KINDS OF BLUE: THE REPRESENTATION OF AUSTRALIAN POLICE AND
POLICING IN TELEVISION DRAMA AND REALITY TELEVISION

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Charles Sturt University 2019
Abstract

Despite the popularity among Australian audiences of television drama and reality programs featuring police, there has been a paucity of research into what they communicate about real world policing. It can be argued that these “cop shows” are productive forms of public relations for police agencies, particularly the co-produced reality TV variety, and as such valuable commodities for producers and broadcasters. As cultural objects these programs both draw upon and generate expressions of national identity. This dissertation examines a selection of Australian police television series—Recruits, The Force: Behind the Line, RBT, Blue Heelers, Wildside, and East West 101—applying a multi-perspective approach that analyses their relationship to the symbolic and real-world institution of policing. In so doing, I explore three key elements fundamental to these programs; their production, textual content and reception.

As complex audio-visual texts, cop shows can generate myriad meanings and messages regardless of factors underpinning their production. However, in the case of reality TV, what became evident is that institutional reputation is foremost: this, ironically, undermines the reality of police work as it is presented on television. The drama series, free from the strictures of the television producer and police partner bond, can go beyond the observational documentary script; however, the programs surveyed here did not use this freedom to challenge the legitimacy of the institution. Furthermore, neither reality TV nor cop dramas embraced the workplace as a site of diversity, particularly in regard to gender.

The reception component of this study drew on 25 interviews with policing students and serving and retired police officers. This qualitative research provided insight into how prospective, current and retired police interpreted televisual representations of the profession. It was found that those interviewees more embedded in the police culture contested the role
of women, while aspirants to the profession were more likely to promote a more diverse workforce.

This dissertation synthesises archival, qualitative and textual research in order to comprehensively examine the under-analysed phenomenon of Australian cop shows. The goal of the dissertation is to provide insights into televisual representations of police work, what these narratives communicate about policing, authority and national identity, and how these constructions are interpreted.
Acknowledgements

I extend my thanks to the following:

My supervisors, past and present: leads, Associate Professor Chika Anyanwu from the outset to beyond the midpoint, and Dr. Suzie Gibson, who stepped up from co-supervisor for the final leg; and co-supervisors, Dr. Lachlan Browne, the late Professor Steve Redhead and Dr Amalie Finlayson. Wise scholars and generous counsellors, all.

The serving, retired and prospective police officers who gave up their time to participate in interviews for the audience stage, and the Liaison Officer and the Television Producer, for their part in the production stage.

My colleagues in the NSW Police Force, especially the library team; Glenda Banfield, Anne Dellapina, Paulene de Graaf, and Sandra Hall; Dr. Chris Devery, Ms Cheryl Vincent and Dr Christie Wallace in the Research Coordination Unit, and Sergeant Donna Bruce.

My critical readers, Andrew Kelly and Dr. Jonathan Bollen.

My most constant of companions at the keyboard, Miles Davis (who inspired the thesis title), Glenn Gould and Slava Grigoryan.

My parents, John—much missed—and Denise Stephenson, and my parents-in-law, David—also much missed—and Anne Bollen.

Most of all, for everything that is the best of all things, and with much love, my partner, Jenny Bollen, and our daughters Monica, Clare and Helena: the four inner-most in my life.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Antony Stephenson

3 June 2019
Accompanying Note

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Police on Television

This thesis examines the representation of police in Australian fictional and observational documentary, or reality television, programs. The research is located in the fields of media studies and policing and adopts a multi-perspective approach by analysing the content of televisual texts as well as their political and cultural influences and the ways in which they are produced, received and interpreted. It does so by examining three elements: the partnership between the NSW Police Force and the television industry as co-producers of reality television programs; a selection of programs that communicate images of and ideas about the police; and, the ways in which officers and those aspiring to the join the profession interpret cop shows, a term used by Nicole Maurantonio (2012) to describe drama and reality television series featuring policing. The methods used to study these elements consist of socio-historical analysis of academic and archival sources; interviews with retired and serving police officers, policing students, and a television producer; and, critical analysis of a sample of cop shows: the reality television series Recruits (2009–2010), The Force: Behind the Line (2006–), and RBT (2010–), and the drama series, Blue Heelers (1993–2006), Wildside (1997–1999), and East West 101 (2007–2011).

Three reasons underpin my selection of this topic: a personal interest in police on television; the significance of the police as agents of instrumental and symbolic power; and the lack of research that explores the ways in which police and policing are depicted in Australian television programs. My personal interest in police on television is influenced by two factors: I am a consumer of cop shows, and I work with police officers. As an enthusiastic viewer of police drama series from a young age, my initial exposure to police was through their images on the screen. Like many other viewers, I had developed my ideas about police—sometimes uncritically, sometimes cynically—by watching their fictional
counterparts on television, rather than through personal encounters with real police officers. Like most people, my “half formed ideas” (Hurd, 1981, p. 57) about police had therefore been filled in and, most likely, augmented by television representations of policing. Since joining the New South Wales Police Force as an administrative, or unsworn, employee in my early 30s, my perception of policing over the past 20 years has been influenced more by real world police practices than television depictions. My interactions with police officers in the workplace have often prompted me to reflect on the way the image of police on television is crafted, what it communicates about the profession, and how policing practitioners respond to it. The popular form of observational documentary featuring police officers started to emerge during my employment with the NSW Police Force. Seeing officers and policing students who I knew appearing on these programs further concentrated my interest in police on television and the ways in which those in the policing profession, and those who wanted to be, saw themselves and their workmates on the screen.

As an institution of state power with the potential to intervene in the lives of all citizens, the police should be subject to close and continuous examination. Because this power is as much symbolic as it is instrumental, the image of the police projected and consumed through mass media also warrants the critical attention of researchers. For over half a century, broadcast television has been the dominant medium through which cultural and ideological messages are distributed, and the police image has featured throughout that time. In recent years, technological advances in digital communication have had a significant impact on the broadcast model of television consumption. Viewers can now engage with content on tablets and mobile phones where and when they wish, often interactively, rather than being bound to the passive broadcast receiver, the lounge room, and the company of their household. Nevertheless, most of my research participants are of the analogue rather
than the digital age. Some may well use personal devices to watch off-schedule, but their viewing lives began with broadcast television. It is through television, which is still the focal point for home audiences (Ritson, 2017) and a medium that invites social ritual in its consumption, that the majority of Australians, including the participants in my research, have encountered and attached meaning to the police image.

As I discovered through my reading on this topic, much has been written about British and American cop shows, but there is a paucity of research on Australian programs. Apart from Murray Lee and Alyce McGovern’s (2013a, 2013b) studies on the relationship between police public affairs units and television producers and the products resulting from it, and Albert Moran’s (1985) observations on locally made police dramas, there has been no research directly focused on the construction, projection and reception of the police image through cop shows made in Australia. This lack of scholarship needs to be addressed so that the police and the policed can better understand what television communicates about the profession and its role in society. It also offers me the opportunity to engage in original research on a topic of personal and professional interest while addressing a significant gap in an important academic domain.

In response to what I have identified as the need for academic inquiry into the Australian cop show and as a contribution to policing and media studies, I address the following research questions:

1. What are the forces of influence in the production of Australian cop shows?

2. How are Australian police represented in cop shows?

3. How do Australian police interpret the representation of themselves in cop shows?
4. What do Australian cop shows communicate about policing and national identity?

In addressing these questions, I seek to establish whether, and in what ways, Australian cop shows communicate ideas about policing, institutional authority and national identity. Douglas Kellner’s (2009) threefold, or multi-perspective (Kellner, 1995), methodology provides a framework well suited for this purpose because his approach contextualises the object of research and its analysis within the influences of social and political power, taking into account its treatment of the many dimensions of cultural representation, including class, gender and race, and the multiple ways its messages may be interpreted. This approach, which I expand on in Chapter 3, focuses on production, text, and audience, as well as the relationships between them and how these elements accord and conflict with each other in the communication of symbolic forms and in the audiences’ recognition of the meanings connoted by them. I apply this approach in the subsequent chapters of this thesis through a series of independent studies.

The first of these studies, featured in Chapter 4, consists of a documentary analysis of NSW Police Force publications that record the organisation’s engagement with the television industry and interviews with a police media liaison officer and a television producer. This study addresses the first of my research questions. The second study, which addresses the second research question, consists of textual analysis of three Australian reality television programs featuring policing, which is presented in Chapter 5, and three Australian police drama programs, which follows in Chapter 6. This text component of the thesis addresses the second research question. For the third study I conducted a series of interviews with serving and retired police officers and policing students. This reception study, which is presented in Chapter 7, addresses the third research question. In Chapter 8, I synthesise these studies to interpret the ways in which Australian cop shows construct police and policing and articulate
ideas about national identity. In so doing, I address the fourth research question posed for this thesis.

Before proceeding to these three studies and their synthesis, all of which comprise the original research of this thesis, in the following chapter I review previous studies of cop shows and the audience response to these programs by those who are depicted in them: police officers. In the subsequent chapter, Chapter 3, I provide the context for this thesis through an examination of police and state power and policing in Australia. I also outline the methodological approach and methods I applied to my research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In reviewing the literature informing this thesis, I first consider publications that examine how police are depicted on television, commencing with studies on police drama series, the longer established genre, followed by those exploring reality television programs. In the second part of this review, I examine the literature focusing on police officer responses to television portrayals of their profession.

Police Drama

Police drama is a long surviving (Rogers, 2008, p. 79) and popular (Reiner, 2008b, p. 328) genre in most countries (Davis, 2012). Although this thesis focuses on Australian programs, the study of police television drama in Britain and the United States is instructive. Compared to Australia, these countries have television industries of longer standing, and with their larger audiences, they share in a richer history of the genre and its critical analysis. Moreover, British and American police dramas have featured on Australian television since its introduction, ensuring that series from both countries have influenced local producers and are well known to audiences. The Australian television industry has developed its own voice since it began over 60 years ago, such that local programs, in their settings, vernacular and accents, look and sound familiar to their viewers. However, the genre itself, often reliant on formulaic narratives and projecting conservative ideologies, is an inheritance from Britain and the United States. Despite this legacy, Australian television production has not followed the recent trend in Britain and the US toward quality or prestige programming because it lacks a market large enough to make such ventures commercially viable. Series regarded as quality television, such as the American productions The Wire (2002–2008) and True Detective (2014–), and, from Britain, Wallender (2008–2016) and Luther (2010–), are targeted toward a financially and culturally advantaged demographic, and diverge from the
traditional structures and narratives of primetime, or network, crime drama (Bignell, 2012). Quality television police series also portray policing and crime in ways that challenge the more orthodox representations and conservative agendas on display in the majority of conventional cop shows. In this way they offer the potential for creating different television versions of the police officer that have featured in most Australian programs to date.

The traditional television portrayal of the British police officer has received the attention of many influential policing and criminology scholars, notably Robert Reiner (1994, 2000, 2010) and Rob C. Mawby (2003), as well as media researchers, including Geoffrey Hurd (1981), Alan Clarke (1983, 1986, 1992), Susan Sydney-Smith (2002), Sue Turnbull (2014) and Helen Piper (2015). In their studies of the “genealogy” of the genre (Sydney-Smith, 2002, p. 17), these researchers have observed both the evolution and the significance of the cop show in British culture since the middle of the twentieth century.

In describing television as a cultural phenomenon, Hurd (1981) contends that people not only watch television, they “learn how it is watched” (p. 54). He argues that viewers develop an understanding of the way television communicates its messages, equipping them to construct meaning from the conventions of genre as much from the narrative of the episode being watched. Most cop show viewers have only marginal contact with the police, relying on these conventions to complete what is a “half formed picture” (Hurd, 1981, p. 57) of policing. Police drama therefore tends to be valued against perceived notions of authenticity rather than what happens in reality. However, Hurd argues that these notions do not arrive as neutral terms, informed only by the limited knowledge of the viewer and the variations in production and style. Instead, he argues, they operate within a dominant discourse that makes difficult any alternative reading of the structure, content, form and meaning. The police series is more than a reflection of the social world of policing; it “actively construct[s] a coherent
version of the social reality within which the playing out of the nightly drama of law and order can be contained” (Hurd, 1981, p. 56), and this reality is created through the relationships, tensions and alliances between the characters and the police institution.

Hurd (1981) draws on *Z-Cars* (1962–1978) and *The Sweeney* (1975–1978), two popular series from the 1960s and the 1970s, to illustrate his point. *Z-Cars* features an ensemble cast of police officers, communicating a shared approach to crime and policing through its decentred narrative. *The Sweeney* focuses on the individual heroic police officer battling hardened criminals. Despite these structural differences, both programs are reliant on the same opposing elements: police versus crime; law versus rule; professional versus organization; authority versus bureaucracy; intuition versus technology; masses versus intellectuals; and comradeship versus rank (Hurd, 1981, p. 66). Hurd sees these points of tension as establishing a myth of classlessness which is central to the purpose of the British police series: the viewer can recognise a working through of recognisable patterns of tension, through characters who gain authenticity through the process. These are useful oppositions for understanding policing dramas. However, Hurd applies a Marxist reading that positions class alone at the centre of institutional power and overlooks the opportunities afforded an “intersectional” assessment of the “basic structures of domination” (Gimenez, 2001, p. 32) such as the police. He therefore ignores the part played by gender and ethnicity in policing, within police agencies and in their relationships with people in the community, and in television depictions.

Clarke’s (1992) analysis of the transformation of British police drama not only extends across a longer time span than Hurd (1981), it also identifies contexts other than class through which television images shape meaning about policing. Describing the changes and continuities in policing and the police image from 1950s to the 1980s as moments of
ideological construction, Clarke argues that political contexts cannot be disentangled from the nexus of fictional representation and reality. The changing landscape of British society, from the ordered, disciplined, and reassured post-war community to a more fearful and cynical public wishing for a return to law and order is reflected in the television police fictions of the period. Clarke does not situate this change in the moral basis of the various series or the genre as a whole. Rather, he contends there is a shift in the “inflection of the moral domain of the hero” (p. 240) and this is seen in four key ideological values and concerns: the threat of crime, the family, process versus rule breaking, and society versus individualism.

Clarke (1992) identifies *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955–1976) as the formative fictional expression of policing on British television. This is a widely accepted thesis (Heidensohn & Brown, 2012; Hurd, 1981; Kidd-Hewitt, 1995; Leishman & Mason, 2003; Loader, 1997; Manning, 2012; Marsh, 2013; Marsh & Melville, 2009; Reiner, 1994, 2010, Turnbull, 2014), and is attributable to reasons beyond the program’s early appearance in British television history, or its popularity and longevity. *Dixon of Dock Green* conveys an ideological construction of policing suited to its time and location (Clarke, 1992, p. 239). In the character of Sergeant George Dixon (Jack Warner), the face of policing is portrayed as firm but friendly. Crime is presented as incidental to post-war recovery, and policing is constructed as the societal glue that maintains an idealised British way of life in which the establishments of family and the law are central to good order. Dixon is shown to be a man of authority, discipline and honesty, offering an avuncular smile to the local residents and his colleagues, and a closing homily for the television viewing public. He is depicted as part of the community; a citizen in uniform, policing misdemeanours and maintaining public order, and a regular family man when off duty.
By contrast, Clarke (1992) sees the scowling Detective Inspector Jack Regan (John Thaw) in *The Sweeney*, as alienated from the community he polices, a symptom of wider social dysfunction in a changing Britain. Regan is hamstrung by a what he regards as a weak justice system and a bureaucratic police force in the face of a losing battle against crime. Regan is shown to meet his challenges through action-oriented policing, behaving individualistically rather than cooperatively, breaking rules on a regular basis because he sees it as being necessary to good policing outcomes. His personal life, in comparison with Dixon’s, appears to suffer from the demands of the job, making his marriage another victim of more widespread social decline.

In post-*Sweeney* depictions of British policing there is a return to a more “orderly, gentler world of crime” (Clarke, 1992, p. 248). More recent series frequently show women in senior roles, a significant departure from both *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955–1976), with its conservative depiction of gender roles, and *The Sweeney* (1975–1978), in which hyper-masculinity is more deliberate in its posturing and in its exploitation of women. Clarke (1992) contends that the central messages that feed the fear of crime and concern for rule breaking, while promoting the importance of family and individualism, continued to feature in British police drama in the 1980s. In programs such as *The Gentle Touch* (1980–1984), *Juliet Bravo* (1980–1985), and *The Bill* (1984–2010), violent crime is still a discomforting presence, but it is less dominant. Policing families are more varied in their response to the demands of policing, due process and procedure are more strongly held tenets of ethical policing, and the individual is less privileged over the ensemble of the policing team. Clarke recognises that these series are not quite as devoid of issues that problematise a more democratic, community-oriented approach to policing as the treatment of these aspects of the personal and professional lives of police might suggest. Issues of police corruption,
entrenched racism and, despite the inclusion of women in these fictional representations, gender inequity and sexism within the ranks are regularly played out in 1980s British police drama series.

Like Clarke (1992), Keith Selby and Ron Cowdery (1995) argue that the changing role of women in policing and the reflection of this change in television drama marks a shift in the thematic concerns of the genre from violence and punishment toward social justice during the 1990s. They also contend that the public order activities of the police in industrial disputes and inner-city riots during the Thatcher era over-politicised the police, an effect they saw extended to television representations of police. These social injustices may have been too great a challenge for mainstream television drama, resulting in a deliberate turning back from hard policing to the “original, core-narrative problematic” of “caring guardianship” epitomised by *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955–1976) (Selby & Cowdery, 1995, p. 81).

Reiner (1994, 2000, 2008b, 2010), too, analyses the police drama in its post-war context. His inclusion of police television drama in his extensive body of work on the political significance and role of policing in British society testifies to the influence the cop show has in “mystifying” (2010, p. 177) the presence and purpose of the institution. He casts the changes in the fictional British police officer as a “dialectical progression” (Reiner, 1994, p. 20) informed by a caret/controller dichotomy. *Dixon of Dock Green* depicts a caring constabulary at one with the community, whereas the police force in *The Sweeney*, a product of a more disrupted time, controls its citizens through tough law and order. In *The Bill*, which emerged soon after both *Dixon of Dock Green* and *The Sweeney* had ended, care and control are interdependent, and the nature of policing is treated as multidimensional. Although depictions of these contrasting styles of “soft police service and hard law enforcement”
(Marsh, 2013, p. 338) persist, Reiner maintains that an “underlying legitimating theme” (1994, p. 29) in support of the police endures throughout each of these series.

Reiner (2010) also provides a useful framework for classifying the different kinds of law enforcement stories. His typology consists of twelve “ideal-type models” of story that are distinguished by their treatment of seven elements: “the hero, crime, villain, victim, social setting, the police organization, and narrative sequence” (Reiner, 2010, p. 188). The range of law enforcement stories in Reiner’s model extends beyond police dramas to include the classic sleuth, the private eye, and the vigilante, genres that are not within the scope of this study. The programs I analyse in Chapter 3 situate policing at the centre of the narrative, and their treatment of some of the elements that Reiner identifies inform my analysis. Nevertheless, some of the models Reiner constructs, while rare enough internationally, such as his “Vigilante” or “Fort Apache” models (Reiner, 2010, pp. 189–190), are not produced at all in the Australian television industry. Their absence is indicative of the construction of policing in this country; cop shows premised on these extreme forms of policing do not feature on Australian television. This is not because the heavy-handed modes of policing that are indicative of these models of the crime story are entirely alien to this country, although, in comparison to law enforcement practiced in some parts of the United States, they are distinctly less prevalent. Rather, I attribute the absence of such stories in Australian programs to a shared understanding among local producers and audiences that the nature of policing is not oppressive, and it is recreated and interpreted accordingly.

Sydney-Smith (2002) also identifies Dixon of Dock Green and Z-Cars as seminal series in British television history, a category to which she adds Softly, Softly (1966–1976). Her research incorporates analysis of the police-television relationship in the production of these programs and, by drawing on correspondence from viewers held in the BBC Written
Archive, their reception by the public. She approaches the evolution of the genre as a history of competing elements within the television industry, providing a reflection on the social and cultural changes that took place during the period from the mid-1950s and to the mid-1970s. The industry related matters include television’s antecedents in radio and film, the organisational, technical, and aesthetic distinctions between documentary and light entertainment within the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and the challenge to the cultural sensibilities of broadcasting authorities posed by the popular programming of Independent Television (ITV).

Sydney-Smith (2002) hypothesises the early British television police series served three functions: ontological, ideological and identificatory (p. 203). Ontologically, the creative tensions between the quest for authenticity and desire for drama inherited through the genre’s forerunners established the sometimes-blurred boundaries between information and entertainment that, if not definitive of the police drama, are indicative parameters for viewers. Arguably, the expectation of realism and excitement is at its most heightened in response to this genre than to any other. The ideological function, a focus of other studies considered in this review and an element I explore in the context of Australian series, is evident in the chronicling of a nation in transition from post-war consensus to a more fractured state and in the different styles of policing exercised in response. This is exemplified in the comparison between Dixon of Dock Green’s beat policing, which would now be referred to as community policing, and the specialist, motorised squads in Z Cars that are efficient and effective but disconnected from the public. In its identificatory function, the police drama, “more than any other popular genre, registers the changing relationship between the broadcast audience and National Identity” (Sydney-Smith, 2002, p. 206). In Britain, regionalism is a marker of class and culture as much as it is one of geography. As
Sydney-Smith notes, setting *Z Cars* in northern England did not simply transplant the petty crime of London’s East and *Dixon of Dock Green*’s paternalistic policing response to a new location, community and constabulary. It realigned the police drama on several fronts. In *Z Cars*, criminality was not treated as individual failing, but a result of social conditions (Sydney-Smith, 2002, p. 129), and, there to respond, the police were redefined as products of “the North”; they spoke in the vernacular—sometimes gritty, sometimes humorous—and they, and those they policed, were rugged in their masculinity, a product of their working class origins as well as their regional locale. As a result, the authenticity projected by *Z Cars*, and later in *Softly, Softly*, related to atmosphere, character, and police practice rather than “procedural exactitude” (Sydney-Smith, 2002, p. 129). The less-than-perfect officers and their cynical workplace culture did not legitimate the police institution in the same way that Dixon had: a cause of concern to the authorities and the press (Sydney-Smith, 2002, pp.161–162). Class and criminality are ascribed to place in Australia, too, although with different parameters. This association can be seen in the social geographies that locate the television series I analyse in Chapter 3. The inner-Sydney setting of *Wildside* (1997–1999) and the multi-ethnic, outer fringe suburbs of *East West 101* (2007–2011) signify danger to middle class Australian viewers sandwiched between these two locales. The city-country divide featured in *Blue Heelers* (1993–2006), is a motif with a long history in Australian political and social discourse (Davison, 2012) and a signifier of national identity in literature, film, and other fictional narratives (Turner, 1986) as well as television. However, it is a less stable signifier of crime than the inner city and the areas on its outskirts, because it articulates two conflicting ideas: the arcadian nostalgia of the country as a refuge from the impersonal city, and the lawlessness bush frontier removed from civilisation.
In contrast to Sydney-Smith’s (2002) analysis of early British cop shows from the 1950s until the 1970s, Helen Piper’s (2015) study focuses on more recent programs and what they communicate about policing and society in contemporary Britain. Piper considers ten popular detective series from the past twenty years as case studies from which to hypothesise “contextual concerns around place, space, crime, policing, deviance and dissent” (p. 43). In this thesis, fictional policing is not just the domain of the plainclothes investigator of Piper’s detective series, a genre in which the uniformed officer and the broader public safety remit of the law enforcement agency are not strongly featured. Nevertheless, identifying the ways in which police are portrayed in Australian cop shows is a central element of my research, and Piper’s study reflects the type of formal or discursive analysis that John Thompson (1990) suggests for this purpose.

The “voices of dissent” that Piper’s (2015) subtitle refers to are, in the first instance, those of the detectives in the series she examines. The character at the centre of the detective series stands apart from his or her colleagues because of the investigative skills he or she possesses. The elements of such prowess variously deriving from: intuition; powers of observation—of the physical, the physiological or the psychological; dedication and perseverance; or willingness to break the rules. Regardless of the type of investigative capability, and the conflict it might raise with colleagues and citizens, it is the detective’s skill that solves the crime. The detective also stands apart from the police institution and, in so doing, is a step removed from the state apparatus that prioritises its own agenda above the community it is supposed to serve (Piper, 2015, p. 148). In this way, the dissenting voices of the subtitle also belong to the series themselves in that they speak about the social and political malaise of contemporary Britain. These failings are evident in the crime stories and the characters affected by such events, but they can also be seen in the spaces and places in
which those stories are told. The housing estate in *A Touch of Frost* (1992–2010)—and in many other gritty realist series not discussed in *The TV Detective*, including *Z-Cars* and *The Bill*—is a site of deprivation that supplies “both reason and metaphor for despair” (p. 143), while the “sun-dappled … ancient, heritage city of Oxford” (p. 61) that provides the setting for *Lewis* (2006–2015), creates and caters to a desire to escape that despair through a nostalgic return to another age. Of course, the sentimental attractions of that undefined other age are just as illusory as they were in *Inspector Morse* (1987–2000), the series from which *Lewis* emerged as both heir and reminder of the cosy viewer’s multiple-murder watching pleasures.

Piper (2015) also demonstrates that the crime series can be a dissenter against the conventions of its genre. The time travelling premise of *Life on Mars* (2006–2007) is an obvious example of this unorthodoxy, but it is not the series’ only departure from the police drama genre. *Life on Mars* is also a “hybrid of crime fiction forms” (Piper, 2015, p. 87) that combines the decentred ensemble of squad or station officers, with the heroic, individual detective—Sam Tyler (John Simm), the man out of time—or as a duo in the unlikely and conflict-ridden partnership Tyler forms with Gene Hunt (Philip Glenister), a detective from the past.

Piper’s (2015) study offers some useful guidance for my analysis of Australian cop shows, particularly in her consideration of the role of setting and locale in the construction of policing and national identity for British audiences. However, the theoretical approach she applies to the reception of detective series, which are predominantly centred narratives, is less helpful for interpreting audience responses to programs such as *Blue Heelers*, which rely on an ensemble of officers. Furthermore, in applying Murray Smith’s (1994), “structure of sympathy”, Piper attributes to an abstract viewer “particular forms of moral judgement”
(2015, p. 33) about the detectives in the program she analyses. These judgements are the result of identification with the fictional characters on screen as projections of the self, created in the imagination of Piper’s hypothetical viewer. For this reason, her interpretation of audience responses to police on television does not extend to how they might construct the police institution. Moreover, as a real rather than abstract audience, the participants in the reception component of my research speak for themselves. Inevitably my interviewees have moments of “recognition, alignment and allegiance” (Piper, 2015, p. 36) with actors and characters, but to limit my analysis of their interpretation of cop shows to those television police with whom they identify—although I do ask them this question—would not assist in answering the research questions I have posed. Despite these differences in focus, I do recognise that Smith’s structure of sympathy, as applied by Piper to the modern British detective series, may be applicable to further research that examines Australian police attitudes to cop shows. I also recognise that such research would need to be designed to address the issues I have identified with this approach.

In examining American cop shows, Michael Arntfield (2011) adopts a similar evolutionary approach to that used by the British scholars discussed above. He relates changes in television portrayals of police to developments in the social, cultural and political landscape of the times. Arntfield selects a number of popular and long running series as exemplars of particular eras, an approach also in keeping with those adopted by his British counterparts. His thesis is that the cop show has evolved through three distinct eras, each standing as a guide to public attitudes to law enforcement and police perceptions of their role as workers in American society: “a self-assessment based primarily on their relationship to technology” (p. 75).
Taking *Dragnet* (1951–1959) as his starting point, Arntfield (2011) argues that it was the “seminal police procedural” (p. 79) and its appearance signalled the start of the “Golden Age” of the cop show. Initially a radio drama series that made a successful transition to television in the 1950s, *Dragnet* adhered to the formula of the police procedural described by J. Madison Davis (2012) as one in which the “ordinary processes and limitations of the police force are used to resolve the crime story” (p. 10). With stories taken directly from Los Angeles Police Department case files, as the prologue to each episode proudly proclaimed, *Dragnet* depicted policing with self-described accuracy and authority. It also featured the various emerging technologies of law enforcement that catered to operational policing activities—including surveillance, armed response and mobile policing—while also providing much of the symbolism of the police as a source of state power.

Although procedure was at the forefront in *Dragnet*, the dramatic element did not overplay action and excitement. Arntfield (2011) interprets this downplaying of excitement and action as an expression of the true nature of police work: methodical and often mundane. This interpretation resonates with Hurd’s (1981) distinction between the centred and decentred biography in police drama, defining the police by institutional rather individualistic parameters. These analyses attribute to the cop show a legitimation of policing through narratives that project an authenticity of practice performed by an ensemble who, unlike individual heroes, collectively represent the organisation. The fact that *Dragnet*’s lack of dramatic appeal is a consequence of its quest for authenticity is not lost on those who experience real policing. All the serving and retired officers I interviewed were attuned to this contradiction: if television policing were anywhere near the reality of their own work, it would “simply be too boring to watch” (Police Officer 1).
Arntfield (2011) marks the mid-1970s as the point at which the world of police officers in crime series became far more complex: their multidimensional lives had personal as well as professional sides and, in reflecting the anxiety of the post-Vietnam War era, were situated in the social changes being experienced by television viewers. The fictional police of this “gilded age” (p. 81) had become human and fallible, but like their predecessors they were “shaped foremost by their procedural technologies” (Arntfield, 2011, p. 83). The series that Arntfield nominates as definitive of this shift is Miami Vice (1984–1990), characterised by its “metafiction” of casting (a black co-lead), characterisation (undercover cops who are alienated and conflicted, unlike Dragnet’s Joe Friday, played by Jack Webb, who is sure of the law and his role in enforcing it), and a narrative that was built on the “aesthetics of machine culture” (pp. 83–84) in the form of high-powered luxury cars, speed boats, and private planes. Miami Vice and other series of its time—including Hill Street Blues (1981–1987) and Cagney & Lacey (1982–1988), which are discussed later—established the proverbial ‘blurred genre’ of television in which the police “not only reflect but also refract the public values they are supposed to enforce and embody” (Arntfield, 2011, p. 84).

Locating another historical marker in the late 1990s, Arntfield (2011) identifies the emergence of a darker age of police drama. Programs characteristic of this era extend upon, rather than significantly vary, the elements of the gilded age. The touchstone of technology in the cop shows of these more recent times is expressed as a force of degradation enacted upon the working police officer by the post-industrial age in which the expert, in the form of the detective or forensic examiner, is privileged over the generalist, uniformed practitioner. This is articulated in the demarcation of roles particularly evident in the new professions devoted to forensic and investigative practices (Arntfield, 2011). Such activities, although still centred in the rigidity of procedure characterised by Dragnet, are at a step removed from the public
that the police serve; victims’ bodies rather than witness statements that Friday insisted contained “just the facts” are the sources for clues and the focus of police and audience attention.

In contrast to Reiner’s (2010) analysis of British police drama in which the stages of evolution are marked by different constructions of policing within a care/control continuum, Arntfield (2011) establishes the American representational evolution as a generational transition marked by changes in technology. This is not a pattern that can equally be applied to Australian police drama. Unlike the US, where technology is symbolic of the country’s entrepreneurial exceptionalism, its value in Australia lies more in its utility. It is also more difficult to establish, without much contriving, definitive epochs in which to categorise Australian cop shows, as Arntfield has for the American canon. There are not as many locally made programs to classify and the history of television production in Australia is not extensive enough to warrant as many divisions. The eras he defines for American society do not correlate sufficiently with the Australian experience to justify their adoption for comparison purposes. Nevertheless, Arntfield’s claim that cop shows act as “historical bookmarks” in the ideological, as well as the technological, timeline of real-world policing (p. 76), deserves to be considered in analyses of Australian police drama series. For this reason, I contextualise two of the drama series discussed in Chapter 3, with key moments in Australia’s history: *Wildside* and the Wood Royal Commission into police corruption of 1995–1997; and *East West 101* in the shadow of the “Tampa” election of 2001 and the Cronulla Riots of 2005.

in the discourse of crime, the broadcast model of television transmission and reception, and
the “language of the police drama” (Nichols-Pethick, 2012, p. 20)—he examines *Hill Street Blues, Miami Vice, and Cagney & Lacey*. Nichols-Pethick regards these programs as products of their commercial and technical circumstances in the post-network era of cable television, and as texts that communicate “the larger social, cultural, and political questions about what constitutes a community and what constitutes citizenship within that community” (p. 19). Each of these series were, in their own way, innovative for and suited to their times. *Miami Vice*, discussed previously, with its focus on male fashion and luxury cars set to a contemporary sound track, constructed policing and crime as glamorous occupations. *Cagney & Lacey*, discussed later, placed women at the centre of the police narrative in roles that demonstrated their professional competence, and their right to police, without exploiting the female body in the way *Police Woman* (1974–1978) depicted Pepper Anderson (Angie Dickinson). *Hill Street Blues*, rated by Nichols-Pethick as one of the most “daring and challenging” in television history, defied conventional structures in its documentary aesthetic, exemplified by the use of hand held cameras and the sense of unscriptedness in the multiple concurrent conversations in the station. It also mixed episodic crime stories with ongoing narratives, sometimes leaving matters unresolved, and it rejected the hero, relying instead on an ensemble of characters many of whom were patently anti-heroic. In its capacity to address “the agonies and frustrations of modern-day police work—the real human frailty beneath the guise of heroic toughness” (Nichols-Pethick, 2012, p. 3), *Hill Street Blues* has no Australian equivalent. Despite the lack of programs with comparable innovative style and narrative complexity, the “discourses of crime, community, and citizenship” are central to cop shows regardless of their “perceived quality” (p. 185). Accordingly, Australian cop shows, which may be without the inventiveness and aesthetics that augment the more challenging
representations of policing conveyed in quality television, do provide much to be interpreted about what drama series communicate about police and their relationship with the public.

Adopting a more comprehensive approach than Arntfield (2011) and Nichols-Pethick (2012), Roger Sabin, Ronald Wilson, Linda Speidel, Brian Faucette and Ben Bethell (2015) review 19 policing series with an additional chapter that briefly considers a further 37. In their critical history of the American police drama, the authors focus on the way each of the programs depict policing particularly in the context of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. The themes of gender and ethnicity are central to my research, and the ways in which they are addressed in many of the series considered in this work inform my analysis of the Australian fictional cop shows selected for inclusion in Chapter 3. The authors also discuss the cop show genre itself, investigating how and to what effect it has changed since the 1950s. In his introduction, Sabin (2015b) contends that cop shows perform “culture work” (p. 8), in that they orient viewers toward programs, and to their messaging, through their form and style. As examples of genre television, police drama series offer familiarity and predictability of viewing to audiences and continuing profitability to producers. With a focus on the disorder created by crime, the attendant restoration of order, and punishment of the transgressors, the genre projects a politically conservative ideology. Programs of this type avoid controversial themes and adhere to conventional ways of telling crime stories. For this reason, they have been criticised on grounds of style as “repetitive, formulaic, unimaginative, schedule-fillers” appealing to the “lowest common denominator” (Sabin, 2015b, p. 8). The fact that several pioneering programs of this type were created in association with police agencies for promotional messaging purposes supports Sabin’s argument that the genre promotes conservative attitudes to law enforcement. These police-endorsed programs, including *Dragnet*, *Highway Patrol* (1955–1959), *The Untouchables* (1959–1963) and *The FBI* (1965–
offered the American public a representation of the police as a stabilising force dedicated to maintaining law and order (Sabin, 2015b, p. 15). *Hawaii Five-0* (1968–1980) was also conceived as a promotional vehicle, but ostensibly to promote tourism rather than to signal the legitimacy of law enforcement. Yet, the casting of a multi-ethnic team featuring officers with Hawaiian and Chinese ancestry in roles that play second fiddle to the white lead characters, inevitably projected its own statement about who should be allowed to police and in what capacity. In the process, the cultural demographics of the police institution undercuts the intended showcasing of Hawaii, still a relatively new state of America in the late 1960s, as a model of racial harmony (Faucette & Bethell, 2015). The casting of the white actors in the lead roles actors in the rebooted *Hawaii Five-0* (2010–), suggests racial inequality in policing—and television—has remained unchanged. Although the ethnicity of police and criminal characters is analysed in each of the series featured in *Cop Shows* (Sabin et al, 2015), Faucette and Bethell’s (2015) close scrutiny of the casting in the original *Hawaii Five-O* overshadows their more fleeting commentary on the assignment of policing roles to white men and criminal roles to those of African, Hispanic and Asian ancestry in many of the other programs they review. Ethnic minorities have long experienced inequality before the law and within the profession, and for this reason analyses of cop shows that highlight the perpetuation of racial stereotypes through casting and characterisation are important contributions to television and policing studies.

Similarly, the role of women in policing has long been met with opposition within the institution, and the ways in which female officers are depicted reveals much about the organisation, and about television and society. Ben Bethell’s (2015a) chapter on *Cagney & Lacey* is instructive on this topic. Conceived as a challenge to “prevailing representations of women on television” (Bethell, 2015a, p. 99), *Cagney & Lacey* also defied established
representations of policing. Programs from the preceding decade, such as *Kojak* (1973–1978) and *Starsky & Hutch* (1975–1979), not only relied on action and machismo, they marginalised women from policing through their respective “post-hard-boiled” (Sabin, 2015c, p. 80) individualist masculinity and their buddying homosocial reaction to second wave feminism (Bethell, 2015b, p. 86). *Cagney & Lacey*’s significance was certainly attributable to its depiction of women in policing and, in contrast to the main male characters in other programs, the portrayal of the two female detectives as working women who happened to be police officers, gave them and the program another dimension (Bethell, 2015a). Bethell argues that through its interweaving of soap opera and crime drama, *Cagney & Lacey* provided a “greater depth of characterisation [and a] more nuanced account of crime itself” (Bethell, 2015a, p. 105). However, in identifying the treatment of the protagonist’s domestic lives as soap opera, Bethell reveals a less progressive agenda underpinning *Cagney & Lacey*. As well as slighting the genre as suited only to telling women’s stories to women viewers, this observation constructs female officers as less credible than their male colleagues and their work as less serious. The undermining of female characters and the officers they represent is also evident in the Australian programs analysed in this thesis, notably in the soap opera-like *Blue Heelers*, but also in the reality TV series, *Recruits*, *RBT* and *The Force: Behind the Line*.

Sabin (2015b) observes that in the American cop shows that appeared after *Cagney & Lacey*, there is evidence of change in the treatment of social issues. Programs such as *Hill Street Blues* and more recently, *The Wire* (2002–2008), are more ambivalent about moral and ethical messages and are more willing to portray “socio-cultural forces at work” in policing (Sabin, 2015b, p.10). In doing so, they transcend the cop show to become objects of “art” (Sabin, 2015b, p. 8) rather than mere entertainment. This is not to say that the rules of genre
have been jettisoned in order to create a more aesthetic experience; rather, it is about “entering a new conceptual and interpretive space” (Sabin, 2015b, p. 10). This new space also depicts policing in more temporally familiar settings for present-day audiences, giving authenticity to the contexts in which it is practiced, if not to the “half-formed picture” (Mawby, 2003, p. 231) of policing itself.

*Cop Shows* (Sabin et al, 2015) also considers the ways in which the American police drama series expresses national identity. The performance of law and order articulates the state of American society, transmitting and reflecting the “politics of the moment” as well as more constant understandings of nationality (Sabin, 2015b, p. 1). The settings and how the police characters occupy such places also carry some of that meaning. The megapolis as a common setting for American police procedural series bears this out. Denoting the impersonal urban jungle of “the street” in which crime fighters like Kojak (Telly Savalas) and his successors in *Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue* (1993–2005), *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993–1999) are at home, the twentieth century mega-city, with its mixture of culture and crime, is a common motif in American film and television (Garcia, 2017). While the frontier that typified the Western has recently been revisited in *Justified* (2010–2015) (Faucette, 2015), *Fargo* (2014–2017), and *True Detective* (2014–2017) (Bethell, 2015c), all of which are quality television programs that have disrupted the conventions of the genre, television police officers are predominantly located in the city.

Unlike the studies discussed above, which have focused on police drama series produced in either Britain or the United States, Turnbull (2014), in *The TV Crime Drama*, adopts a transnational approach. As well as analysing individual programs, she conducts a comparative assessment of cop shows in both countries and establishes that the genre emerged in similar circumstances on either side of the Atlantic. The key series of the 1950s,
Dixon of Dock Green in the UK and Dragnet in the US, both had origins in other media (film and radio), projected the same conservative agendas, and enjoyed the support of police institutions (Turnbull, 2014, p. 41). Thereafter, cop shows in both countries explored similar sub-genres, themes and aesthetics, but at different times and in different contexts in what Turnbull describes as a series of “loops, spirals and returns” (p. 42) that are reflective of changing technologies in television and policing as well as attitudes to law and order. Despite these agile re-inventions, the locational contexts, and what they reveal about their respective societies, provide the more persistent point of difference between British and American crime drama. Like Sydney-Smith (2002), Turnbull distinguishes programs set in the metropolitan south from those in the regional north, to which she attributes the dimension of class. Like Sabin (2015b), she identifies “the city”—sometimes identified, sometimes anonymous—as the default site of the American crime story. The dramatized versions of crime and disorder arising from these settings, and the policing response to it, articulate much about the respective societies in which they are located.

Turnbull (2014) also applies a transnational approach to her analysis of gender in television crime drama. Devoting a chapter to women and crime (pp. 153–185), Turnbull demonstrates that the television crime drama in Britain and the United States has served as an index of societal change in regard to gender. These changes have not only been played out on television screens through which its viewers have witnessed the belated appearance of the “policewoman” and her subsequent promotion from minor player to senior officer, they have also had an impact back stage. Turnbull notes that professional progress for women writers and directors has also been slow, perhaps more so than that experienced by the characters they create and direct. Referencing the experiences of producers and writers, she describes the television industry, especially in America, as one of the more difficult fields for women to
enter. Perceptively, she observes that the relative absence of women in the production of television says much about the relationship between the role of women off-screen and the portrayal of women on-screen (p. 166). Despite this gender imbalance, the programs attributable to women writers and directors in America and Britain that Turnbull analyses at length—Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday’s *Cagney & Lacey*, and Lynda La Plante’s *Prime Suspect*—were successful series that also challenged established constructions of gender on screen and in policing.

In her analysis of British series, Turnbull (2014), like Hurd (1981), makes particular reference to *Z Cars* and *The Sweeney* as significant moments in the post-*Dixon of Dock Green* history of the British cop show. But her analysis of *The Bill*, “a case study in the evolution of the genre” (p. 44), provides insight into representations of a more current police institution and those who serve in it. Turnbull attributes *The Bill*’s 26 year run on screen to regular renewal of style and form. These reboots ensured the program kept pace with changes in attitudes to contemporary issues, audience tastes, and the broadcast environment in which deregulation and emerging technologies enabled competition in much the same way as online content providers, such as Netflix, have challenged the industry in the more recent times.

Throughout the program’s constant reformatting and restyling, the series’ core cast of officers working the daily “relief”, or shift, at Sun Hill station continued to be the British viewing public’s most familiar model of police. Their enduring presence has contributed to the construction of law enforcement in Britain as steadfast in its service to the public, a message that is declared most resolutely in the final episode. In Turnbull’s (2014) analysis of the closing scene from that episode, she describes an extended tracking shot through the station in which all the main cast members appear (pp. 62–63). As well as praising the scene as an accomplished piece of camera work indicative of the production aesthetics of quality
television to which the program latterly aspired, Turnbull regards the inclusion of the ensemble cast as a celebration of the longevity, popularity, and commercial success of the program. More critically, I contend that it is this demonstration of television’s didacticism, in which the audience is made aware of the durability and omnipresence of the policing institution, that is *The Bill*’s more enduring legacy.

Turnbull’s (2014) chapter on the US procedural compares *The Wire* with *CSI* (2000–2015). The differences between the programs, she says, arise from their respective ambitions, and in the demographics and expectations of their audiences. *The Wire*, a Home Box Office (HBO) production, is categorised as quality television and has attracted critical acclaim, while *CSI*, a more conventional crime series, has greater popular appeal. *The Wire*, as a product of HBO’s ‘arthouse’ sensibilities, strives for authenticity, while also experimenting freely with the conventions of the genre, whereas the formulaic *CSI* is clearly pitched for entertainment purposes and broadcast for general audiences. The form and style most clearly reveal an aesthetic disparity, but these elements allow the programs to express different ideas about policing. The moral uncertainty that *The Wire* creates through its play with the conventions of the genre, contrasts with *CSI*’s episodic nature and narrative closure that leaves no ambiguity about justice prevailing. The certainty of science, and the expertise, tenacity and rectitude of its practitioners ensures that the rule of law wins out in *CSI*, whereas the intractability of crime in the deprived social conditions of *The Wire*’s Baltimore setting, and the complex nature of the characters on both sides of the legal divide, show the deficiencies of the legal system. The glossy look of *CSI* falsely romanticises crime and its responders, jarring with *The Wire*’s “gritty” (p. 93) appearance that eschews glamour. The clear moral boundaries that define criminality and law and order in *CSI* seem contrived when compared with the flawed “systems and institutions supposed to support the workings of
democracy” (p. 94) in *The Wire*. Just as Sydney-Smith observes of *Dixon of Dock Green* and *Z Cars*, Turnbull argues that criminals in *CSI* act out of moral failing, whereas *The Wire* constructs crime as systemic and “society itself is the crime” (p. 94).


Despite the prevalence of the genre, it has not received commensurate attention from researchers. Alan McKee (2001) contends there is an absence “of a strong tradition in Australia of critical writing interested in television programs” (p. 5). Significantly, those who have studied police drama have, for the most part, considered it in the context of the development of the Australian television industry or the changing image of a national culture, rather than for what it might communicate about police and policing. Both McKee (2001) and Rozzi Bazzani (2007) focus on the role played by Crawford Productions in the development of the Australian television industry and in bringing local stories and characters into the nation’s lounge rooms. In his selective genealogy of Australian television history, McKee devotes a chapter to *Homicide* as the first series to be “really important to the Australian audience” (p. 51). McKee’s focus is predominantly on the culturally pioneering attitude held
by Hector Crawford which he expressed through the creation of “Australian drama—with Australian accents, local settings and production values that did not quite match up to the imported fare” (p. 66). Despite this less than enthusiastic statement about technological capability, McKee gives due regard to the innovations actively explored by Crawford Productions throughout the lifespan of *Homicide*, including the experimental use of hand-held cameras and rapid cuts, as well as embracing colour film as the preferred medium before colour television transmission was available to Australian viewers in the mid-1970s (p. 67). McKee also credits *Homicide* with establishing the police series as the dominant form of Australian drama production (p. 66).

Bazzani (2007) provides a more comprehensive treatment of Crawford’s police television series than McKee (2001). She too concentrates on the “special image-building role” Crawford hoped such programs would play in the creation of an Australian television industry and a “specifically Australian consciousness and sense of national identity” (Hector Crawford, cited by Bazzani, 2007, p. 114). On the topic of industries and technology, Bazzani argues that in Australia, unlike most other countries, it was local television drama production, initially led almost solely by Crawford, rather than cinema, which engaged in “the articulation of a popular national artistic sensibility” (2007, p. 115). Bazzani’s analysis of Crawford police drama productions advances beyond that of McKee’s through her inclusion of programs other than *Homicide*. Nevertheless, she does so only in the context of the expansion of Crawford Productions into other networks rather than considering the representation of police across a range of programs and their respective settings and areas of police practice.

An earlier study of police drama by Albert Moran (1985) moves beyond an exploration of the development of the local television industry and the emergence of a more
accurate portrayal of Australian culture. Like McKee (2001) and Bazzani (2007), Moran concentrates on Crawford Productions, in this case *Homicide, Bellamy*, and *Cop Shop*. However, his analysis is focused on the elements of narrative and character in order to understand how police drama constructs the institution’s power and the authority of its officers within the context of their Australian settings.

Moran (1985) makes four critical observations about the construction of police through these programs. The first relates to the crime story. Here, Moran describes a tale in three acts: in a prelude to the opening credits an act of violence sets the story in motion, the police then investigate the crime, and at the end of the episode they identify the perpetrator, who is then either arrested or killed. This is the same conservative meta-narrative that Sabin (2015b) refers to in the American context, as discussed above, that legitimates the police role by restoring the social and legal order that prevailed prior the violent disruption of crime.

A second, complementary, aspect Moran (1985) addresses is the visual image used in cop shows. This observation draws on the *mise-en-scène* or the staging of the shot: what and how the visual elements appear in the frame (Bordwell, Thompson & Smith, 2017, p. 113). In the first instance, Moran considers the opening credits and how they position fictional officers and the police force. *Homicide* includes images of officers surrounding a police car in front of headquarters. In this setting, the officers appear as “powerful and impersonal agents of authority and justice”, and the imposing building represents the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the work they do (Moran, 1985, p. 167). Similarly, *Bellamy* commences with images of the hero “juxtaposed against the density and anonymity of the city” (Moran, 1985, p. 167). The title credits for *Cop Shop* reflect the dangers of police work, represented by the flashing red light on a police car speeding through the night, and the commitment required by individual officers, whose images in “characteristic poses” are inter-
cut with the action (Moran, 1985, p. 167). These three images, taken together, suggest there are different possibilities for depicting policing. As I observe of the series I analyse, the opening credits, including the imagery and theme music, pre-empt the type of policing that the program will project as much as they introduce the characters and setting.

Moran (1985) then turns his analysis of the visual image to the characters and the spaces they occupy. The exclusive focus on detective work in both Homicide and Bellamy is evident from the near absence of uniformed officers (Moran, 1985, p. 168). In Cop Shop, however, the uniformed officers are equal players in both the dramatic narrative and the business of policing, although the roles of both groups are clearly distinguished. This distinction is most evident in the upstairs/downstairs divide between the officers assigned to general duties and the detectives. In an arrangement also seen in the UK series, The Bill, the detectives occupy a work space remote from the reception area where the uniformed officers attend to the public. But, as is the case in Blue Heelers, the station ensemble drink together at the local hotel after their shift. Interestingly, the female characters are not excluded from the comradery of the watering hole. Although predominantly a male domain, the pub is a site of non-discriminatory police fellowship in these ensemble examples of the cop show genre. Moran notes that the pub, while “little more than incidental in Bellamy and non-existent in Homicide ... is vital in Cop Shop” (1985, p. 170). The communal space of the pub is an important feature of Cop Shop’s setting and a vital component of the serial narrative, which is sustained through the episodic appearance of regular police characters and through the ongoing relationships between them, including those that are sustained outside the workplace.

The emphasis on personal relationships in Cop Shop also aligns with a third aspect of the police drama identified by Moran (1985). This aspect relates to the depiction of how police go about their work rather than what police work is. Moran refers here to Hurd’s
(1981) distinction between the centred and decentred biography as a mode of narrative. Using these categories, Bellamy, in which one character takes on the role of the heroic detective, relies on the centred narrative, whereas Homicide has a more decentred approach with its small group of detectives sharing the investigative duties in each episode. In Cop Shop, the decentring extends to the whole cast, incorporating all officers in the station into the narrative. As an ensemble, argues Moran, the police characters, regardless of role and rank, “get on with the job together” (1985, p. 171). This representation of police projects a team image “characterised by internal harmony and cohesion among its members, a dedication to duty, to the maintenance of law and order, and by a respect for police methods and procedures” (p. 171).

Lastly, Moran (1985) refers to the representation of offenders. Criminal characters in Homicide, Cop Shop and, to a lesser degree, Bellamy, are mostly depicted as ordinary, fallible people driven to desperate measures by their circumstances, rather than psychotic “monsters” (Moran, 1985 p. 171). Like the officers policing them, Australian lawbreakers tend to be portrayed as authentic in their response to their situations, even if they are not necessarily justified in their actions. For this reason, Moran suggests that Australian audiences, unlike their American counterparts, are more disposed to empathising with criminal characters of this type. Moran’s construction of viewer empathy for criminals as something embedded in the national psyche may have some merit; however, sympathetic treatment of people pitted against authority cannot be regarded as exclusive to Australians. Addressing social issues from a critical perspective is a feature of quality television series in more recent times and, because many programs of this type are made in America, it is reasonable to assert that audiences there, too, are attuned to more compassionate renderings of criminality and its causes.
Moran (1985) concludes his study of *Homicide, Bellamy* and *Cop Shop* by recognising the part such programs play in communicating the role of police in society. He sees the police as being presented favourably in these programs, noting they offer a “countervailing force to the dangers and threats” of the world (Moran, 1985, p. 174). He contends that it is the focus on teamwork that contributes most to this positive image. Referring to the emphasis on the routines of station work in *Cop Shop*, Moran argues that it is the officer’s collegiality, rather than adherence to bureaucracy, that gets the job done. The officers in *Cop Shop* therefore deinstitutionalise policing. In doing so, they not only operate outside the sometimes-benign inefficiencies of bureaucracy, they also moderate the more repressive purposes of the state apparatus (Althusser, 1971). Despite identifying the treatment of police in *Homicide, Bellamy*, and *Cop Shop* as sympathetic, Moran recognises that these programs are instruments of police legitimation and the officers in Australian programs project a style of policing acceptable to local audiences.

Moran’s (1985) analysis of policing and crime in Australian television series is one of few on this topic. His examination of police roles and workplace relationships, and depictions of criminality are informative, but there are some omissions that my study will address. His silence on the depiction of women officers and ethnic diversity in the police workforce ignores the real-world changes that were taking place in the 1970s and 1980s. The ways in which television shapes ideas of criminality has also changed since Moran’s research. In more recent series, including *Wildside* and *East West 101*, it is the marginalised, rather than those who do wrong, who are more likely to carry the burden of suspicion. My analysis of these more contemporary television series gives more consideration to the treatment of gender, ethnicity and youth.
In this section, I have reviewed British, American and Australian literature on police television drama series. I note that, with the exception of Turnbull (2014) who suggests there may have been some Atlantic “cross-fertilisation” (p. 66) in form, content and style since television commenced, these studies have been limited to programs of a single country rather than venturing into comparative analyses. Margaret Rogers (2008), in her observations on cop shows, contends that “what identifies and privileges national attributes and cultural context within the television police genre is the interplay of repetition and difference” (p. 81). These elements are not exclusive to police drama, but in noting that even intertextual references within the genre “seem to be governed to some extent by national attributes and cultural context” (p. 81), Rogers suggests that a national rather than international focus is of greater merit. She sees the influence of these attributes and contexts, as well as that of historical moment, as inevitably bearing on the construction of police in each country, a proposition of relevance to my study.

The works I have considered in reviewing studies of fictional police series have focused on the texts themselves. Before moving on to consideration of the treatment of reality television, I turn briefly to two recent studies of police drama series that have adopted a different approach in which analysis is limited to the processes of creating such programs, particularly the writing and, to a lesser degree, the production. Neither of them includes textual or audience analysis. In the first of these, Marianne Colbran (2014) explored “the process of storytelling” (p. 4) on The Bill. Focusing “solely on the production process and on the creation of stories” (p.5), she studied the “day-to-day” processes on The Bill in the context “of the social organisations in which they are situated”: that of writing and production team and the television industry (p. 29). The longevity of The Bill (1984-2010) ensured that its image of policing had to evolve for the program to retain its claim to authenticity. Colbran
examines this aspect of the series as a parallel to the changing expectations held by its producers who regularly sought to reengineer the format, types of stories and styles of telling them in response to commercial and programming changes. Of relevance to this thesis is Colbran’s consideration of the police advisers who work on *The Bill* and the input from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). Although many other crimes series use the services of police insiders to advise on procedure, *The Bill* engaged former police officers as “in-house” (p. 53) advisers whose role was to assist with the creation of stories rather than provide post-production suggestions for changes to stories and scripts that had been written by BBC staff writers. The staff writers, who were not only members of a very different workplace culture, but like much of the public for whom they created policing stories, had little knowledge or experience of real police work. The former officers employed to work beside the staff writers were involved in advising from the conceptual stage onwards, ensuring the accuracy of procedure that was depicted in each episode, but also the authenticity of police work: “the small change of policing” (p. 79). They also provided ideas for stories from their own policing experience. Additionally, the police advisers acted as conduits to other police contacts who they introduced to the staff writers as sources for stories. They also served as a point of contact with officers and departments in the Metropolitan Police Service wishing to incorporate initiatives into episodes of the program (p. 54). The purpose of these instances of police involvement did not appear to extend beyond quests for accuracy and the promotion of operational activities and Colbran does not report on any ideological intent on the part of the police organisation. Nevertheless, the officers considered themselves to be apart from the television industry: “at the end of the day our first loyalty is still to the Metropolitan Police Service” (p. 87). Colbran’s study is a valuable account of aspects of the relationship between police, whether as in-house advisers or as an institutional apparatus in the shape of the
Metropolitan Police Service and its departments, and their counterparts at the BBC: the writers, editors and producers of *The Bill*, and the institution itself.

In a study similar to and contemporary with that of Colbran’s (2014), Anita Lam (2014) explored the making of the Canadian crime series *The Bridge* (2010). Like Colbran, Lam focused on the writing process rather than the texts resulting from it and the audience response to it. Her research included a series of interviews with and observations of the writers and producers of the program which she analysed using actor-network theory, a “method that not only addresses questions of how, but also attends to processes of knowledge formation and representation” (Lam, 2014, p. 33). In regard to police involvement, Lam reports that Entertainment One, the makers of *The Bridge* for Canadian Television (CTV), like the BBC in the making of *The Bill*, employed police advisers or “technical consultants” on matters of police procedure, although they often provided the ideas for stories from their own experience as well, and taking the opportunity to privilege television police officers as heroic protagonists in the process (p. 88). In comparison to Colbran, Lam makes only passing reference to the relationship between the makers of *The Bridge* and the local police organisation. This is understandable in the context of her research methods. Observing the interactions of those present in writers’ rooms and interviewing those directly involved in the creation of the program are credible and relevant research activities, but they necessarily preclude any formal engagement with policing organisations. In the case of *The Bridge*, the police organisation response is noteworthy for its echoing of Gannon Jenkins’ experience with the NSW Police Force in the making *Wildside*. as Lam notes, *The Bridge* did not receive approval or formal cooperation from the City of Toronto because of concerns about negative representations. This demonstrates the imperative “for police to police their own media image” (p. 87).
Colbran (2014) and Lam (2014) provide rare insights into the creation of television drama featuring crime and policing. Their focus on the writing process and the interactions between the writers and with others involved in production of fictional cop shows provide helpful direction for similar studies. I did not undertake any field work exploring the production of police television drama and the creation of scripted stories in this thesis, a limitation that I attribute in part to the cessation of NSW Police Force engagement with producers of fictional.

In the following section, in which I review studies of reality television, the creation and production of this genre of cop show is a site of greater importance for policing studies than is the case for fictional programs. This is largely due to the more active engagement of police agencies in the production of reality television series.

**Reality Television**

The term “reality television” is used to describe a wide variety of program types and it is necessary to clarify what this term means in the context of this research. Put simply, reality television is a form of documentary production in that it involves “real people, and not actors and situations taken from real life” (Orlebar, 2011, p. 95). One of the pioneers in film documentary, John Grierson is attributed with describing documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” using “fragments of reality” (cited by Orlebar, 2011, p. 95). Annette Hill (2007) regards reality television as a form of popular factual programming, a term that she claims “defies categorization” (p. 48), although she describes it as having as its purpose audience entertainment. The portmanteau word “infotainment”, in its blending of information with entertainment, suggests a popular, rather than didactic, application. Hill distinguishes between programs that engineer situations which are then recorded, such as *Big Brother* (2001–2014) and *The Block* (2003–2004), and those that record established situations, such as
the police observational, or “fly-on-the-wall” (Orlebar, 2011, p. 101), documentaries studied in this thesis, Recruits, The Force: Behind the Line, and RBT. Despite assigning these three titles to a sub-genre of reality television that focuses on police, I also acknowledge a distinction made by Frances Bonner (2003), who includes such programs within the wider scope of “ordinary television”, or programming that ‘operates’” (p. 3) as non-fiction. According to Bonner’s classification, The Recruits, with its focus on a group of identifiable policing aspirants and their personal and emotional “journeys”, operates within the “docu-soap”, or “more ordinary”, less highbrow version of the documentary genre (2003, p.54), whereas The Force and RBT, fit within the “close trailing” (2003, p. 25) model of police reality television, which focuses on policing activity and anonymises the officers who perform in the role.

Commencing 30 years ago, the American series, Cops (1989–) is perhaps the earliest program in the reality television genre to focus on policing. Cops can be described as an observational documentary in that the camera and microphone record the activities of police on patrol. This description suggests that Cops simply presents policing as it is in real life, but this an inaccurate explanation. Mary Beth Oliver’s (1994) study of the program demonstrates this discrepancy in the way race is associated with aggression and violence. Oliver undertook a content analysis of Cops, coding the characters appearing in the program according to role (police officer or suspect), race, gender, and aggressive behaviour. This data was compared with crime and employment data to determine any disparity between the real world and that portrayed on television as reality. Oliver’s research revealed that Cops over-represented instances of violent crime and the rate at which crimes are solved. The data also showed that black police officers were disproportionately less visible than their white colleagues. Although racial minorities were not overrepresented in the character of the criminal suspect,
Oliver contends that the proportionate overrepresentation of whites as police officers effectively portrayed them as heroes against the non-white criminals. The distortion of the real world under the guise of documentary gives good cause for Oliver to refute the term reality-based. More importantly, it shows that the law and order messages contained in such programs need to be more critically scrutinised than police and production partners expect of their infotainment offerings.

In his comprehensive study of police reality television, *Arresting Images*, Aaron Doyle (2003) tests propositions relating to the influence of such programming beyond the question of whether crime on television affects the audience. While not refuting this premise—indeed, he considers it throughout his book—he also seeks to determine whether “crime and policing itself is altered as it is televised” (Doyle, 2003, p. 4). He proposes that television production does not simply convey events but “often shapes the things it records” (p. 4). This shaping influences the actions of the individual officer as well as that of the institutions involved. Doyle illustrates this proposition through the example of a roadside traffic stop in *Cops*, against which he asks how the situation is changed with the introduction of a camera. Arguably, officers necessarily adapt their off-duty demeanour in order to communicate the approved messages of road safety and police practice in all such police-citizen interactions. Placed in front of the camera, they become players in a performance not only for themselves, but also for an audience; an audience that only exists because the camera was present. The officers, the motorist, and passengers cease to be mere participants in a policing transaction; in the knowledge of being on television, all these individuals are likely to behave differently. Furthermore, the police organisation, as a co-producer of police reality programs, may be prompted to change policy or procedure, and the government to change the law in response to the televised events, or in expectation of the way they might be received.
by the audience. In this way, Doyle regards television as not only capable of promoting ways of thinking about crime that fit with “law-and-order ideology” (2003, p. 147), it can also influence the creative institutions that shape ideology and the institutions of state involved in the legislation and administration of justice, making its messages felt at “numerous points ... [by] policy makers, prosecutors, sentencing judges, and frontline police” (Doyle, 2003, p. 148).

Doyle (2003) argues that Michel Foucault’s (1977) model for considering punishment as having evolved from spectacle to surveillance needs to be reconsidered in the context of crime and reality television. Policing is different to the penal, or corrective field; it is better suited to spectacle, and television does spectacle well. The production of reality television is certainly a form of surveillance. All participants are watched: the speeding drivers in the Australian series *Highway Patrol* (2009–) and those being breath tested on *RBT*, and the police officers undertaking their duties. The broadcasting of reality television makes a spectacle of that surveillance for the entertainment of the viewers who are at the same time engaging in a form of surveillance. In this way, the didactic law and order messaging projected by television is reinforced by and upon the viewer.

Jessica Fishman (1999) interprets the construction of policing in reality television through a comparative textual analysis of *Cops* and *America’s Most Wanted* (1988–2011). She contends that rather than offering a single ideology, programs in this genre can create different law and order narratives or “stories we tell ourselves about authority, power and social conflict” (p. 268). *Cops*, in focusing on the actions of police officers actively enforcing the law, justifies police as the single professional body of “authoritarian agents of criminal control” (Fishman, 1999, p. 268). Conversely, *America’s Most Wanted* (AMW), in asking the audience for assistance in solving recent crimes and identifying suspects, encourages “civic
agency and the individual’s efficacy, minimizing the difference between the crime-fighting responsibilities of state institutions and the general public” (Fishman, 1999, p. 270). The former is progressive in its construction of law enforcement in that power is authorised to an expert group in the form of the police; the latter relies on a populist mode, empowering the individual to contribute to good order without the need for centralised, authoritarian intervention.

*AMW* and *Cops* depend on different narratives (a crime to be solved or person to be identified versus the resolution of a crime and arrest of a person) and characterisations (the absence of the police officer versus the construction of police-officer-as-hero). However, both maintain the suggestion of a dangerous world needing “ever-vigilant crime fighting” (Fishman, 1999, p. 270) and encourage audiences to share in the desire for a punitive legal system. The preferred model of crime fighting in *Cops* is not only centred on police but presents a hard-policing model that is action-oriented and highly physical. Like its British counterpart, *Crimewatch UK* (1984–2017), which is examined in depth by Deborah Jermyn (2007), *AMW* takes the focus off the police officer. However, the invitation it offers for public engagement in crime fighting is consistent with the principles of community policing, a soft form of order maintenance. Programs such as *AMW* and *Crimewatch UK* are not within the scope of this research; their focus is on crime rather than policing and, as evidenced by the intermittent *Australia’s Most Wanted* (1988–1999) in Channel 7 with only four series in 10 years, and Channel 10’s *Wanted* (2013), the genre has not been a regular or popular feature of Australian domestic television programming. However, Fishman’s (1999) analysis of *Cops* is instructive, particularly in her identification of its construction of American police as heroic agents of control, competent experts engaging in a unique field of practice, and performers of violent action.
Although professional competence is a characteristic of policing that also features in Australian reality television programs, instances of institutional violence and individual heroism of the type depicted in *Cops* are not seen in locally made programs. I contend that this is because images of excessive force and individual heroics do not align with the idea of policing that Australian police agencies seek to communicate through television. Murray Lee and Alyce McGovern’s (2012, 2013a, 2013b) research into the formal and informal relationships that operate between the police and the media in Australia provide important insights into the types of messages communicated through these by co-produced reality television programs. *Policing and Media: Public Relations, Simulations and Communications* (Lee & McGovern, 2013a) reports on the partnership between the NSW Police Force and the television industry. In this book, Lee and McGovern analyse the effectiveness of police-sponsored programs in promoting confidence, trust and legitimacy in the police and whether these programs achieve the objectives of the NSW Police Force Media Policy. This project consists of two components: a survey to measure the difference in perceptions of policing between viewers and non-viewers of police observational documentaries, and a content analysis of the NSW Police Force sponsored reality television programs, *Recruits*, *RBT* and *The Force: Behind the Line*. The quantitative data for the first component showed that viewers who watched a lot of police reality television programs also had positive perceptions of the police. The content analysis relating to the second component consisted of quantitative data on the frequency of operational procedures, types of offences, consequences imposed on offenders, and demographics of police officers, victims and offenders. The narrative analysis applied to this component examined quotes, themes and storylines to determine the way in which themes of legitimacy, such as goodwill, discretion and fairness, were displayed in transactions between the police and the public.
The content and narrative analysis demonstrated that there was a close alignment between the messages and themes in the three programs and the stated objectives of the NSW Police Force (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 154) as defined in the NSW Police Media Policy:

1. Maximise assistance and information from the public to help solve crime,
2. Correct or clarify information in the community,
3. Warn people of dangers and threats,
4. Create discussion in the community and/or among criminals during investigations,
5. Deter criminal activity by increasing the perception of detection,
6. Highlight good police work,
7. Increase police visibility,
8. Reassure the community and reduce the fear of crime,

Although none of the programs included messages relating to objectives 1 and 4, the other 7 objectives were demonstrated in at least one of the three series. Recruits demonstrated objectives 5, 6, 8 and 9. It was also seen as providing a “humanizing” picture of the police through the personal experience of the featured recruits and depicted the police as “important members of the community” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 156). RBT episodes featured objectives 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9, and The Force: Behind the Line illustrated objectives 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9. The Force also emphasised the social services role of the police through stories showing police assisting homeless people and those injured in fires, and preventing danger to others (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 156).

Lee and McGovern’s (2012, 2013a) research has provided the most significant insight into police co-production of reality programs to date. Their research is directed toward the
ways in which cop shows of this genre communicate the corporate message of the police as articulated in policy documents. They explore, among other things, the concept of police legitimacy and the ways in which it is expressed and sought by law enforcement agencies through reality television. However, they do not examine the ways in which these programs function as expressions of police power nor how they communicate the influence of police culture on its practitioners. Both matters are relevant to police officers’ interpretations of television representations of their profession and to the research questions explored in this thesis.

**Police Audiences**

The body of research exploring police attitudes about their representation on television is sparse. Describing the police as an unexamined group in the study of media influence, Nicole Maurantonio (2012) laments not only the missed opportunity to learn how meaning is made from television but how meaning is made by those who are the subject of representation. The earliest example of research on this topic was conducted in the United States by Alan Arcuri (1977), who surveyed police officers on their views of 13 police television drama shows screened during the months of the survey. Arcuri posed questions aimed at determining how frequently the programs were watched by the officers, the officers’ perceptions of realism, and their views on the impact of the programs on the public. The data revealed that although the participants nominated a large proportion of the programs as frequent or occasional viewing, only three programs, all police procedurals, were considered realistic. The main reason they offered for this response was not authenticity of procedure, but professionalism, a term the participants used to refer to the competence, dedication and skill of the police characters. Although the participants found some aspects to be unrealistic, particularly the dramatic action, it was the way that the television officers went about their
duties that was considered the most authentic aspect. The three police procedural programs also received favourable comments for their depictions of interactions between officers and activities unrelated to law enforcement. The police respondents clearly valued seeing the human side of policing and the quotidian routine of their work in television drama.

Arcuri’s (1977) research does not extend to ideological messages in cop shows. His interest is limited to police viewing habits, their opinions on the authenticity of the programs fictionalising their practice, and on the impact of this representation on the public. The issue of police legitimacy is unchallenged by Arcuri’s questions and, although the participants state their displeasure toward the police image in television drama, he does not explore this misrepresentation through a social, political or cultural lens. The nominated programs, as mainstream fare of the mid-1970s, are unlikely to have depicted policing in ways that challenged the legitimacy of the institution. Similarly, research conducted in that era is not likely to have explored the way television constructs policing and power. Nevertheless, Arcuri’s study demonstrates that the richness of his research lies in the comments offered by the participants rather than quantitative data provided in reply to survey questions, a fact made evident in my research.

In a more recent study, David Perlmutter (2000) examines the discrepancies between police practice and its representation on American television. Unlike Arcuri (1977), Perlmutter conducted his research in the participants’ work environment while they were on duty. In a series of observations while accompanying officers in patrol cars, Perlmutter explored, among other topics, police attitudes to how they are depicted on television. While his purpose was primarily to take photographs of policing activities, his interactions with and observations of police officers provide an insight into police self-perceptions, their thoughts on public expectations of the police, and their views on the media’s role in the formation of
these impressions. This is a unique, self-reflexive study, drawing as it does on unguarded moments of interaction between police officers and an outsider embedded in their workplace. The police officers in Perlmutter’s study displayed conflicting attitudes to the ways in which television portrayed their profession. They were disparaging of fictional television officers who they regarded as staging an unrealistic portrait of operational street work that overemphasised action and claimed an improbable rate of crime solving. They also disapproved of the portrayal of the back stage of policing that they regarded as a misrepresentation of station house and off-duty interactions. At a deeper level, they were critical of the lack of presence; television could not reconstruct their own real sense of “being there” (Perlmutter, 2000. p. 50). Yet, he notes that despite these and other criticisms, many of the officers, consciously and unconsciously, incorporated some of the actions they disapprovingly associated with their televised counterparts into their own performance. Whether knowingly or not, “the real cop does not exist independently of the mediated cop” (Perlmutter, 2000, p. 28). In the same way, the officers participating in my study rejected the suggestion that they might take their cues from television, although some of them said they observed others doing so.

It is this type of blurring of fiction and reality that Sean O’Sullivan (2005) argues needs more attention in policing and media studies. He points to the proliferation of competing images of police, ranging from the nostalgic warmth created by programs such as *Heartbeat* (1992–2010) to the clinical science of forensics seen in *Silent Witness* (1996–), contending that the multiple versions of policing make it is difficult to gain any meaningful insight into the realities of the job. With so many policing types on television, O’Sullivan (2005) is interested in how cop shows might affect the perceptions of police and those considering the profession. This is a question also asked by Andrew Billen (1996) about the
focus on corrupt and unethical behaviours of police in drama series of the 1980s and 1990s. While accepting that corruption is a part of the reality of the police profession in any era, and that it makes good television, Billen’s concern is not with the “mean moral relativism” of late 20th-century drama or the ambivalence toward such flaws in the ethics of policing (1996, p. 39); rather, he wonders what impact such portrayals have on current and prospective police officers.

O’Sullivan’s (2005) apprehension is not with the negative influences of corruption and unethical policing on television that troubles Billen (1996). Instead, he questions whether programs that present policing in ways that support the hegemonic model of law and order create the perception that more police are needed to fight criminals, terrorists and others who challenge the social order. He also asks whether the alternative, modernising constructions of gender and race within television police agencies might account for increased diversity in recruitment. These are important questions for my own research because they examine the way policing is constructed through television by exploring, as Charlotte Brunsdon (1998) describes it, the questions of who has the right to police, and how policing is performed.

O’Sullivan’s (2005) suggestions for researching police on television provide the opportunity for more critical studies than Arcuri’s (1977), published nearly 30 years earlier. Commenting on the trend toward a more discursive style of analysis, O’Sullivan recognises that political, social and cultural meanings are constructed from cop shows. Although he also advocates research methods that engage directly with police participants, in the way that Arcuri did with his cohort, he argues that they need to be applied to the exploration of more critical issues than viewer preferences and minor quibbles over police procedures. In this regard, Laura Huey’s (2010) research aligns more with O’Sullivan’s expectations. Huey examined whether officers thought that forensic and procedural police programs affected
their interactions with the public. Drawing on Perlmutter’s (2000) claim that the police see their media counterparts as rivals for the public’s sympathies, Huey conducted semi-structured interviews with 31 Canadian crime scene investigators questioning them on their views of two core aspects: the coherence of television portrayals of investigative work with their own experiences, and the influence of television programs featuring forensic science on public expectations of their professional practice. The participating officers responded strongly on both aspects. They considered the depiction of police investigative work on television police drama to be an unrealistic representation of their own work. Most of the participants also readily provided examples of witnesses and victims who expected to see investigators perform forensic procedures that were not viable for the circumstances but were regular features of police drama series like CSI.

Huey’s (2010) research demonstrates that police officers’ concerns about police drama do relate to authenticity: the lack of congruity with the real world of policing creates false expectations that undermine their implicit claim to expertise in their field. However, it was not a lack of authenticity relating to procedure that was of most concern, despite the exaggerated capabilities of forensic science in the fictional world of CSI. Rather, it was the discrepancy between the high-tech, well-resourced television police units and their own experiences of shortages in staffing, resources and funding, that troubled them most and gave them cause to think this could lead to heightened expectations which, when unmet, might result in a decrease in public confidence. In a subsequent co-authored article, Huey and Ryan Broll (2015) analyse what appears to be the same set of interviews to explore the participants’ attitudes to the “glamorization” of police “dirty work”. In this second study, the criminal forensic investigators expressed concerns about the propensity for television drama to sanitise
their work and, in doing so, deny the social, moral, and physical taint that should stigmatise their work, but instead fascinates viewers.

More recent American research by Maurantonio (2012) also bears a closer resemblance to the police-as-audience component of my own study. Her field work consisted of interviews with 14 New York Police Department officers of various ranks and a focus group with seven rookie officers. Of significance in Maurantonio’s study is her interest in symbolic power which she describes as the “product of the contests and negotiations” (p. 4) between the police, those who depict them, and the general public. She argues that cop show representations of police present a challenge to officers’ symbolic power that can cause them to question their professional and personal value, “generating problematic consequences” (p. 4) for their self-image. Maurantonio focuses her research on criminal investigators, drawing on Sarah Deutsch and Gray Cavender’s (2008) concept of “forensic facticity”, which legitimates that particular field of policing practice by representing it as being “upheld by rigorous scientific inquiry” (Maurantonio, 2012, p. 13). For this reason, television depictions of scenes of crime officers and forensic investigators challenge the validity of their professional status as police officers and as scientists.

It is clear from Maurantonio’s (2012) study that television’s problematising of police legitimacy is not limited to individual officers. The legitimation of television cops through audience perceptions of authenticity reinforces the significance of police work “to the proper functioning of society” (Maurantonio, 2012, p. 17), while simultaneously creating false expectations of police capabilities. In this study, Maurantonio, like Doyle (2003), explores the effect of cop shows on police performance in the real world. Maurantonio’s discussion on this point centres on a more serious event than Doyle’s traffic stop example cited above: a raid filmed for a reality television program resulted in the accidental shooting of a child.
Maurantonio contends that the circumstances of the child’s death prompted questions in the media about the effect of the cameras on police performance: Was the officer engaging in a “dramatic” response because he was being filmed, was he conflating scenarios from television with his own circumstance, and, “does the presence of TV crews affect police performance?” (Maurantonio, 2012, p. 6).

These are perhaps the wrong questions. They limit police performance modelled on the media representation of police to circumstances in which a television camera is present. A small percentage of police officers participate in reality television programs, whereas all officers perform policing. A more useful question would be: do police in their day-to-day work perform their role in ways that are learnt from their television models? According to some of Maurantonio’s (2012) interviewees, there are some who do. Most of the officers she interviewed said they were not regular viewers of cop shows, but they were familiar with the basic premise and characters of current, popular programs. Whether through knowledge familiarity, or assumption, they offered their views on the content and its impact on viewers, including their colleagues. Several officers spoke about the effect of police drama on the public, but others “revealed how the webs of forensic facticity may tangle with the realm of the police institution itself” (Maurantonio, 2012, p. 16). The more common examples of this type of tangling were offered by forensic investigators who reported that their generalist police officer colleagues shared many of the misconceptions held by the public about forensic capabilities, acknowledging that “even we [police] get unrealistic expectations for some of the things going on television. Imagine what it does to the kids” (Maurantonio, 2012, p. 16). However, in a statement supporting Maurantonio’s concern for problematic consequences for police stemming from challenges to their symbolic power, one officer observed that in her experience when detectives were assigned to homicide squads they tended to “play like
they’re on television”, a phenomenon she attributed to a presumption on their part that “because they see it on TV that’s the way they’re supposed to act” (Maurantonio, 2012, p. 16).

The question of television providing a model for police practices also drew affirmative answers from retired police officers who participated in a British pilot study conducted by Ian Cummins, Marian Foley, and Martin King (2014). Here, too, behaviour among detectives was seen to demonstrate a “loop” between television representations and the work practices and occupational behaviours on which the television drama was based (Cummins et al., 2014, p. 210). An example of this was offered by an officer who observed that “when The Sweeney was on, officers started to call me Guv” (Cummins et al., 2014, p. 210).

Whereas Huey (2010) and Maurantonio (2012) situate their research around the facticity of forensics and scientific realism, Cummins et al. (2014) explore their interviewees’ viewing habits and attitudes, both self-reflexive and presumed of the public, in the context of the police organisational culture in Britain. Cummins et al. asked former officers about their viewing habits and preferences in regard to police drama, and what they liked and disliked about the genre. The participants were also asked to nominate what they thought was portrayed well, what was portrayed badly, and why the genre held such popularity. These questions prompted the same type of comments about authenticity as in the earlier studies reviewed above. As was the case in those studies, the issues most readily identified by the participants related to the minutiae of police activity. Cummins et al. (2014) observed that the retired officers claimed they rarely watched police drama, but they readily expressed annoyance with most of these programs because they were “completely improbable but also full of procedural errors” (p. 208). Nevertheless, they also raised issues about behavioural and
attitudinal elements; matters relating to police culture rather than procedure. *Life on Mars*, a post-modern “hybrid of cop show, time travelling sf/fantasy and psychological thriller” (Irwin, 2013, p. 369) was nominated in relation to this topic. The historical rendering of policing—and society in general—from the early 1970s, when most of the participants had started their careers, did resonate with them. They all mentioned the program, and some claimed to have watched it, but they were mostly critical of the unprofessional culture of the era. The authors described this as “the conceit of the programme—the viewer is invited to mock these outmoded social attitudes, the assumption being that these prejudices have been eradicated” (p. 6). Nevertheless, as one interviewee noted, the “big macho culture, big drinking culture” (Cummins et al., 2014, p. 210) was a feature of *Life on Mars* that was still prevalent in the real police of today. Many of the interviewees in my study, particularly the students and female officers, were similarly disapproving of police officers, onscreen and offscreen, who did not live up to current standards: “fat old sergeants who don’t care anymore” (Male Student 10), “rude” (Female Officer 2) officers who “act like bogans” (Female Student 6).

These three recent studies (Cummins et al., 2014; Huey, 2010; Maurantonio, 2012) share a methodological basis which actively elicits police attitudes to the way members of their profession are portrayed on television. Importantly, all three studies move beyond questions of accuracy in the depiction of the processes of policing and its iconography, a term Maurantonio (2012) uses to refer to the accoutrements of policing such as cars, guns and uniforms. They all consider the police in the context of institutional power and social control, and they recognise that the television image of police communicates these aspects of policing. These studies are important contributions to British (Cummins et al., 2014) and
American (Huey, 2010; Maurantonio, 2012) police and television research and have not been matched by any comparable Australian studies.

Despite this absence of Australian research specifically focused on police attitudes to television representations of the profession, Janet Chan, Chris Devery and Sally Doran’s (2003) *Fair Cop: Learning the Art of Policing* does touch on the topic. This book is an important study of acculturation into the police profession, and although it reveals that the media is an influence on policing aspirations, it is not the purpose of the authors to focus on this element. Nevertheless, the recruits’ construction of policing is informed by television, which is relevant to this study.

*Fair Cop* (Chan et al., 2003) analyses the characteristics of one cohort of police recruits commencing at the NSW Police Academy in the mid-1990s. The authors compiled demographic data to determine “what kinds of men and women become police officers” (Chan et al., 2003, p. 63). They also investigated the motives and expectations of this group. The sources of knowledge about police that the recruits identified give an insight into the influences shaping their views about what policing entails, and the values they attribute to the occupation they hoped to join. Although three quarters of the cohort could draw on personal acquaintance with police officers to shape their understanding of the role, a third nominated fictional television programs as their primary source of knowledge (Chan et al., 2003, p. 72).

Like Arcuri’s (1977) research into police attitudes, extended interviews conducted by Chan et al. (2003) elicited richer responses to the questions they had posed in their surveys. These interviews revealed the recruits showed a preference for “noble and courageous images” of police officers rather than the “negative, sensationalized ones portrayed by the media” (p. 73). The authors’ construction of media portrayals as negative and sensational is
an allusion to the Wood Royal Commission into Police Corruption which was the subject of much attention when they conducted the research. The exposure of corrupt practices strongly influenced public attitudes to the NSW Police Service, and the recruits would not have been immune to the intensive news coverage. The endemic nature of corruption as a likely detractor for these recruits does overshadow other unfavourable aspects of police work that may have been referred to more frequently in less troubled times; there may otherwise have been more acknowledgement of the mundane work in policing that contrasts with the crime-fighting image on television. Of particular interest here is the tendency for the recruits to cast the media as a purveyor of negativity, despite the fact that their own constructions of policing as noble and courageous were, to some extent, shaped by media image-making.

Chan et al. (2003) also identified some unrealistic career expectations among the recruits. Most of them (82%) wanted to work in specialised areas, particularly in criminal investigation. This area of practice is the realm of the detective rather than the general duties officer, a role to which less than half of the respondents aspired despite it being the career-long assignment of most officers. The recruits also showed a strong preference for crime fighting and rapid response roles, while “goals aligned to a community policing response” such as increasing feelings of safety, were of lower importance (Chan et al., 2003, p. 75). These expectations resemble fictional depictions of policing and are at odds with organisational priorities and the reality of police practice.

*Fair Cop* (Chan et al., 2003) is not an investigation into the influence of television on recruitment. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate that many who aspire to a policing career have constructed an idea of the job from television representations. In doing so, many of the recruits anticipate an atypical work assignment and a degree of excitement that is unlikely to be fulfilled. The study also shows that television representations that reflect favourably on the
police profession can influence public attitudes even to the extent that they aid recruitment.
Despite the evidence in news reports of the time of endemic police corruption, it would appear that the more deeply embedded ideological constructions of police as virtuous and heroic, which are favoured in fictional representations held sway over the recruits’ ideas about policing and in their own career ambitions.

My review of the literature relating to the representation of police on television shows that, in the Australian context, the topic has not received the attention that an institution conferred with such status and power warrants. The views of those who perform in the role of policing have not been explored. Moreover, there are no studies of the Australian cop show that focus on all three elements of television communication—production, text, audience—so as to determine the construction of police and policing through this medium, a gap this thesis seeks to address in order to understand what policing means in the national context.

In the following chapter I examine the role of police in Australia and the theoretical and methodological approach I have adopted in order to examine the ways in which policing is constructed by television cop shows. I also outline the methods I have used to undertake the research for this thesis.
Chapter 3: Contexts, Methodology and Methods

In the previous chapter I reviewed previous studies examining television representations of policing and the police response to these representations. In this chapter I articulate the context and the nature of my research on this topic. Firstly, I examine the role of the police as an agent of state power and how this relates to the Australian social, cultural and political condition and to the construction of police through cop shows. In doing so I identify some important theoretical concepts that relate to policing and which apply to this thesis. I also outline the methodological approach I have adopted and the methods I apply to my research.

Research Contexts: The Idea of Police

Louis Althusser (1971) uses the term interpellation to describe the way in which citizens come under the authority of state power over their lives and, fittingly for the topic of my thesis, he uses the example of the police officer to illustrate this concept. Here, the police officer “hails” or calls out to a citizen, who, in responding, becomes subject to this “repressive state apparatus” (Althusser, 1971, p. 174). By simply knowing that the police exist and are a constant presence in public places, citizens regulate their own behaviour. The cop show, too, can be regarded as a source of interpellation; by viewing the presence and actions of police on television, audiences come to recognise the authority of the police and the state and accede to it. A viewer response of this type confers on the cop show a form of soft-simulation (Lee & McGovern, 2013a), or policing by proxy. Thus, Althusser’s corresponding apparatus of ideology, the media—which for the purposes of this thesis is limited to television—convey ideas about policing that endorse, and are endorsed by, the state. Through television, the police can be framed variously as a force of state repression with a tough-on-crime agenda, a service in support of its community, or an organisation with
a workforce representative of the public it serves. Carl Klockars (1985) provides a fitting expression for this social construction in the title of his book, *The Idea of Police*. Klockars uses this phrase when describing how his criminal justice students have tried to define policing by function, particularly in regard to the use of coercive force. For the purposes of this thesis, I use the term the *idea of police* to refer to the more abstract construction of the institution and its officers, a construction that is not contingent on physical coercion, but is founded on expectations of service, protection and justice, and concerns about oppression, abuse of power, and corruption.

Certainly, the feature unique to the police is their authority to use coercive force against members of the public. They have what Max Weber describes as a “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force” (Gerth & Mills 2009, 78). The authority to use coercive force on fellow citizens, and the state as the source of that authorisation, is signified by officers’ uniforms and jurisdictional insignia. Their implements of coercion, such as firearms, handcuffs and batons, are also visible expressions of police power. Although the circumstances under which an officer applies physical force are exceptional, the authority and capacity to do so are present in every interaction between the officer and the public. In this way, as Jacques Derrida (1992) claims, rules and regulations of state are not necessarily enforced in every instance but, as instruments of the state, they cannot be regarded as the law without enforceability, and there can be no “applicability or enforcement of the law without force, whether this force be direct or indirect, physical or symbolic” (p. 6). All police-citizen interactions are based on an understanding that the potential to apply authorised coercive force is ever present, and that understanding is derived from the recognition of the symbols that represent police power.
It is clear, then, that police not only have real power, or corporeal or bodily power as Michel Foucault (1977, p. 138) describes the authority under which they can subject coercive force upon its citizens; they are also imbued with symbolic power, a form of power that is inserted “more deeply into the social body” (p. 82). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Ian Loader (1997) describes this as an “invisible power, inculcated through instruction, habit and routine” (p. 3). This inculcation can be described as doxic, consisting of “pre-conscious dispositions which generate and shape people’s attitudes, perceptions and practices” (Loader, 1997, p. 4). The symbolic power of policing is deeply rooted in the social consciousness as an attitude shared by the police and its public. It is the source of influence in police-citizen interactions, which, according to David Bayley (1985) is expressed in the socialisation of the public and regulation of their behaviour. As “society’s most pervasive teachers about civic values”, the police are “government incarnate” (Bayley, 1985, p. 197). On this point, Bayley makes particular note of the British Bobby and the Canadian Mountie. Seen as “formative actors in the determination of national character” (Bayley, 1985, p. 198), these highly identifiable symbols of law enforcement double as icons of their respective countries, consequentially implying that they are societies in which the law is respected and obeyed, and that condition of lawfulness is what defines them as a people. In constructing national identities from these romanticised versions of British and Canadian officers, Bayley downplays the potential of physical, even fatal, yet justified coercive force. But, even in these lofty constructions of the Bobby and the Mountie, it is evident that the symbolic value of the police has always been more important than “any instrumental effects in controlling crime” (Reiner, 2008a p. 691). If, in this way, the police can be regarded as a symbolic entity, so too can the police who appear on cop shows be considered as symbolic forms. They stand in for the power and authority of government through the television images of police dramas and the operational practices captured on reality television. Whether they do so in ways that
accurately reflect or critically refract (Arntfield, 2011) the reality of policing is an important question for this thesis.

Just as critically, this thesis also examines how this proxy role of television police contributes to the simulated work of policing. Pat O’Malley (2010) describes simulated policing as taking on a number of forms, including “profiling, monitoring, modelling, predicting and so on” (p. 797). It is “the point at which the real and the virtual converge” (O’Malley, 2010, p. 795). Real police work is done; intelligence is collected, fines are issued, criminals—and others—and public places are surveilled, but the policing itself is virtual. The technologies that support these activities allow policing to expand its reach while reducing costs (O’Malley, 2010, p. 797). Television cop shows therefore need to be regarded as simulated policing: on-screen officers demonstrate the institution’s enforcement capability to those who are watching at home. The reality television version of the cop show is highly valued by police organisations for simulating policing in ways it controls and approves. These programs have become a key component of a form of policing that Lee and McGovern (2012) argue is increasingly conducted at the “level of the policing image – simulations of policing” (p. 122).

By examining the ideological messages suggested by the appearance of police on television, I am also acknowledging that these images do not exist independently of the world in which they are produced, transmitted and received. Recognising that context is integral to the text and contributes to its meaning is central to critical scholarship. Derrida (1976) makes the case for this idea in the phrase: “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” (p.158), by which he means there is no outside-text. Although these words have been widely misread (Schalkwyk, 1997), Derrida’s (1988) subsequent rephrasing as “there is nothing outside context” (p. 136), makes clear that he advocates an intertextual approach for critical analysis.
Methodology

In recognising this critical importance of context, I have adopted Kellner’s (2009) threefold, or multi-perspective (Kellner, 1995), methodology provides for this thesis. John Thompson (1990), who uses the term tripartite for this type of approach, describes at much depth the research processes relevant to the study of objects of mass communication such as television programs. Unlike Kellner, Thompson’s disciplinary roots are in sociology, a field cognate with policing rather than television or media studies. Nevertheless, Thompson’s research interests are generally directed toward media and culture and, in advocating for a “methodology of interpretation” of symbolic forms (Thompson, 1990, p.272), he uses television as an example in explaining the research practices it involves.

Kellner has applied a multi-perspective methodology in several of his own studies, including his analysis of news coverage of the 2004 United States Presidential Election (Kellner, 2006), and the impact of the Iraq intervention and Hurricane Katrina media spectacles on the public’s support for the Bush Administration (Kellner, 2010). Other researchers have also adopted his approach in their critical analyses of media texts in order to expose the political, social and cultural contexts of their production and the audience response: Erik Ma (1999) in his analysis of television broadcasting in Hong Kong before and after the former British colony was returned to Chinese rule in 1997; Jay Scherer and Steven Jackson (2008) in their study of the “(mis)appropriation and commodification of Māori culture” (p. 508) by commercial sponsors of New Zealand’s All Blacks national rugby team; and, Benjamin Frymer (2009) on the reporting of the Columbine school shooting and the reconstruction of Goth culture as a sect for violence obsessed, alienated youth. Similarly, Evan Cooper (2003), in examining “campiness” (p. 519) in the treatment of gay sensibility and humour in the American sitcom Will and Grace, and Casey Brienza (2010), in her study
of Manga comics and the Japanese and American markets in which they are produced and consumed, refer to Thompson’s (1990) tripartite approach in their methodologies.

The variety of topics in this sample of studies demonstrates the breadth of scope that a multi-perspective approach offers for analysing objects of mass communication. More importantly, because this approach is focused on determining the ideological messages encoded in the object of communication, the circumstances of that encoding, and the ways in which these messages are decoded, it offers a powerful method for analysing and critiquing the ways in which television constructs policing, and for understanding the political and cultural implications in the representation of such an important institution. Of equal importance to my adoption of this approach, is the centrality of police to each of the elements in this study: the police share in the production of the reality TV series I analyse and have contributed to many drama series; they are the subject of these programs; and they are the viewers whose interpretations I examine. My application of this approach is therefore unique. I do more than contextualise the programs to their police-aligned production—although this is an important part of it—I also analyse the police-as-viewer response, a perspective that has not been previously explored in Australian television or policing research. In my thesis, police are creator, subject, and viewer, and the type of approach advocated by Kellner (1995, 2009) and Thompson (1990) provides the means to interpret what the television representation of police means.

Central to this type of interpretive, multi-perspective methodology are several individual elements, or moments of analysis, which Thompson (1990) refers to as “depth hermeneutics”. Hermeneutics can be described as the “art, theory, and philosophy of interpreting the meaning of an object” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 137). In the context of media studies research, hermeneutics seeks to develop an understanding of the symbolic forms of
mass media in their communication of ideology or “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1990, p. 292). Thompson’s model of depth hermeneutics provides a methodological framework which is directed towards the “interpretation (or re-interpretation) of meaningful phenomena” (p. 21), and by which separate and distinct types of analysis can contribute to the research as whole. In this way, different modes of inquiry open the research object to a deeper exploration and allow for consideration of the interrelations between its components and by which the sequence of representations connects the parts to the whole (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The framework that Thompson (1990) describes comprises three phases or moments of research: social-historical study; formal or discursive analysis; and interpretation or reinterpretation. He argues that these phases should be treated as distinct elements of a complex process of interpretation rather than single stages of a sequential method. These phases are well suited to decoding the ideology conveyed and received through symbolic forms that are communicated through television and other forms of mass communication.

The purpose of the first phase or moment of depth hermeneutics is to explore the social-historical conditions and contexts of the production, circulation and reception of the media object. To do so is to examine “the rules and conventions” (Thompson, 1990, p. 284) that determine the relationships between institutions involved in its production. This initial phase is premised on the understanding that symbolic forms do not simply emerge without any past or context. Rather, the circumstances under which they are created and consumed necessarily shape the process of production and the effect of reception.

In engaging in this first phase of analysis I recognise that the police institution in Australia is a complex entity. As an agent of the state, it shares much with police agencies in
other democracies, including its role as a source of interpellation, as I contended in the opening to this chapter. However, the rules and conventions under which it operates are shaped by the circumstances of the country’s colonial past and the social, cultural, and political conditions that have influenced civic life to the present. The influence of British rule through the dispossession and continuing repression of the country’s Indigenous people and the penal foundations of settlement, and through its social structures, transplanted from a stratified class system, are important considerations in any study of police in Australia. These factors contribute to the various ways people understand the symbols and myths of Australia’s national character, particularly in their attitudes to authority. The construction of national identity, forged through the twin tyrannies of distance and paramilitary policing, but undermined by the dissenting resolve of the displaced and the oppressed, has found expression throughout Australia’s factual and literary storytelling.

In *The Australian Legend*, Russel Ward (1958) argues that the convict past gave rise to a national disregard for authority and a romantic inclination to glorify those on the wrong side of the law. The legend constructs the archetypal Australian as a “fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen” (Ward, 1958, p. 2). Accordingly, Australian police, unlike their “benign and dignified” (Reiner, 2010, p. 50) counterparts in Britain, have not always held the respect of all sectors of the community simply because of their office, and the popular attitude to the institution itself seems to have oscillated between contempt and ridicule (Priestley, 2003; Rickard, 1998). These disapproving sentiments can be seen in early literary texts, such as Marcus Clarke’s *For the term of his natural life* (1874/1975), in which the convict colony is shown to be built on the cruelty and violence of its gaolers, and Rolf
Boldrewood’s *Robbery under arms* (1893/1985) in which the bushrangers are more endearing than the authorities who hunt them down and punish them.

Stephen Knight (1993, p. 120), describes this narrative, long-popular in Australia, as “zero-policing”, by which he means the story is told “approvingly” from the criminal’s point of view. Knight (1997) also claims that over-policing during the gold rush of the 1850s provoked such distrust of police among miners and other rural workers that police stories, while well-liked among metropolitan readers, “did not mesh exactly with the newly developing social and economic life of the goldfields” (p.116). The much-celebrated poem and bush ballad *Waltzing Matilda*, also cast the law in a negative light: the troopers’ pursuit of the jolly swagman is at the behest of the squatter from whom the man had stolen a jumbuck, or sheep. Although the swagman’s guilt is evident, his crime is petty, but the troopers administer the law in favour of the property-owning rich at the expense of the dispossessed, and with much malice. The more sinister debasement of policing in the form of deviance and venality is also prominent in works such as *Jonah* (Stone, 1911/1965) and *Power without glory* (Hardy, 1950/2008).

The reality of an anti-authoritarian attitude that is particular to Australia, fomented in its convict past, as advanced by Ward’s (1958) thesis, has been contested in more recent years (Hirst, 2014; Roberts, 2008). Nevertheless, it still has some hold over the collective imagination (Bongiorno & Roberts, 2008). The notion of an Australian attitude toward police was likely to develop a corresponding attitude among local officers about the profession and about those it serves. Significantly, the conditions and attitudes that have helped to shape ideas of a national identity, have created a distinct—and contradictory—discourse for Australian policing. On the one hand, street policing, a mode that connotes action, sits well with a certain idea of the masculine Australian legend. On the other hand, the same
projections of Australianness re-enact a suspicion and disregard for authority and a contrary tolerance, even a championing, of law breaking. The construction of Ned Kelly as an Australian folk hero or man- myth (Simmons, 2014), demonstrates this national tendency for celebrating “romanticised outlawry” (Huggan, 2002, p. 132), which, in the television version of the zero-policing story, is replicated in much of the Underbelly series (2008–2013). This site of tension is a manifestation of policing’s workplace culture, a feature of the profession that reinforces attitudes and behaviours associated with solidarity (Crank, 2004), unintentionally and counterproductively projecting a conflicted version of policing rather than one that is secure in the hegemony that it really commands.

Peter Waddington (2008) describes police culture as a mixture of informal prejudices, values and assumptions common to members of the profession that inform their working practices. It is, among other things, a force of unity for those within and a barrier against those who are not (Cockcroft, 2013; Crank, 2004; Loftus, 2009; Paoline, 2003; Reiner, 2010; Waddington, 2008). Police culture therefore acts as a force of influence on officers as they make judgements about their colleagues and about those who do policing on screen, whether in reality television programs or fictional series. The police workforce, and so too its culture, has long been dominated by men. Despite the increasing number of women pursuing a career in policing, they still account for only a third of sworn officers in Australia (Australia New Zealand Police Advisory Agency (ANZPAA), 2013). Australian police forces also remain as monocultural outliers: “bastions of Anglo-Saxon male privilege” (Sarre & Prenzler, 2018, p.10), they are unrepresentative of the communities they serve despite the many attempts to renew so as to “mirror the multicultural complexion of society” (Shepherd, 2014, p. 241). Cultural diversity, gender and ethnicity are therefore key sites of challenge to— and from—policing’s occupational culture. For this reason, my analysis of television series featuring
policing pays particular attention to the treatment of women and ethnicity, and my analysis of the police-affiliated audience response to these programs has a strong focus on how officers and policing students judge their on-screen colleagues.

Correspondingly, officers are judged by the public, many of whom have a limited understanding of policing, or an idea that is “half-formed” (Hurd, 1980), against which they assess the legitimacy of their police force and its representatives. Police legitimacy relates to the entitlement of the police “to call upon the public to comply with the law” (Murphy, 2009, p. 190). It is associated with the “rightful use of authority” (Mawby, 2008, p. 157), and is a critical influence on the public’s acceptance of the police exercising their lawful power over their fellow citizens. Without legitimacy, or the endorsement of the public, police authority is at best qualified, and in extreme cases of dictatorial regimes, or police states, a force of oppression upon its citizens. Police agencies work on maintaining their legitimacy by promoting their public image and gaining and maintaining the support of those over whom they exercise power. Police media work is a significant element of that strategy and institutionally controlled images of police work, such as those shown on police reality television programs are expressions of that legitimisation strategy. Because the mediated image of policing is the more familiar version for most of the public, police officers tend to be critical about the ways in which viewers construct their understanding of policing, an opinion that was widely shared by the interviewees participating in my research as well as those in other key studies (Huey, 2010; Maurantonio, 2012; Cummins, Foley & King, 2014). Police culture and legitimacy are established concepts in the discipline of policing studies, and their influence on television representations of police through cop shows is central to this thesis.
Social-historical analysis also needs to consider the institutions that influence society and “the rules, resources and regulations which constitute them” (Thompson, 1990, p. 282). Certainly, the institution of the police is a potent apparatus of social control and its power ensures it is unique among other agencies. It therefore has a strong and commanding effect over public behaviour and on that of its own members. Television, too, is a powerful institution that holds significant influence over consumers of its products (Fiske, 2011; Hartley, 2008) and, since its commencement in Australia in the 1950s, it has been an omnipresent form of mass communication, variously informing, educating and entertaining, a threefold commitment of the government funded broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) as prescribed in their charters (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 (Cth); Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991 (Cth)). Their commercial broadcasting counterparts may have less obligation on these objectives; nevertheless, their programming, too, informs, educates and entertains. These purposes are not mutually exclusive, as is evidenced in the research undertaken in this thesis; reality television programs designed to inform and educate need to entertain in order to attract viewers, and police drama is a source of information and education—sometimes contradictory—as well as entertainment.

In addition to these social historical settings, the medium through which the symbolic form is communicated, or the “technical media of inscription of transmission” (Thompson, 1990, p. 283), is integral to my analysis of police representations on television. When defined only by the physics of electro-magnetic waves, this element of television does not readily coalesce with the other aspects of social-historical analysis. However, technology does not exist in isolation from the social experience; rather, technical media are embedded in those contexts in which they “presuppose certain skills, rules and resources for encoding and
decoding messages” (Thompson, 1990, p. 283). The rules and conventions of television are shared within a culture and are used to create messages from which its members interpret meaning (Fiske, 2011). Many of these rules and conventions are shared with cinema as the language of the screen (Giannetti, 1996) through which mise-en-scène, cinematography, sound engineering and editing often communicate more that the dialogue. Much of what can be regarded as the idiom of television expression is at odds with real life, yet it is understood and accepted by producers and viewers of television content. Unnatural devices used in television, such as the nonlinear treatment of time and the inclusion of non-diegetic music for dramatic effect, are not part of our lived experience. These techniques are not only used and accepted as television practices; we share in the understanding of the meanings they convey. This technical understanding is also pertinent to the conditions of production and reception of cop shows.

The institutional involvement of law enforcement agencies in the production of reality television programs, such as RBT and The Force: Behind the Line, can be seen as having a regulatory or normative purpose. Similarly, police viewers of cop shows bring an insider’s perspective to their engagement with these programs. Understanding the ways in which television communicates images of police and policing helps in the interpretation of the ideological messages underpinning the symbolic forms produced and circulated through this medium. But it is not just the images transmitted through television that communicate meaning; as Marshall McLuhan’s (1964/2001, p.7) popular aphorism proclaims: the medium itself is the message. Because broadcast television is predominantly an appointment medium, in that programs are scheduled for viewing, content is broadcast at times that best suit targeted audiences. For this reason, scheduling itself carries meaning about the program and what it communicates, and to whom it speaks. Cop shows programmed during time bands
suited for children, for example, communicate policing in different ways to those in primetime that are watched predominantly by adults. The media of transmission therefore needs to be recognised for its contribution to the construction of meaning and included in the analysis of cop shows, and in their production and reception.

The second phase of analysis of the mass mediated symbolic form focuses on the object itself, the text that communicates the producer’s message to its audience. This phase of analysis requires a “formal or discursive approach” (Thompson, 1990, p. 284). While not inattentive to the relationships of social-historical fields to symbolic forms, as I have outlined above, this phase of analysis shifts the focus to the text and what it communicates, rather than its production and reception. Recognising that a text is not simply a display of signifiers, but a bearer of meanings (Fiske, 2011) and those meanings have an interpellative purpose, I apply a discursive analysis to selected cop shows to decode some of the meaning these texts might convey. My purpose here is to identify connoted ideas about police that are imparted through television images and, through a multi-perspective textual analysis, interpret how some of the features of these programs might communicate ideological aspects about police or carry “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1990, p. 292). Critical analysis can consider a range of television narrative elements to understand what social, cultural and political connotations can be inferred from them. It is also important to assess the genre and narrative structure of these programs. Identifying my selected programs as ‘television dramas’ and ‘reality TV’ texts assumes that they fulfil the generic conventions that producers perpetuate, and audiences expect of these types of programs (Mittell, 2004). Although the cop shows I have selected are drawn from two different genres, they all share in a focus on policing, making them equally suited to discursive analyses of the representation of police although aspects of their styles of production diverge. Indeed, the similarities and differences
in the ways these series depict police and policing are important to the construction of the police image and to the research underpinning this thesis.

The main objective of my narrative analysis of the selected programs is to examine “the patterns, characters and roles which are common to a set of narratives and which constitute a common underlying structure” (Thompson, 1990, p. 288). The study of narrative structure not only focuses on the story, it also considers the succession of events and how they advance the plot, as well as the characters and their relationships, and the ways in these elements contribute to what it is that the story is telling. It allows for drawing inferences about the presence—or absence—of characters and their narrative purpose. For example, as I identify in The Force: Behind the Line, the program is promoted as a glimpse into the daily work of the “brave men and women of the force”, but women officers are mostly absent throughout the first episode. Similarly, the arrival of a female officer at the fictional town of Mount Thomas hints at a challenge to the male dominated police station in the drama Blue Heelers. Although the new constable, Maggie Doyle, proves to be a competent officer, her first task is that of victim care, a role determined by her gender.

My research engages in activities of analysis throughout the domains of production, text, and reception, eliciting the interpretations of producers and audiences as well as constructing my own. In this way, I also engage in activities of re-interpretation. I analyse the interpretations of the producers of content, and they, too, draw—consciously and unconsciously—from long-established social-historical influences. As television producers, the police and television industry respondents interpret, or decode, ideas from these influences and encode them into televisual symbolic forms. In the same way, I interpret audiences’ interpretations of content as they receive and decode messages communicated through television transmission. Television industry producers of cop shows engage in this
interpretive and re-interpretive process in the creation of their programs. Police working in corporate communications or public affairs units do so from a policing perspective; professional content creators take direction from policing agencies, or at least are mindful of their expectations. Both of these producer groups, along with police as television viewers, take some inspiration from their own mental store of images of cop shows-past, which are “half-formed” (Hurd, 1981, p. 57) through the marginal contact which people, including television industry professionals, have with operational police. This phase of analysis provides insight into the coherence of the television image with the audience’s interpretations as well as the points of inconsistency and rupture. In this way, I examine how police-aligned viewers respond critically to television programs that depict their profession.

Methods

In applying Thompson’s (1990) depth hermeneutics, I have conducted a series of separate, but related, activities. These activities are analysed in Chapters 4 to 7, and, in Chapter 8, I synthesise these elements to determine the meaning of police and policing in their representation in Australian cop shows. The field work activity for my research into the production of cop shows, which is analysed in Chapter 4, consisted of a documentary analysis of NSW Police Force annual reports and a pair of complementary semi-structured interviews; one with a police officer assigned to the Film and Television Liaison Unit of the NSW Police Force, the other with a production manager from a commercial television company. The interview schedule and the prepared questions are included in Appendix 2. The officer participating in the first interview, a sergeant with experience in operational policing public relations, is responsible for coordinating all aspects of television program production featuring the NSW Police Force. The second interviewee is a television production manager whose company has worked with the NSW Police Force on the popular and long-running
police reality TV program, \textit{RBT}. Her experience as a television professional and external provider offers another perspective on reality TV’s construction of policing.

The interviews were focused or semi-structured, meaning that I sought to guide rather than direct the interview by asking questions that explored the research topic in a purposeful way, but still allowed the participants to discuss broader, related issues (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). As a qualitative research activity, the aim here is not the measurement of data obtained through set questions as in the case of a structured interview; rather, it delves into the participants’ perceptions and the ways in which they construct reality (Minichiello et al., 2008, p. 51). The order of the interview questions allowed the exploration first of the production of programs, then the programs themselves, and lastly the audience. In this way, questions relating to production sought to explore the work of the Film and Television Liaison Unit, the relationship between it and production companies they work with, the purpose of each party, and the points of difference. The text-related questions focused on the stories each party hoped to tell through cop shows, and their preferences for the types of officers or characters that appeared on screen and the styles of policing in which they were engaged. Finally, questions addressing the reception of policing programs explored the targeting of audiences and the purposes for doing so and investigated whether cop shows were created with any consideration of police as viewers.

The phase of research exploring cop show texts, which is the focus of Chapters 5 and 6, consisted of viewing and analysing cop shows in order to interpret what is denoted and connoted through these objects of communication and ideology. The programs selected for analysis within the reality television category are: \textit{Recruits} (2009–2010), \textit{The Force: Behind the Line} (2006–), and \textit{RBT} (2010–). Reality television encompasses a wide range of “popular factual programming” (Hill, 2005, p. 41) including: the competitive “gamedoc” or group
challenge programs (J. G. Butler, 2012, p. 136), such as Big Brother (2001–2008); talent contests, such as Australian Idol (2003–2009); and lifestyle and renovation programs, such as The Block (2003–). The police reality TV series considered in this thesis are aligned with the observational documentary type of program, a longstanding form of reality TV that has its genesis in the American series Cops (1989–).

The programs were selected for several reasons: audience reach, relationship to the NSW Police Force Film and Television Liaison Unit, familiarity to police viewers, and inclusion in a previous study. Recruits extended over two seasons and attracted a good share of viewers with the debut episode ranked in the top 20 programs for the week (OzTAM, 2009). As at 2018, the other two programs continue in production; The Force is in its 13th series and RBT in its 8th (“Online TV database: an open directory of television shows,” n.d.). The debut episode of The Force attracted over 2.3 million viewers making it the most watched premier for 2006 (“Force premieres on seven, proves a ratings winner,” 2006). It was the most watched documentary program for 2007 with an average audience of over 1.8 million (Screen Australia, 2016c). It has since remained in the top 10 Australian documentaries (Screen Australia, 2016c). RBT ranked in the top 10 for its first 2 years of broadcasting (Screen Australia, 2016c). The programs were also known to most of the respondents undertaking a survey I conducted in the initial stage of my research and from which I recruited interview participants for the audience analysis phase of the thesis. I discuss the survey later in this chapter in relation to Chapter 7: Audience.

Importantly, all three series were produced in partnership with the NSW Police Force. The Force was first developed by Channel 7 as a co-production with the Western Australian Police; the NSW Police Force became involved in the production of the program after the
second season. The three programs were also selected by Lee and McGovern (2013b) for their studies of police-media relationships and television co-production.

The police drama series selected for analysis are: *Blue Heelers* (1993–2006), *Wildside* (1997–1999) and *East West 101* (2007–2011). All three programs were shown nationally on free to air television in an era yet to experience the disruption of streaming services that now challenge traditional broadcasting entities. *Blue Heelers*, produced by Southern Star was broadcast by the Seven Network, *Wildside* created by Gannon Jenkins, appeared on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) television network, and Knapman Wylde Television’s *East West 101* on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). Channel Seven is a commercial network; the ABC and SBS are both public service broadcasters. Although the Seven Network and the ABC viewership is predominantly Anglo-Australian, SBS caters to an ethnically and culturally diverse audience (*Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991* (Cth)). However, the ABC’s Charter (*Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cth)) states that it broadcasts programs that contribute “to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community”. The Charter also refers to the high standards of its content, which can be interpreted as meaning transcending commercial priorities and popular tastes.

These drama series were selected because of their relevance and reach to television viewers, taking into consideration the relative recency of each program, as well as their impact, gauged by their longevity and popularity. Continuing for 510 episodes (Idato, 2006), *Blue Heelers* was Australia’s longest running, locally made television drama series (Blundell, 2006). It was also one of the most popular series, scoring the highest rating for an Australian series in 1998 and persisting in the top five throughout its 12 series (Screen Australia, 2016b, 2016d). It remains the most watched of all Australian cop shows, extending over the longest
continuous run, thus warranting its inclusion in this study. The more recent titles, \textit{Wildside} and \textit{East West 101}, continued over three series: \textit{Wildside} with 60 episodes and \textit{East West 101} 13 episodes. They also attracted large audiences. In 1999, \textit{Wildside} ranked in the top ten for drama series (Screen Australia, 2016b). The audience for the opening episode of \textit{East West 101} was twice that of SBS’s previous highest rating program (O’Hara, 2008). All three programs, as long running, popular series on different networks at the height of the broadcast television age, have communicated their respective representations of police over a lengthy period to large audiences across many viewer demographics, including age and station preference. In addition to their broad popularity, these programs had some resonance with police respondents in this project, as shown in the earlier survey data and interviews conducted with police participants. Most of the survey participants were familiar with the three series even if they did not watch them regularly. \textit{Blue Heelers} was recognised by all of the respondents and nominated as the most watched of all cop shows. \textit{Wildside} and \textit{East West 101}, although familiar to most participants, were not watched as regularly as \textit{Blue Heelers}.

The selected programs also situate police in different locales, with contrasting social, cultural and political characteristics. \textit{Blue Heelers}, is a hybrid text that has the characteristics of both cop show and soap opera drama. It depicts country town policing as a legitimated community service. In \textit{Wildside} and \textit{East West 101} the police are in conflict with sections of their urban communities: inner city residents and street kids in the former, and an ethnically diverse population, mainly Middle Eastern, in the latter. The internal dynamics of the police units also vary, presenting different depictions of police culture. These characteristics are examined in this thesis in order to develop a critical understanding of what fictional Australian cop shows communicate about police.
Having selected these six series, I have focused my analysis on the first episode of each program. This approach follows that of Jonathan Bignell (2009) who studied the aesthetics of four police series in order to demonstrate the capability and intent of state institutions to deal with disruption to public and social order. Bignell’s focus on the ideological messages of these programs aligns with and is instructive for my study. Of particular relevance to my thesis is Bignell’s selection of pilot or first episodes for his analysis. Opening episodes introduce key features of a series: for the reality television programs, the template is set for subsequent episodes; for the drama programs, the main characters and settings are introduced, and the series’ narratives are launched. These introductory cop show episodes also establish the ways in which the idea of police is constructed throughout the series. Certainly, these structural, narrative and ideological elements may evolve over time, but to study this type of series development for six programs is necessarily beyond the scope of this thesis: it would result in episode selection dilemmas and unreasonably long text chapters. Instead, I focus on the same point in the life of each series: their beginnings.

As well as investigating the relationship between police and the television industry and the depiction of Australian police on television, the purpose of my thesis extends to understanding the ways in which such images are received by those within the profession. For this reception element of my research, I engaged with police audiences, first through an initial survey and then a series of interviews. The survey participants were recruited via email request sent to two NSWPF Local Area Commanders, the president of the Retired Police Association of NSW, and the course coordinator, at Charles Sturt University’s School of Policing Studies. A total of 121 (36 sworn officers, 45 retirees and 34 students) opened the survey and responded to some or all of the questions. The survey was designed to serve three
purposes, the first of which was to gather initial data about viewing preferences and attitudes to cop shows in general. For this purpose, participants were asked to identify Australian cop shows they were familiar with and those they enjoyed watching and what they liked about them. I had anticipated that the survey data would yield meaningful insight into the ways in which police responded to television representations of their profession and its practice. The lack of responses to the open questions in the survey meant that it did not serve this purpose. I expected program familiarity and viewing preference data would also provide a guide for further and more refined exploration in subsequent research activities. This expectation was better met. The second purpose of the survey was to determine which programs were most familiar and appealing to the participants, thus providing guidance for the selection of programs for the textual analysis component of the thesis. Although I was guided by other factors in selecting the programs for analysis, the survey data, despite being limited, did not conflict with my selections. The third purpose of the survey, focused beyond the data it may have yielded, was to recruit participants to engage in subsequent audience related activities aimed at exploring some of the matters covered in the survey at greater depth, and, with more open questions, to encourage the participants to articulate their own ideas about police representations. These subsequent activities were initially planned as focus groups, but due to constraints imposed by distance, time, and participant availability, a series of interviews was conducted instead.

The second component of my reception research consisted of a series of interviews with 25 participants, some of whom had responded to the survey, while others volunteered on the recommendation of participating colleagues. These interviews were independent of those relating to the production of cop shows analysed in Chapter 4, and the Liaison Officer who participated in that research activity was not interviewed for this component of the research.
The interviewees in this series included serving and retired police officers, and policing students undertaking the recruit training program at the New South Wales Police Academy in Goulburn. One of the serving officers disclosed part way through the interview that he had been involved in the filming of a reality television episode, and one of the retired officers, now a policing and criminal justice lecturer, also revealed mid-interview that he had worked as a consultant on several police television drama series. I did not explore these production related circumstances, treating both interviewees as participants in the audience study only.

The 25 audience participants ranged in age from their early 20s to the late 70s. Five were women and three identified as having non-Anglo Australian heritage. Although small, this group reflects the proportion of women in policing in Australia (ANZPAA, 2013), and the linguistic diversity of officers in the NSW Police Force (NSW Police Force, 2016a), a comparable, if not an exact indicator of cultural heritage. Seventeen interviews were conducted face to face and eight were conducted via telephone. All interviews with policing students and the majority of interviews with serving officers were conducted face to face. In the case of the policing students, all were in residence at the Academy, and the serving officers who participated in face to face interviews were either stationed at the Academy or visiting for work or training purposes. Most of the retired officers were recruited through the survey and, because they were widely distributed across NSW, telephone interviews were the most convenient option for them.

The interviews I conducted with this viewer group were, like those in Chapter 4, semi-structured. They consisted of a set of guiding questions that focused the discussion on aspects central to the research topic, while also providing the opportunity for participants to raise and comment on aspects of cop shows they were interested in or concerned by. For the reception study interviews I initially used four guiding questions. This is significantly fewer
than those asked of the participants in Chapter 4, whose expertise warranted deeper examination. The interview schedule and guiding question are included in Appendix 2. These questions were designed to explore the participants' attitudes to cop shows, whether they considered police as portrayed favourably, and whether there were types of police officer or characters from cop shows, that they identified with or appealed more to them than others. Responses to these questions were subject to further probing and, as the interview series progressed, additional questions informed by the comments of previous interviewees were included. Other additional questions assisted in maintaining conversations and clarifying questions and answers. I discuss the participant responses at length in Chapter 7, in which I draw on Stuart Hall’s (1980) concept of encoding and decoding, focusing on the less commonly considered professional position that insiders apply to their viewing.

The third phase of analysis in this multi-perspective study is one of interpretation and reinterpretation. In Chapter 8, I synthesise the views of my research participants with my critical readings of the selected cop shows to determine what Australian cop shows communicate about policing, authority and national identity, and the ways in which the idea of police might be constructed from such programs. I also discuss the implications for my research, acknowledge the limitations of this thesis, and outline the potential for further study on the representation of policing on Australian television and through other media forms.

In this chapter I have provided the context and the nature of my thesis. I examined the police as an agent of state power and as institution in Australian society. I outlined the threefold methodological approach I adopted and the methods I applied to my research. In the following chapter I consider the production of cop shows through a combination of documentary analysis and interviews with police and television industry professionals.
Chapter 4: Production

This chapter examines the production of cop shows and the part played by the police organisation in that process. It also investigates the relationship between the police and the television industry and whether these institutions share in an ideological purpose or whether their “productive” association, as Lee and McGovern (2013a, p. 110) describe it, is no more than one of mutual convenience, in which each party is focused on its own objectives. Moreover, it looks at the image of the police that this relationship produces. In doing so, it addresses the first aspect, or object domain, in the tripartite (Thompson 1990), or threefold (Kellner, 2009) approach to media studies, through a combination of social-historical analysis and ethnographic research.

Social-historical analysis is intended to illustrate the characteristics of the institutions involved in the production of mass media objects and the relationships between them. In this chapter, I trace the history of police and media relations, and the manifestation of that association in one police agency, the NSW Police Force, with a focus on its partnership with the television industry in the production of reality TV programs. In doing so, I draw upon relevant texts, including NSW Police Force corporate records, and the experiences and knowledge of two individuals involved in creating television programs featuring police officers.

The Police and the Media: Logics and Asymmetries

Understanding how the police enforce the law and maintain the institution’s legitimacy requires an appreciation of the sources and expressions of police power, and the knowledge that police power is both instrumental and symbolic. The public may be able to identify uniformed officers and have some conception of what they do, but much of the symbolic messaging about the police is communicated through the media, most notably
television (Mawby, 2002). The relationship between the police and the media has allowed these institutions to construct the image of the police for public consumption. An examination of the relationship between the police and the media provides the possibility for understanding the symbolic power of the police and how it, and the instrumental power it stands in for, is communicated to those it polices.

The relationship between the police and the media is one of co-dependence, but it is not devoid of tension. Whether part of a strategy for dealing with public scrutiny over legitimacy, bias and power, demonstrating good works to an approving and deserving society, or exercising control over various populations deemed as dangerous, police have generally had to rely on means beyond their own sphere of practice to communicate their messages. The media has long provided this service through news reporting and, in more recent years, television programs including those characterised here as cop shows. However, as the history of the relationship between the police and the media demonstrates, describing their association as one premised on mutual benefit does not reflect its complexity.

The police hold the privileged position of “primary providers and definers of crime news” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 13). They not only deal with crime; they control the media’s access to the details of these events. That privilege may have diminished, or at least recast, in the past decade in which all citizens have the potential for distributing newsworthy stories and images through a range of social media channels. Nevertheless, the substance of most crime stories is still subject to police gate-keeping. The police, too, need the media to communicate with the public. In the context of this research, the relationship between the police and the media is significant because it informs the representation of the former by the latter. The association can be seen as an enterprise of social control. Both the police and the media are political bodies: they are, as Louis Althusser (1971) labels them, apparatuses of the
state and their interests lie in maintaining the state’s and their own hegemony. In this Althusserian model, the police, as a government agency and particularly as one whose members have coercive powers, is a repressive state apparatus; the media, the fourth estate, an ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1971).

Steve Chibnall (1977) describes the problematic nature of the police-media relationship in his account of reporting on crime in twentieth century Britain, as do Ian Freckelton (1988), Lee and McGovern (2013a, 2013b), Stephen Jiggins (2007), Peter Putnis (1996), and Paul Wilson (1992) in the Australian context. Whether reporting on crime or police failings, the media’s news gathering methods and modes of storytelling have not always been seen by police agencies as supportive of their mission and of the institution itself. Police agencies in Britain and Australia have long been troubled by what they regard as bad press and the subsequent damage they perceive it does to their legitimacy in the eyes of their respective citizenry (Lee & McGovern, 2013a; Leishman & Mason, 2003). It was predominantly the concerns around these issues that gave rise to the establishment of the first police public relations units. In Britain, the Scotland Yard Press Bureau was formed in 1919 to provide an official means for the release of information to the print media, which had previously been sourced through unauthorised leaks from friendly or venal police contacts (Mawby, 2002, p. 12). Similar issues were arising at the same time in Australia but were not acted on until several decades later; the NSW Police Public Relations Branch, for example, was not formally established until the early 1960s (NSW Police Department, 1965).

While police agencies were, and continue to be, motivated by a desire for control over the flow of information, and therefore over the relationship between it and the media, the benefits of a more cooperative partnership flow both ways. Put simply, the media benefit from access to the source of crime information, albeit in a way that cannot be wholly
controlled, and the police have a conduit for engaging with the community when they want to communicate a message and when they need the public’s assistance in solving and preventing crime. A public relations capability does make it possible for the police to effectively manage its relationship with the media in a mutually beneficial association that is nevertheless “asymmetric in favour of the police” (Mawby, 2010, p. 1062). For this reason, many police agencies have moved to a professionalised approach by recruiting experienced journalists to lead and work in corporate communications units which had previously been staffed by police officers (Lee & McGovern, 2013a; Leishman & Mason, 2003; Lovell, 2003; Mawby, 2002).

Lee and McGovern (2013a), in their study of the police-media relationship, address the activities undertaken by public affairs units in Australian police agencies. They categorise the “logics”, or strategies, of these functional business units into three interrelated areas: the management of public risks and “responsibilization”, or the encouragement of responsible behaviours; the promotion of positive police stories, or “image work”; and establishing and maintaining confidence or trust in policing, and in the legitimacy of police organisations (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 40). Each of these objectives are at play in the media work that police agencies engage in through their public affairs units. Although these public relations activities may invite cynicism, Lee and McGovern contend that police agencies see this as an investment in community confidence that has a return on investment in the form of community support for the police which is likely to encourage citizens to report crime. Just as the relationship between police and media can be seen by the latter as “productive” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 110) rather than a site of inequality of power, police media work can also be regarded as productive for the police rather than “spin”, a pejorative term for much that constitutes public relations work.
Police sponsored television programs, such as *Recruits*, *RBT* and *The Force: Behind the Line*, are relatively recent additions to the Australian television industry. However, the police media apparatus has a long history of association with television broadcasters for promotional purposes, particularly with the fictional form of the cop show. The London Metropolitan Police recognised the benefits of “cooperating in the construction of fictional representations of police work” (Leishman & Mason, 2003, p. 36) from the 1950s. This cooperation was most notably on show in the making of *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955–1976) (Clarke, 1983; Mawby, 2002). A British television institution, emerging as the small screen spin-off of the popular 1950 film *The Blue Lamp* (Cave, 2014), it received the same “unparalleled … police co-operation, advice and facilities” (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 16) as the original film. Similarly, in the United States the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) famously supplied *Dragnet* (1951–1959) with crime stories and the policing resources needed to tell them (Lee & McGovern, 2013a; Reiner, 2010). Commencing in 1949 as a radio series, each episode claimed to be the “documented drama of an actual crime, investigated and solved by the men who unrelentingly stand watch on the security of your home, your family and your life” (Webb, 1949). Following the program’s transition to television two years later, writer, producer, director and leading actor, Jack Webb continued to have access to LAPD files, and its officers were encouraged to write about their experiences (Sabin, 2015a) in order to tell “the story of your police force in action” (Webb, 1949).

In Australia, the Victoria Police established a long-lasting partnership with Crawford Productions “as an aid to recruiting and better police/public relations” (Crawford Productions, n.d.). Like the association between the LAPD and *Dragnet*, the Victoria Police and Crawford Productions began working together to produce radio serials in the late 1940s, a partnership that extended into the television era with *Homicide* from 1964 (Brandum &
Nette, 2016). In exchange for the authenticity generated by script-writing assistance and free use of uniformed police officers to act in non-speaking roles, Crawford’s programs provided images of policing for its sponsoring force that did much for police public relations in Victoria, where it was produced, and throughout the rest of the country (Brandum & Nette, 2016).

In more recent times, the reality television series has become the favoured genre for law enforcement agencies wanting to communicate police messages and images. Programs of this type give police agencies greater control of the product. Over time, the police have evolved from being program advisers and wardrobe and prop assistants to co-producers. Lee and McGovern’s (Lee & McGovern, 2012, 2013a, 2013b) work on police-media relations is instructive on the topic of the co-produced cop show. They identify in police reality television co-production the same strategies of police-media relations that are at play in other aspects of this association. Police reality television is therefore a critical tool of public relations that presents the police in highly favourable ways, inculcating faith in the institution. In updating the dialectical relationship between the police and the media from the print dominated, crime news focused era that Chibnall (1977) reported on, to the age of television and Internet communications, Lee and McGovern (2013a) contend that police organisations still use the media to promote policing, and the media and the public still want to produce and consume stories about policing. The difference is that the medium has become the moving image (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 62). Lee and McGovern frame this premise around Thomas Mathiesen’s (1997) revision of Michel Foucault’s (1977) panopticon of social control. In Mathiesen’s reassessment, Foucault’s panopticon, whereby the few watch the many, is reciprocated by the synopticon, through which the many watch the few. More correctly perhaps, the reality television model is one in which the many are watching the few
(the police), as they, the few, in turn, are watching the many. In this way, the viewing public live vicariously as police through television while also allowing themselves to be policed. The public can also contribute to the production of policing images, which can either assist in law enforcement or challenge police actions. Equipped with mobile phones, dashcams, and security cameras, “citizen informers”, in a “panoptic-synoptic fusion” (McCahill, 2012, p. 246), can record suspicious behaviour or instances of law breaking by other members of the public and provide the footage as evidence or intelligence to the police. Conversely, the same tools can be used for “cop watching” (Huey, Walby, & Doyle, 2006), whereby citizens record police officers engaging in unlawful or inappropriate behaviour and sell the images to media outlets or share them through their own social media channels. This constitutes a form of targeted “citizen journalism” whereby technology is employed to challenge “the ‘official’ version of events” (Greer & McLaughlin, 2010) that may be projected by the mainstream or state media.

Unlike the other emerging forms of simulated policing, such as the audio-visual content shared directly with the public through a range of online platforms that Lee and McGovern (2013a) refer to as synoptic law enforcement strategies, reality television production and its communication still requires engagement with a media partner. For this reason, police public affairs apparatuses have increasingly dedicated more funding and personnel to media industry liaison (NSW Police Force, 2016).

The NSW Police Force and Television: A Documentary Analysis

The formal record of the NSW Police Force over the past 60 years offers useful insights into the evolution of the partnership between the police and the television industry in Australia’s largest jurisdiction. The annual report for 1957 (NSW Police Department, 1958), the year after television broadcasts commenced in Australia, notes the use of this new
technology to assist in solving crimes: “During the progress of the Royal Easter Show in Sydney, Police took advantage of the opportunity to use television to exhibit photographs of a man wanted for murder” (p. 7). How this initiative was facilitated and what resulted from it is unclear. At the time, there was no formal or specialised public relations unit within the NSW Police Department. A Sergeant W. Tyrell was appointed to a public relations role on a trial basis in 1956, and on proving his “aptitude for the task and with widening experience” he was confirmed in the position of Public Relations Officer the following year (NSW Police Department, 1958, p.3). Tyrell was reported as being of “increasing value in handling press releases and other forms of publicity on behalf of the Department, and dealing with the continuous requests received for Police assistance or participation in various publicity ventures” (p. 3). By 1964, “the Branch” was a functioning unit; the sergeant in charge and a constable were “assisted by a senior female Public Service officer” (NSW Police Department, 1965, p. 28). Despite its “comparative recent origin” the Commissioner, Norman Allan, commended the Branch noting that it “performed good work in the promotion of Police Public Relations and has assisted materially in the investigation of serious crimes … through the media of Press, Radio and Television” (NSW Police Department, 1965, p. 28).

Annual reports throughout Allan’s tenure show he took a keen interest in police public relations, repeatedly extending his thanks in annual reports to the “Press, Radio and Television … who so readily cooperated with me and my department” (NSW Police Department, 1967a, p. 34; 1967b, p. 34). This sentiment implies a collaborative arrangement with the media, but from a position half a century removed, his claims of police-media cooperation are disingenuous. Allan was not only “increasingly unable to cope with the media” (Whitton, 1993), he was responsible for a culture of corruption that, among other more egregious activities, included the dishonest reporting of crime rates (Royal Commission
into the New South Wales Police Service & Wood, 1997). Despite his real intentions, Allan, at least formally, promoted the appearance that the NSW Police Department under his command was an open and accountable organisation. Early in his near-decade term as commissioner, he wrote of “much to be done in the promotion and development of Police Public Relations” (NSW Police Department, 1965, p. 28). In the following year, in “appreciating the importance of the work of the Branch” he approved an unspecified increase in the staff (NSW Police Department, 1967a, p. 22).

Of 1967, Allan (NSW Police Department, 1969, p. 18) reported that “new fields of activity” were being examined by the continually expanding unit, and “the greatest possible use is made of all mass news media, the Principals of which I must say have shown their desire to fully co-operate”. These new fields of activity were “designed to enable the public at large to have a knowledge of the manner in which its Police Force functions” (NSW Police Department, 1969, p. 18) and were focused on the type of image work that Lee and McGovern (2013a) describe as the key strategies underpinning police and media relationships. Despite his own conduct, Allan saw the value in maintaining a good relationship with the public through the media, at least in those areas that would promote the police and not risk exposure of corrupt practices:

It requires no statement from me to stress the need to have a public relations policy in the Police Force which is designed to enable the public at large to have a knowledge of the manner in which its Police Force functions. The Public Relations Branch has created an impact in the manner in which it has presented all phases of Police activities and I am sure that the Police Force of this State is the better for what has taken place. (NSW Police Department, 1969, p. 18)

By 1971, the Public Relations Branch had expanded its assistance to the television industry to include services for producers of programs other than news broadcast (NSW
Police Department, 1972). As well as maintaining “its day-to-day contact with the news media”, the branch, in a clear acknowledgment of the power of the police image, also cooperated with “authors, feature writers and film producers in the production and presentation to the public of very good factual features on the role of the police force in a modern society” (NSW Police Department, 1972, p. 22). The report does not provide titles for these factual productions, or where and to whom they were shown.

The following year, Allan’s successor, Fred Hanson, reported on “the growing importance and number of staff of the Public Relations Branch” and an expansion of the range of activities it engaged in (NSW Police Department, 1973, p. 23). What was included in the scope of this expansion was not stated. However, Hanson (NSW Police Department, 1973), like Allan before him, expressed his thanks to the media in communicating the preferred message of the organisation:

I am indeed appreciative of the help received during the year from the news media, press, radio, and television, whose executives and staff have co-operated willingly in publicizing items of public interest. (p. 27)

While the good factual programs were left unnamed in the 1971 annual report, the 1978 issue referred to a specific title, Police File, through which, it claimed, the “department entered a new field of public relations” (NSW Police Department, 1979, p. 41). The program is described as a popular segment of the Friday edition of the Channel 10 evening news, the format consisting of a Public Relations Branch officer speaking with a reporter about “unsolved crimes, incidents and wanted criminals”, followed by an invitation to viewers “to ring a Police telephone number if they feel that they can assist” (p.41). Police File continued for at least another 4 years, broadcasting its 200th program in December 1981 (NSW Police Department, 1982, p. 47). The initial claim that “the reaction to the programme has been
particularly pleasing and from the response of the viewing public many offenders have been arrested and convicted” (NSW Police Department, 1979, p. 41) was not reiterated in other annual reports and appears to be the only mention of this type of “crime-stopper” program.

In 1984 the Police Department established the Film and Television Unit (NSW Police Department, 1985). The 1984–85 annual report (NSW Police Department, 1985) describes the unit’s role as one of liaising with organisations involved in “film making, television series, documentaries, commercials and stage plays” (NSW Police Department, 1985, p. 38). The staff provided advice on police procedures and co-ordinated the loan of uniforms and other equipment, “such as Police car door stickers, lights and sirens” (NSW Police Department, 1985, p. 38). During that reporting period, the Unit received “some 300 requests” for assistance (NSW Police Department, 1985, p. 38), from unnamed sources. Two years later, in 1986–87, the Film and Television Unit had expanded from its advisory and assistance capacity to cover “all facets of Police involvement in films, television series, commercials, still shots, drama groups, etc. The basic aim is to ensure authenticity, correct procedure and protocol by all actors portraying Police in policing situations” (NSW Police Department, 1987, p. 87). In the same reporting year, the Film and Television Unit received over 2,000 enquiries, also from unnamed sources. In response, their services were provided free of charge (NSW Police Department, 1987, p. 87). By this time, “the Unit” was also conducting lectures in conjunction with the Australian Broadcasting Commission “to instruct employees regarding the correct procedures to follow when filming in the street, or when seeking assistance from the Police Department” (NSW Police Department, 1987, p. 87). The staff also provided advice to the Los Angeles Police Department and the London Metropolitan Police “in regard to establishing film and television units” (NSW Police Department, 1987, p. 87).
In the 1990s, following significant changes under the leadership of Commissioner John Avery, the administrative arm of the organisation, the NSW Police Department, and the operational arm, the Police Force, merged to form the NSW Police Service (NSW Police Service, 1990). For Avery, this organisational restructuring was a key element of the major reform of policing in New South Wales that he had long-championed (Avery, 1981). At the centre of his vision for policing in a modern democratic state, expressed in the title of his book, *Police: Force or Service?* (Avery, 1981), was the relationship between the police and the community which he believed relied on a strong and open partnership with the media. The early 1990s television campaign for crime prevention featuring the song “He Ain’t Heavy”, exemplified Avery’s aspiration: as a product of the police-media partnership it “perhaps did as much for the cause of crime prevention as it did for the community perception of the Police Service” (NSW Police Service, 1991, p.18). At the same time, and for the same purpose, the organisation was highly supportive of fictional television productions, which it regarded as a viable way to “promote understanding of the Service and community education”. The 1991–1992 Annual Report recorded that the organisation had “enhanced its liaison with scriptwriters of popular TV dramas including *A Country Practice*, *Police Rescue* and *GP*” (NSW Police Service, 1992, p. 68). *Home and Away* was added to the list the following year (NSW Police Service, 1993, p. 61).

By 2004–2005, the increasing demand for police assistance in film and television was regarded as a burden on the organisation’s resources and on the tax payer (NSW Police, 2005, p. 32). As a result, a cost recovery model was introduced, earning the organisation $46,317 for film and television liaison services in its first year (NSW Police, 2005, p. 32). Earnings in subsequent years do not appear to have warranted reporting, but the new policy did not lead to a reduction in demand for the services offered by the unit. The 2007–2008
report (NSW Police Force, 2008) claimed the Public Affairs Branch was working with more than 50 production companies, film makers and agencies either wanting to use the organisation’s image, staff or equipment, or to benefit from the unit’s advice. The 2008–2009 report (NSW Police Force, 2009) recorded an extensive list of programs that provided a way of promoting the organisation’s “messages and services” and highlighting “the good work of our officers” to a public whose “interest in policing has never been greater” (p. 25). As evidence of its partnership with the commercial television industry, the report cited co-production series with each of the commercial networks: Nine Network’s Missing Persons Unit, Channel Seven’s The Force, and The Recruits on Channel 10. The report stated that the unit:

also worked with a large number of production companies, film makers and authors looking to feature the NSW Police Force image or staff in their productions, or who were seeking expert advice on policing procedure. The productions included high profile shows such as Crash Investigation Unit, Recruits, Beyond the Darklands, Gangs of Oz. (NSW Police Force, 2009, p. 25)

It is evident from these sources that the NSW Police Force has long held a keen awareness of the value of television as a tool for influencing public behaviour and attitudes to the organisation. More recently, fictional programs have ceased to be mentioned as recipients of the Unit’s advice or assistance. The new form of reality television featuring police work has evidently taken over as the preferred form for the police/television partnership. The costs of making programs of this type compared to television drama are significantly lower; they do not require script writers, actors, large crews and special effects. As a result, this genre of television is a lucrative business for production houses (Lee & McGovern, 2013a). For their part, the police have creative control over the entire process, from the commissioning of
programs on areas of practice to which they want to direct viewer attention, such as traffic or recruitment, to the right of veto on the final product (Lee & McGovern, 2012, 2013a).

A conflict with ABC over the program *Wildside* shows that the issue of control is critical to the police and that it is not as easily maintained in the case of fictional series. In 1997 the NSW Police Force withdrew its consultancy services to the series because it considered the “negative” representations in the program were not in keeping with the organisation’s “preferred image” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 144). In more recent years, negative images of policing have provided an increasingly rich vein for fictional cop shows such as the American series *The Shield* (2002–2008), and the British programs *Life on Mars* (2006–2007) and *Line of Duty* (2012–). When questionable policing practices are associated with an identifiable sponsoring police service, as in the case of *Wildside* and the NSW Police Force, it is not surprising that the police organisation, as a “control agency” (Chibnall, 1977, p. 173), seeks to manage the risk to its own reputation. Such problems do not arise when the police agency has creative control and the power of veto. In concentrating its services for film and television on reality TV cop shows such as those listed in the 2008–2009 Annual Report, the NSW Police Force appears to have asserted greater control over its image.

It is evident from the annual report series analysed above that the association between the NSW Police Force and the television industry has become an increasingly mutually productive partnership: the growth in police reality television programming promotes police messages without significant cost and delivers commercial gains for its television partners. However, despite the benefits to the television industry, and although police priorities and expectations have changed over time, the relationship between the two institutions continues to be asymmetrical in favour of the police (Mawby, 2010, p. 1062). To complement the social-historical analysis drawn from these documentary sources, and to explore the police
and television partnership further, in the following section I report on and interpret a set of interviews I conducted with two people involved in the production of police reality programs: a police officer and a television producer.

**Productive Opinions: Two Interviews**

The interviewees were recruited in a two-step process. Initially a request to interview a member of the Film and Television Liaison Unit within the NSW Police Force Public Affairs Branch (PAB) was made through the organisation’s Research Coordination Unit. This request was approved and, following an introductory telephone discussion, an officer from the Unit agreed to participate in an interview. A male sergeant with more than 25 years of general policing experience, the officer, hereafter referred to as the Liaison Officer, has served in his current position with PAB for over 5 years. This interview was conducted at the Liaison Officer’s work location at the NSW Police Force Executive Offices in Sydney in May 2017. Subsequent to that interview, the Liaison Officer’s Film and Television Liaison colleague introduced me via email to a producer (the Television Producer) working for a television production company, a long-time industry partner with the NSW Police Force and makers of *RBT*, a program documenting random breath testing operations. Following initial email discussion, the Television Producer, a woman with more than 30 years’ experience in the television industry as a production manager, presenter, journalist and author, agreed to an interview. This interview was conducted at her workplace in suburban Sydney in June 2017.

The interviews commenced with an explanation of the research, with particular reference to the tripartite methodology and, within it, the production phase, which was presented to the participants as being the most directly related to their involvement. The interviewees were provided with project and ethics approval documentation and their
informed consent was obtained verbally. The interviews, including the acknowledgements of consent, were recorded using a digital audio recording device.

The interviews explored issues relating to production, text and reception, with questions on the production of cop shows and the relationship between the police and television industry in that process grouped together and explored first. This area of inquiry was followed by questions focusing on the texts resulting from that partnership and, in a third grouping, attention was directed toward the participants’ understandings of audiences including the police viewer. The prepared questions were open rather than closed, thus providing prompts for discussion. As such, the responses ranged across other topics as well as, or instead of, the issue being explored by any of the questions posed. The responses often provided the opportunity for probing and for clarifying questions for the interviewees and answers for the interviewer. The questions addressed to each of the participants were not identical. Instead, they were constructed so as to explore the same concepts, but with slight variations to wording to account for the interviewees’ respective associations in the production partnership.

The questions in the production section of the interviews focused on what each party understood as the purpose of their employer organisation and that of their counterpart in engaging in the creation of relevant programs. This is an important point of distinction between the police as a public-sector agency collaborating with a private company whose purpose is creative production and whose sustainability depends on audience appeal. This section also included questions about the relationship between the two organisations, including the interviewees’ perceptions of any conflicts that arise when working together. The component of the interviews exploring attitudes to the programs created by this process included questions about the kinds of stories told and the people depicted. The questions
relating to audiences sought to explore the interviewees’ understanding of cop show audiences and what those viewers might experience by watching such programs.

For my analysis of the interviews, I adopted a thematic approach against which the answers and other statements provided by the interviewees were considered. In some instances, this reflection was applied discretely, typically when issues that were raised by either of the participants were not given consideration by the other. For the most part, however, complementary or counter perspectives were identifiable and analysed accordingly. This approach to analysing the interviews better incorporates all responses relevant to the themes, and the overall interaction, regardless of the context in which they were offered, and therefore provides a more fluid narrative. I categorised the themes under which the responses were considered as: purpose, incorporating the interviewee’s understanding of why their organisations partner in television production; process, or how they go about making television content; cooperation and conflict, or how they work together; texts, what is produced and with what message; and, audience and reception, or how they perceive the message might be received by those watching.

The absence of discussion about drama series from the production component of the research reflects the current status of that genre for the NSW Police Force. The NSW Police Force Media Policy does not specifically exclude support for drama programs in its description of services provided by Film and Television Liaison Unit. It names the reality television series The Force: Behind the Line and RBT “as examples of the type of activity managed by the unit” (NSW Police Force, 2016b, p. 9). However, it is more equivocal about its support for film and television production more generally and describes these services in terms that are more indicative of drama programs:
The Unit arranges specific technical advice for scriptwriters, authors and production companies. The Unit also assists with inquiries regarding access to personnel, facilities, uniforms, body worn video and equipment by the film and television industry for research or production purposes. This assistance is subject to cost recovery where appropriate. Any requests received by this Unit are subject to review in consultation with the relevant command and must comply with and/or promote key corporate objectives. (NSW Police Force, 2016b, p. 9)

The Liaison Officer described police assistance to drama programs as “very limited”. The Unit regularly provides advice in response to straightforward requests for information about police practices and procedures: “occasionally they might ring up to ask us something about uniforms or I’ve had phone calls to do with police funerals, for example, asking whether they wear appointments [firearm and handcuffs], [questions such as] do they do this do they do that?” Answers to this type of question from television producers do not draw on his knowledge of operationally sensitive information, nor are they a drain on police resources. Requests for more active assistance to producers of fiction programs, however, were generally denied:

We get phone calls asking to use police cars or uniforms. We don’t do that anymore. We used to, we stopped that a number of years ago, so it does sort of breach our policies about using our logos, insignia and all that. So, yeah, all we do there is recommend them to look up the Internet and find suitable hire places that have generic type uniforms or highway cars. (Liaison Officer)

The organisation’s sensitivities to how it is represented on television are not limited to the use of its logos, insignia and other signs of its identity and authority. One of the reasons for NSW Police Force not supporting police drama “anymore”, or at least a greater reluctance to do so, can be attributed to the issues it encountered with the Wildside series, which were discussed previously.
The Liaison Officer referred to the policy condition by which any request “must comply with and/or promote key corporate objectives” (NSW Police Force, 2016b, p. 9). In the context of its participation in film and television production, these objectives are articulated in the *NSW Police Force Endorsement Policy* as intending to:

- reduce the fear of crime by reassuring the public of the ability of police to prevent and solve crime and apprehend criminals
- increase community confidence in police and thus the reporting of crime
- provide a deterrent to crime by informing potential criminals of the consequences of crime (2015, p. 10).

These objectives articulate the strategies of police media engagement as identified by Lee and McGovern (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, pp. 39–43). Firstly, they refer to the management of risk and the “responsibleization” of the public by showing the consequences of criminal or otherwise dangerous behaviour as a means to deter it. Secondly, the organisation’s public relations, or image management, work is evident in the reassurances it offers over its ability to reduce crime and the fear of crime within the community. This category of media work seeks to promote the agency’s customer service and points to the “increasingly blurred line between operational policing, public relations and entertainment” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 125). Lastly, the legitimacy of the police is contingent on having the confidence of its community, a value the NSW Police Force is keen to increase. This aim is more abstract than the others, but it is clearly articulated in the formal agreement the NSW Police Force enter into with television partners. The Liaison Officer referred to these deeds of agreement for television production and made particular reference to the inclusion of clauses requiring production companies ensure that they must not create any
content that has the potential to bring the NSW Police Force or any police personnel into ridicule or disrepute.

The Liaison Officer and the Television Producer both understood their own agency’s purpose in the making of police reality television programs. They also shared in an appreciation of what their partner organisation sought to achieve through the association. The Liaison Officer described the police purpose for participation in television programs as realising a benefit, defining this benefit as productive, a term used by Lee & McGovern (2013a) for police media relationships. He therefore recognised that the police approved only those programs assessed as having the potential to communicate messages consistent with police strategies:

We’ve got to look at what benefits the New South Wales Police get out of it. So, we’ve got to look at crime reduction, we’ve got to look at road toll for RBT and traffic related ones. So, if it’s going to benefit us in regard to getting that safety message out there, whether it’s to slow down, stop using mobile phones, stop drinking and driving, stop taking drugs and driving. If it’s going to benefit us that way by communicating those messages rather than just doing ads all the time, well, yeah, we’ll participate. (Liaison Officer)

He reiterated the strategy of communicating risk and inculcating responsibility at various points throughout the interview:

We only do these shows if we get a benefit and that benefit is to educate the public.

… it’s a good tool to use to reduce crime.

Well, we want to get our messages out there. So, our messages are to do with crime prevention, saving lives, reducing road tolls, anything to do with the key corporate objectives.
The frequency with which he restated the organisation’s adherence to the application of police media strategies attests to the centrality of the Endorsement Policy to the operational activities of the Film and Television Liaison Unit and its business decisions involving television partnerships.

In response to my question about the purpose of the television industry in partnering with the police to make cop shows, the Liaison Officer initially ascribed the motive to “making money”, noting that the production companies are “always out there for profit and ratings”. His subsequent comments revealed a more nuanced understanding of how this imperative is realised, particularly in the creation of a narrative, which he identified as a critical component in a program’s suitability for television, its capacity to attract and maintain an audience, gain ratings, and generate income for a broadcaster. Nevertheless, he recognised the financial incentive for the production industry was part of a symbiotic accord: “they will come to us and say this is your message and this is how we can get that message out there for you, but their ultimate goal is money”. He recognised the need to communicate the police message, the reliance on television to do so, the comparative lack of internal capability, and the financial benefit the partnership brought to the police budget:

It’s a great opportunity for us to get that message out there without having to pay to do it, [to] advertise random drug testing. To do that, they’ve [the NSW Police Force] got to pay thousands of dollars to put those ads on television. This [reality television] is a free advertisement, so it’s a good tool to use to reduce crime. (Liaison Officer)

The Television Producer regarded the television industry’s expectation of its relationship with the police as productive toward its own purposes and beneficial to both partner’s agendas. For example, she described her expectations of RBT as entertainment value: “what we want to achieve is a good show”. She reiterated this idea when
acknowledging the police, too, benefitted from the partnership: “we obviously want to make an entertaining program at the end of the day and the police want us to make a program that gives them a positive outcome and also to inform and educate drivers out there.” This is the key to the relationship I described above, between a practice-based police force and a creative media organisation. It is also an acknowledgement of the interrelated nature of television’s public service objectives: to inform, educate and entertain. In defining the police expectation from the partnership, she used similar language to the Liaison Officer and demonstrated an understanding of the purpose, or “logics” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a), of police media engagement. She also talked about the financial incentives for the production company and the police. The profitability of RBT was, she said, reflected in the demand for new series and repeats of previous programs. That the production company and the NSW Police Force were, at the time of the interviews, negotiating an eighth series adds weight to this claim. She also recognised the monetary value for the police, who were “basically strapped for resources and they’re really strapped for resources for media.”

The NSW Police Force, while recognising the commercial dividend for the production house, see their own purpose in engaging in the relationship as limited to communicating a message to their local audience. The Liaison Officer noted that requests to create content for international television markets were usually declined: “We get a lot of requests from overseas, so overseas you’ve got to look at, well, if they’re going to show it over there what is the benefit for us?” There is nothing to be gained in communicating expectations of responsible public behaviour, marketing the corporate image, or advocating the legitimacy of policing to those over whom the NSW Police Force has no authority. While there is potential for television production companies to profit from selling cop shows to markets beyond the
jurisdiction in which they were created, the international exposure is not a factor in any consideration by the police.

In responding to questions about the purpose of the relationship and the resulting products, the interviewees did not consider the creation of cop shows as constructing objects of ideology. They did refer to the operational messages the police sought to communicate and the extensive reach of television as the means of its transmission. They also recognised the strategies of police media relations identified by Lee and McGovern (2013a) as factors in the relationship generally, and specifically in the production of *RBT*. However, they articulated these elements as being productive, whereby the relationship allowed both parties to realise their own separate goals. For the Liaison Officer and the police, the goal was “free advertisement”, for the Television Producer and her company, “a good show”. Neither spoke of the ideological messages about the police and state power that might be conveyed through television. It was not expected that they would; the interviews were designed to explore operational and experiential aspects of the partnership. However, some responses referred to the effect of simulated policing through television as a form of control. For example, the Liaison Officer described some of the collaborative work with other agencies featured on *The Force: Behind the Line* in this way: “we’ll highlight some of those stories from time to time, to show not to try and get into this game.” Notably, these and other ideological considerations were not raised when responding to questions about the relationship between the two organisations; rather, as I discuss later in the chapter, they were articulated when replying to questions relating to narrative.

As well as discussing the purpose of their respective organisations in engaging in the production of cop shows, both interviewees spoke about their own involvement and that of some of their colleagues in the filming process. Just as they both understood the other
agency’s purpose in the production of cop shows, the Liaison Officer and the Television Producer also recognised each other’s individual contribution to the production process. The recording of police operations for inclusion in *RBT* is managed by a designated police filming supervisor. The Liaison Officer has undertaken this role regularly and described the requirements and activities associated with it in detail. Police performing in this position need to have operational experience, preferably in the field of practice featured in the program. *RBT* filming supervisors, for example, generally have some traffic and highway policing experience. The Police Filming Supervisor is responsible for planning and overseeing the on-location recording for each program. In the case of *RBT*, this involves scheduling recording shoots, selecting locations and briefing the staff at Local Area Commands, or police stations. When on site, this officer has to “supervise all the filming, make sure that everything is appropriate, talk to the crew about the issues around filming” (Liaison Officer). These issues are related to the legal requirements for consent and privacy, which are documented in the deed of agreement between the production company and the NSW Police Force.

The Police Filming Supervisor, regardless of rank, oversees the shoot. This officer is not, however, in charge of the police operation itself. Responsibility for the scheduled police operation is still that of the senior local officer who, because of rank would ordinarily be in command. Nevertheless, in being in charge of the shoot, the police filming supervisor controls the image management aspect of the activity for the NSW Police Force. This supervisory action includes ensuring officers are wearing their uniform properly and acting in accordance with police policy. The Liaison Officer described this as making sure they look “professional and watch what they say”. By looking professional, he was referring to the officers’ appearance, including adherence to uniform policy, and the way they engaged with
each other and members of the public. Watching what they say meant that the officers should not venture into criticisms of organisational policies or the law.

The Television Producer also recognised that the operations they were recording were managed by the Police Filming Supervisor. She described the officer’s role as operating as “a go-between, between us and them and the police officers out on the road.” The Television Producer also noted that, as well as overseeing the actions of the film crew and ensuring their presence did not interfere with the police operations, the Police Filming Supervisor also maintained command over the officers involved, particularly in regard to image management: “and that Police Filming Supervisor also has the task of making sure that those police out on the road are doing the right thing, I mean, down to having their caps on when they’re talking outside.” Beyond these “little bits and pieces like that, just procedural sort of things” as she described them, were other actions that were focused on protection of the police image.

When asked to consider the role of the film crew in regard to the production process, the Liaison Officer described them as creative and technical: “they’re the experts and they want to get the right shot”. He explained that the production crew provided directions to police officers for their piece to camera statements, such as where to stand and what to look at. He also described how the crew fitted officers with cameras and microphones. Similarly, the Television Producer regarded the production side of the process as one of finding and creating stories from the events they recorded. Neither described the film crew’s role as making any contribution to policing or its simulation through the creation of the cop show.

The productive association between the police and its television industry partner is necessarily dependent on cooperation and, often, compromise. Because each party’s ultimate goals are not shared, it is likely that the partnership also experiences conflict. Both
interviewees were asked about the ways in which they cooperated with their partner organisation and on what points they had to compromise in order to achieve their objectives. They were also asked to identify sites of conflict and how and if they were satisfactorily resolved.

The interviewees recognised that location filming of police operations presented difficulties for both parties. In most circumstances, the recording of activities and conversations in public spaces is not restricted, but police operations are subject to the requirements of the NSW Surveillance Devices Act (2007). Both interviewees were clear in their understanding of the meaning of the Act in relation to filming and communicating police-citizen interactions and how those circumstances affected the program. The Liaison Officer explained that when members of the public were requested to provide a breath sample or when the traffic stop resulted in arrest, they were no longer “free to come and go”, thus for legal purposes, they were deemed to be no longer in a public place. The powers of the police to detain and question do not allow for these interactions to be recorded for non-evidentiary purposes. Therefore, television crews recording conversations involving citizens under these circumstances require the consent of the participants. Although the production crew is there for the purpose of capturing police work on camera, they are limited in what they can record without the permission of those over whom the police have power. Those detained must give their permission to be recorded and this is brokered through the police. The Television Producer described the challenges of filming within the provisions of privacy law as restrictive: “[it is] sometimes hard … because there’s the whole thing about the Surveillances Act and things like that.” Nevertheless, she recognised that police operations were also compromised by location filming:
We have to compromise quite a bit and I guess in a way they have to, they compromise too because maybe they’ve got a night where they were just going to pick up people for bald tyres or licences and they know we’re there so they know that we expect them to probably do more RBT and MDT [Mobile Drug Testing] than they might normally do on a night, because we need that and they need it for their visibility too. (Television Producer)

In isolation from other comments on policing activities, this statement exposes the disingenuousness of claims of reality accorded to this genre of observational documentary. It suggests that when the cameras are present, the police can be expected to perform policing activities that are compatible with the premise of the program being filmed even when that may not align with operational priorities. Roadworthiness examinations of vehicles do not provide the police-citizen interaction that is involved in sobriety tests on car drivers, although both contribute to road safety. Clearly, the interpersonal encounters at play in the breath test are critical to the RBT narrative and are encouraged by the production team.

The interviewees reported little conflict in police/television production relationship broadly and in the case of RBT. The problems they did raise were generally limited to those elements of divergent purposes that both participants had previously identified: policy for the police versus drama for television. They also recognised that the long-term working relationship ensured that both parties were familiar with the ground rules and the points of tension were therefore generally avoided.

For the Liaison Officer, television’s need for entertainment, even sensation, sometimes resulted in attempts to create drama from the more mundane and less confrontational circumstances under which the police ordinarily operate and for the most part prefer: “for production it’s about entertainment, for us it’s more crime prevention.” Here, the Liaison Officer recognised that police reality television’s propensity for “blurring the factual-
fictional distinction” (Reiner, 2010, p. 201) in order to dramatize the routine nature of much police work was at odds with his agency’s intended message. When circumstances arose that put their respective imperatives in conflict, a police filming supervisor would act on the production crew’s contractual obligations “not to interfere with any proceedings”. Interference generally took the form of encouraging police to respond to citizens in ways they might not necessarily do under other circumstances: “Oh, the crews always try to prompt [the police].” This form of interference was a nuisance for the Liaison Officer, but not such that he felt the police lost the upper hand. The agreement allowed the police filming supervisor to intervene when he or she observed the crew interfering with operations. Instances of interference that either went unnoticed or were not interpreted as such during filming were unlikely to get past the reviewing stage following initial post-production work.

The Liaison Officer also commented on the occasional disconnect between the programming decisions of television stations and the operational campaigns of the police. He offered as an example an instance of scheduled location filming at ski resorts not being broadcast until after the snow season had finished. He attributed this to television’s quest for ratings trumping their support for a road safety strategy aimed at a particular audience and for a specific event.

The Television Producer understood the control the police had over the process and the product; “we have to always be considerate of the fact that we are following them and their duties and can’t interrupt their duties.” Nevertheless, she spoke of her frustration with some operations not offering much for the camera, such as roadworthy vehicle testing. In doing so, she recognised that operational circumstances always dictated opportunities for capturing the type of footage that would work for television and some officers were more willing to oblige in that than others:
Well, it’s obviously frustrating for us if we go out and there are a couple of on-duty policemen who actually just spend the night checking engines and tyres, and, you know, that has occasionally caused a bit of frustration for us, but we have to sort of live with it, I guess. (Television Producer)

Post-production objections from the NSW Police Force were not, in the Television Producer’s opinion, too frequent or unreasonable. There were, however, some occasions when she felt the need to “push back” against instructions to remove footage from programs. She cited an example in which one of the police officers, having reviewed footage of an operation, had requested that it be edited. The officer’s request was not premised on a legal, procedural or policy concern. Rather, his objection was, as the Television Producer described it, that he:

just didn’t like the way he did something, and it was, you know, you’d blink and you’d miss it, it was really nothing. And it’s just that same thing, they’re not used to being on camera some of them, it’s that heightened sense of self-consciousness. (Television Producer)

This instance of police veto resulted in the removal of a short segment of a larger story, the impact of which, in the Television Producer’s view, was nevertheless lessened without it. Notably, the premise of the official objection was the self-consciousness of one of its officers rather than the likelihood of reputational damage to the organisation. The officer’s concerns were not of a professional nature in that they did not relate to the execution of his formal duties. They were instead about his television performance; the way he looked in front of the camera. For the Television Producer, objections relating to the police domain such as legal procedure, organisational policy and procedure were generally accepted and acted on without remark. This overruling by the police, however, is in the domain of the television professional. Creative rather than procedural, the decision was an encroachment into the
Television Producer’s territory and can be seen as a reversal of the normal power dynamic in television production in which the producer would be expected to exert authority. There is no reciprocity within the agreement by which the television production company could exclude or include content in opposition to the wishes of the police partner. This situation demonstrates that the asymmetry that Chibnall (1977) attributes to the police-media relationship, more recently confirmed by Mawby (2010), extends to the co-production of police reality television programs.

So far in this analysis of the two interviews, the focus has been on the participants’ understandings of the relationship between the NSW Police Force and a television industry partner. Their responses and other comments about that association have been categorised under the themes of purpose, process, and cooperation and conflict. These themes are aligned with the production phase of analysis. Neither interviewee regarded the association as extending beyond the productive; that is, they did not identify the purposes, processes or the sites of cooperation and conflict in the partnership as having an ideological basis or intention. Having explored the interviewees’ knowledge of the production of cop shows, the following section of this chapter turns to questions about texts and reception, the subsequent phases of a tripartite approach. In doing so, I analyse the interviewees’ interpretations of television programs featuring police and their expectations of viewer responses, particularly among police audiences.

As a form of entertainment, the reality television cop show tells a story about law enforcement. In contrast to the police drama series, the reality television story is offered to its audience as a factual record of events as they happen, unadulterated by scripting and fictional imaginings. It is true to say of such programs that the officers involved in making them are real police and that they are doing real police work. However, the real police operation
performed in situ becomes something other than that in its presentation on the screen: “what purports to be reality is a mediated expression of such” (Mason, 2003). That is, the on-site directional choices to record or not record police-citizen interactions, and then, through editing, to include or omit, to frame and comment on them, inevitably results in a record less factual than the genre known as reality television would suggest. Selectivity, whether for reasons of legality, dramatization or any other that the police team, the film crew or editors encounter, creates the story. The interviewees are agents in the television construction of policing and contribute to the selective process of storytelling. Their perception of how this translates into the programs themselves is important to the understanding of what is communicated about police and policing.

In this particular form of reality television, police programs like RBT present an overarching narrative featuring policing. As a specific example of storytelling, RBT communicates the role of the police as an agent of social control through their presence on the roads as they detect drink driving offences and charge offenders. As I point out in the following chapter, each episode is structured around several individual stories featuring those activities and the interactions between the police and the citizen drivers. Both interviewees showed they understood the need for stories that were both engaging for the viewer, and exemplary of police activity. Indeed, they understood that the program had to entertain in order to instruct because its potential to convey the messages of its police sponsor would only be realised through its capacity to attract and retain the attention of a large audience; it had to be worth watching.

The stories, rather than the messages underlying those stories, were seen as most important to the Television Producer. She believed this was also understood by the police, noting that she detected in some officers a creative capability that was often brought to the
storytelling side of filming. In doing so, she referred to police operational experience and knowledge, a type of “sixth sense” (Worrall, 2013) or “street smarts”, from which officers derive their situational awareness for self-preservation and spotting troublemakers. She saw professional knowledge contributing to on- and off-camera activities and considered that the program benefited from that. Some Police Filming Supervisors were markedly adept at anticipating stories and providing directorial intervention, in both the police and television production sense:

Some really good ones will actually tell the police on duty, “Pull that car over. There’s a car coming, pull him over.” They’ll actually direct them to pull over people. Because often the police filming supervisors are senior to those officers and are more aware of what sort of people to pull up. … And quite a number of our stories have actually been initiated by what the police filming supervisor has spotted. (Television Producer)

This appreciation of what makes for a good story was not limited to identifying citizens and vehicles with televisual potential. As well as recognising their capabilities for behind-the-camera work, she also noted that some police were capable performers whose on-screen presence could contribute to the desired “good show”. She described such effective on-camera officers as those who could create something from their engagement with the citizens they had stopped for testing:

The police, you know, obviously give us a lot, because, you know, for example, when they’re in the police car the only way we’re going to get chat from the person is by the police initiating that chat, so often they help us like that. Normally they mightn’t ask them some personal questions, but they will, just to sort of help us with our story. (Television Producer)

The “chat” is central to the producer’s need for a story. The police use a particular form of words to request a driver to undertake a breath test; this is effectively their script. The
chat referred to by Television Producer is the unscripted augmentation of the encounter. The scripted component is a legal requirement for every encounter but, as the Television Producer saw it, it is tediously repetitive for television. She recounted that in the first series of the program the mundane procedural statements and actions were too often retained during post-production. This included officers “reading out the things, and I had to say to them, ‘No, it’s the same every time, people don’t need to know that anymore’”. In her view, repetition was taking up screen time that should be used to tell “the person’s story”. She did not consider showing officers engaging overly in procedures and legalese utterances as adding to the story, despite these being central to the police operation and the message of their production partner. Rather, she saw it as crowding out her preferred narrative features:

At first when we started this show it was that really kind of stiff, [puts on police voice] “The offender …” they know not to do that stuff. You know, to just chat normally with people and be human. And being human does them a world of good as well and people start to warm toward them as well because they are human. (Television Producer)

The Television Producer’s intention to direct the focus of the narrative away from the legal and procedural minutiae and onto the stories of those affected by it, necessarily positions the citizen/driver rather than the police as the centre of each segment of the program. Here she is guided by her professional experience and instinct for the television story. Indeed, when asked about the types of stories she liked RBT to tell about police and policing, she contended that they were not the focus of the program: “stories about police and policing? It’s not, I don’t know, it’s more about the people that they’re picking up than police”. This statement articulates the producer’s prioritising of the individual story over the message that the police agency partner intends the program to communicate. It also echoes Sue Turnbull’s (2014) claim that Z Cars (1962–1978), a fictional series but with a realist
aesthetic, was more about the lives of ordinary people than policing (p. 49). However, as I argue in Chapter 5, it is clear that it is the relationship between police and citizens that tells of policing. Indeed, the Television Producer also saw that the individual police officers themselves contributed to the “human side” of the program: “they do bring something to it and in themselves a lot of them are great characters and they know what we want, and they enjoy it.” It is clear from these statements that the Television Producer understood RBT to be “about” the people, both the officers and the citizens, rather than the institution of the police. However, as I argue in Chapter 5, RBT can be a popular program and an effective tool in reducing drink driving offences because the two strands of story and police-preferred message work together effectively. The favourable depiction of individual officers can be seen as a legitimating influence that benefits the police institution, despite the fact that the organisation itself is not the “story”.

Similarly, when asked about whether Australian cop shows such as RBT conveyed the idea of a distinctly local style of policing, the Television Producer focused on other elements of the program. She spoke about filming police operations against the backdrop of the landscape in regional locations and at events such as the Sydney Mardi Gras, seeing these as conspicuously Australian images that might appeal to domestic and international audiences. Nevertheless, her comments about the centrality of the individual citizens to the appeal of the program suggests that she regarded the personality-driven nature of the series constructed some form of national narrative. Her view that the program showed the police-citizen encounters as demonstrations of police legitimacy through the mostly genial engagements between officers and members of the public implies the same is true for this aspect of the Australian police image. The Liaison Officer did not identify aspects of policing in the programs he had worked on as showing a uniquely local style of policing, choosing instead to
refer to the need for officers’ on-screen behaviour to be professional. In policing parlance, the term “professional” is a catch-all, positive descriptor that can be applied equally to physical appearance as to ethical behaviour. In this context, it can be interpreted as engendering positive citizen encounters. For the Liaison Officer, too, *RBT*, as an example of the Australian reality television cop show program, represents its police institutions as legitimated to its citizens.

The interviewees were asked about the demographics of the police officers that *RBT* likes to feature on the program. The Television Producer expressed interest in having a more diverse cohort of police appear in the program, particularly in regard to gender: “You know, obviously, I personally like it when there’s a female officer occasionally. It creates a bit of difference. It softens it up quite a bit.” Her interest in difference in this context is about offering a more appealing show. However, she also attributes to female officers a quality that moderates their ability and right to do policing and ascribes to them a different type of policing they are considered fit to do. In making this distinction between male and female officers and by using the term “softer” as a descriptor, she perpetuates the police cultural tenet of policing as a masculine domain. This type of gender bias against women in police culture is also apparent in the texts I analyse in Chapters 5 and 6: the female policing students in *Recruits* are introduced to the audience packing clothes and playing the piano, in contrast with the physically active performance of the men; and the character of Maggie in *Blue Heelers* is assigned to a perceived softer form of policing where she operates as a victim support officer.

The Liaison Officer also privileged operational capability over police image management regarding diversity. He explained the difficulty of selecting police crews for filming if they were to take the promotion of diversity into consideration when recording
police operations. He referred to requests from the national multicultural broadcaster, SBS, for “some Indigenous police and then you get requests to cover Middle Eastern officers”. The lack of diversity in operational units often prevented the police from meeting these requests:

SBS always have an ethnic side to their stories, so when they work with us, they say can we include some ethnic officers of different cultural backgrounds. But sometimes we just don’t have any in those sections that we can provide. If they [the television producers] want to work with this section this is all we’ve got. Either do that or don’t work with them. (Liaison Officer)

Despite both interviewees seeing the overall police image management potential of programs such as RBT, neither considered that the obstacles to showing a more diverse workforce could or should be overcome. The opportunity to show a police force as an inclusive employer and, by association, pluralist in its policing practices for a diverse community, was not one they felt they could consider because of the nature of documentary location filming. The Liaison Officer ventured, “For us, all the police are police regardless of their background and they’re all doing the same job and we can’t be trying to show that there’s more diversity.” The Television Producer regarded these circumstances as a hindrance to incorporating “difference” into the show, noting that for filming it was always a case of “whoever’s there and whoever’s willing to participate.”

In the course of the interviews both participants explained the importance of structure in the stories told in RBT. The Television Producer spoke about the program being dependent on an ordered narrative:

As I say to people who start to work on RBT as producers, well look, basically every story, if a person is arrested, has the same beginning, middle and end. It begins by being picked up over the limit or positive to drugs, the journey from there to the police station then in the police station and the results. They’ve all
got the same beginning, middle and end. The only thing that makes it different is the character of the person and their story and that’s what makes it different. (Television Producer)

The Liaison Officer was also aware of the structural requirements of the narrative and referred to the need to have a “beginning, middle, and an ending.” He offered an example to support this statement, and although it related to another program he had been involved in, it is still likely that he had been schooled about this formula in the same way that the Television Producer had instructed her new colleagues starting on \textit{RBT}. In his example, he described a drug operation for \textit{The Force: Behind the Line} that had not gone according to plan. The intention was for the camera crew to be on location at a unit block where police planned to make a drug arrest. After the suspect stopped at a car park to sell drugs, the police following him decided to make an immediate arrest instead:

It sort of threw things out and we missed [filming] the arrest because we weren’t planning on that park, we were planning on another place and we went and did the search warrant straight after that and found all the drugs in the unit, but we didn’t get the arrest shot so there was no story because we missed the beginning of the story with the arrest. (Liaison Officer)

The absence of what he considered to be the beginning of the story, in this case the surveillance and arrest, often resulted in the operation not being included in the program. However, a new, if less action-oriented beginning could be, and often was, created to fill the void:

Sometimes they might go back afterwards and get an introduction by the officer in charge or something leading up to it. Get them leaving the police station to show the beginning and then if [the arrest is] captured, [edit in] like a search warrant or something else. (Liaison Officer)
His description of post-production editing was not to suggest any misrepresenting of the events. Indeed, he quoted the NSW Police Force contractual requirement that programs “accurately depict the events occurring [and] must not be factually inaccurate”. But, in describing the incident in the way he does, the Liaison Officer demonstrated his awareness of the constructed nature of “reality” television and the necessity to create cogent and entertaining stories to communicate police work. He understood that the television version of a policing event was not allowed to vary from the facts of the event, but the telling of its story often needed more latitude.

*RBT* is created through a partnership between the police and the television industry. The interviewees regarded the program as an object of entertainment and of instruction, regardless of which purpose was more important to either party. The Television Producer, attuned to what is required for a successful program, considered the stories told by the program were those of the citizens who are stopped by the police. These stories, constituting the entertainment of the program, were, in her view, the basis of the program’s popularity because of their “human interest”. As a popular program, *RBT* also acts as an object of instruction, calculated to educate its audience about the role of the police and the way the public should respond to its authority; it acts as a form of simulated policing (Lee & McGovern, 2013a). The interviewees’ interpretations of *RBT*’s success in communicating key policing messages are the subject of analysis in the following section.

Neither interviewee regarded the cop shows they were involved in as having a specific target audience. The Liaison Officer referred to *RBT*’s ratings and the scheduling of repeat program in different time slots as an indication of its breadth of appeal. Similarly, the Television Producer described the program as having “universal” appeal rather than being designed for a particular demographic:
Gee, I mean, target audience? Look, honestly, as I said, kids watch it, I go to the gym and the guy next to me goes, ‘Oh, my kids like that, and the family watches it together’, which is interesting. I guess it educates the kids and then you’ve got older people who watch it, so I don’t know about targeting. (Television Producer)

When asked about police officers as viewers of cop shows, neither of the interviewees regarded them as a distinct audience group that the program was aimed at. The Liaison Officer believed that his colleagues would tend to be resistant to watching the program or they would view it cynically in order to criticise the officers appearing on it: “cops are very critical of other cops.” He said that many officers he had spoken to were particularly disparaging of Recruits despite its popularity with the public: “The public love it, but then you get the cops thinking ‘Oh, that’s embarrassing, I didn’t like the way they shot that’.” This attitude, explored further through interviews with a larger cohort of police officers in Chapter 7, reflects the dominant occupational culture and its tendency toward cynicism (Reiner, 2010; Waddington, 2012). In this case, that cynicism is directed at displays of individuality by officers on screen, whether showy, awkward, or self-conscious, and at those perennial targets of suspicion: senior police, non-operational officers, and civilian employees, particularly those involved in image management.

Although they did not categorise the cop show viewer as belonging to a particular demographic, both interviewees referred to the effect of RBT on the audience as manifest in driver behaviour, attributing in part the reduction in the instances of drink driving to the program. On this point, the Liaison Officer said that RBT”s popularity was so valued by the producers and their television transmission partner that neither party wanted to make changes to the program that would more accurately reflect emerging issues for police traffic operations:
You see, *RBT* is random breath testing for alcohol, but we still include some drug stories on it. When we go out filming these days, all we’re getting are drug stories, but the production crew want the alcohol story and we’re just not getting them. It’s harder and harder. They want to do a new series and we’re having trouble finding alcohol related events. (Liaison Officer)

The number of alcohol related traffic accidents has reduced since random breath testing was introduced in NSW in the 1980s and fatalities have continued to decline over the past decade (Centre for Road Safety, 2014). Publicity relating to this public safety policing strategy, including *RBT* itself, may have a right to claim some credit for this (Papafotiou & Boorman, 2012). But, the reduction in alcohol affected drivers on the roads is often reflected in random testing operations in which there are no instances of drink driving detected. Instead, the police regularly detect several instances of illicit drug related offences during each operation. The title of the program and the signature device of the breathalyser digital read-out, which the Television Producer referred to as the “ticker”, appearing either side of each advertisement break are identifiable characteristics of the brand that would be lost if the program were to change its strategy to messaging other traffic related offences. The Liaison Officer contended that a more multidimensional program on traffic operations would be more effective for the police message were it not for the value of the *RBT* brand: “we wanted to do a new show encompassing all those things, but they don’t want to: that’s their brand and they just want to keep doing it.”

The Television Producer did refer to the reduction in drink driving and the contribution made by the program to that achievement:

What the police have told us is that they think that *RBT* has helped them, helped their visibility and helped their campaign against drink driving. And, in fact,
drink driving has gone down since the show’s started and they put that down, partially to the program. (Televison Producer)

She also noted the increase in the detection of drug related driving offences during the filming of *RBT* and the generalisation of that trend across the state:

Nowadays, the alcohol thing is starting to skew towards drugs and we’ve also assisted them in the sense, you know, they wanted us to promote MDT more and we’ve done that. And, sadly, it seems to be a huge issue with people driving under the influence of, especially meth-amphetamine. So, you know, we do, we kind of work hand in hand with them like that. (Television Producer).

Of particular note were the Television Producer’s views about what she considered as the effect of the program on viewers. She observed that recurring narrative elements of the program were not only recognised by the audience, they were behaviour influencing.

Audiences learnt from *RBT* what was expected of them:

When people are going through the procedure of being breath tested or in the station they say, “I know what to do I’ve seen this on RBT.” The show has a high visibility and high presence in people’s minds, so they know it. (Television Producer)

In this statement, she contends that viewers learn what was required to perform in front of the camera and how to respond to the authority of the police. These are separate ideas, one of which relates to the events of the program itself, the other to the subject of the program; nevertheless, they coalesce into the same moment of learning. On one level *RBT* teaches its viewers how the program works. In this case, they learn the ways in which *RBT* tells its stories, recognising the components of the traffic stops that are shown in each episode. Those who become familiar enough with the program could, as the Television Producer said, act out the part expected of the driver without the need for direction from the police; a performance
that necessarily requires being pulled over for a breath test during the filming of an RBT operation.

The program also teaches the lay viewer how to respond to the authority of the police. In this case, viewers learn the meaning of the stories of RBT. This extends beyond being familiar with the procedural elements of the random breath test, to having an awareness of the ubiquity of this type of operation, the police right to conduct them, and the need to comply with their directions and the law. It is, therefore, evidence of an expected ideological message for the public incorporated into cop shows. The Television Producer did not express this idea in response to questions relating to the production of cop shows, but she attributed such characteristics to the programs themselves. This would suggest the cop show is never neutral in its articulation of police authority regardless of its intended purpose.

The Television Producer was referring to lay viewers rather than police officers in her claim that RBT inculcated knowledge about police-citizen encounters. Certainly, the public is the intended audience and shaping attitudes within this category of viewer is the purpose of the program. However, in the context of this research, I suggest that the police viewer could also learn to perform RBT operations in a way that corresponds with the television version, such as engaging in banter with their colleagues or members of the public, even if this might conflict with prescribed police procedure.

As another example of RBT’s teaching capacity, the Television Producer cited an episode of the program Gogglebox (2015–). A reality television program, albeit a different type to RBT, Gogglebox features groups of household audiences, “goggleboxes”, watching and discussing television programs (Shine Australia, 2015b). The episode the Television Producer referred to is instructive in regard to her interpretation of the audience reception of
*RBT*. It features viewers watching a segment of *RBT* in which a driver adopts a defiant attitude to the police (Shine Australia, 2015a). The viewers are shown predicting the driver’s breath analysis reading in the way the Television Producer describes. They guess at what “he’ll blow” and whether “he’ll be over”. These audience observations testify to their familiarity with the story of *RBT*. Such comments also demonstrate that the process of television viewing itself has a narrative, in this case it tells of the circular relationship between the text and the audience.

The goggleboxers’ commentaries can also be seen as endorsing the Television Producer’s claim about *RBT*’s capacity to teach an audience. In this regard, the *Gogglebox* audiences are shown to take issue with the driver’s attitude to the police. They see and reflect on the driver challenging the police officer about the procedure relating to breath-testing. Because he had acknowledged he had consumed his last drink 5 minutes prior, he was required to wait 10 minutes to be tested and was irritated by the delay. The viewers recognise that this is standard procedure, one that would be to the driver’s advantage having stated he had just consumed 4 drinks. The viewers also see him continue in his antagonism after he returns a reading below the limit. Despite being free to leave, in a show of defiance and bravado he attempts to goad the officer into issuing him with a ticket for not restraining his dog properly, an offence for which the officer had initially been content to give him a warning. The audiences describe him in disparaging terms (“they should take the guy’s license off him for being an idiot”) and commend the police for the firm and polite way they dealt with the driver (“that’s good police work”) (Shine Australia, 2015a). Their criticisms of the driver and compliments for the officer demonstrate their learnt understanding of how to respond appropriately to the authority of the police and how that authority is legitimated by the communication of effective policing on television.
The Liaison Officer acknowledged *RBT*’s longevity, but he did not share the Television Producer’s positive analysis of its continuing value. He recognised the program’s contribution to the police message could be demonstrated by viewer familiarity with the procedural elements of the road side stop, the breath test results, and the outcome for those driving over the limit. However, as well as his concerns about repeat programs and the negative impact on officers who appear in the re-runs, he reiterated his view that the program’s premise was now less relevant to the police objectives and needed to be re-focused:

It was introduced back in a time when drink driving was a huge issue and now this show has been going so long everyone knows about random breath testing. It’s been on TV over and over and over so they all know how it works, what happens if you get locked up, what the result is. So that message has well and truly worked and we’re having trouble getting people on alcohol these days, our biggest issue now is driving under the influence of drugs. (Liaison Officer)

Here the Liaison Officer demonstrates an awareness of a gap in the “risks and responsibilization” strategy of police media relations identified by Lee and McGovern (2013a, p.76). He can see a shift in delinquent driver behaviour from alcohol-related offences to those involving illicit drugs. While this perception of the program’s reduced relevance may not have an immediate impact on the image making and legitimacy of the police, the Liaison Officer recognises that it is an issue that should be addressed by the program makers and their police sponsors. He accepts that in doing so the production partner would need to compromise the program’s product recognition and risk losing popularity.

In response to the first of the research questions for this thesis, which sought to determine the forces of influence in the production of Australian cop shows, this chapter has revealed several key aspects about the partnership between the NSW Police Force and one of
its partners in the co-production of cop shows, and the expectations of both organisations for the texts resulting from that association. Significantly, as the NSW Police Force Annual Report series has shown, the focus of police image management through television is now predominantly directed toward reality television co-production, a form of the cop show over which it can exercise editorial control. The police image offered through programs of this type has become the authorised version, governed by the “logics of police media relations” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 40) and communicated by real police pictured as doing real policing. This is despite the form of the genre that, although not scripted, relies on controlled situations and edited images to create a version of events that can be marketed as reality. The interviewees regarded the police-television partnership as one of mutual benefit: profit for the television industry and an effective means for “educating the public”, as the Liaison Officer described it. They also attribute what can be interpreted as ideological qualities to the products of that association: legitimating the police as an instrument of social control and acting as a form of simulated patrol.

In the following chapter I turn to the programs that result from the type of partnership between police agencies and the television industry that I have discussed in this chapter. In the first of two chapters that explore the construction of police on television, I apply textual analyse to three police-sponsored reality television to determine how Australian police are represented in this type of program.
Chapter 5: Texts 1: Police Reality Television Series

Following the analysis of the production of cop shows in the previous chapter, my attention now turns to the texts that result from that process and through which the symbolic meaning of police and policing is conveyed. The approach I have adopted for this phase is one of a formal or discursive nature, focussed on a selection of cop shows which I analyse for relevant narrative elements in order to interpret meaning (Lockyer, 2008). The texts selected for this aspect of the research are the reality television, or observational documentary series *Recruits* (2009–2010), *The Force: Behind the Line* (2006–), and *RBT* (2010–).

*Recruits* (2009–2010)

*Recruits* is one of the first reality television programs made through the joint venture model between the NSW Police Force, a commercial production house, and a television station. Two series of the program were produced: the first consisting of 13 episodes in 2009, the second, screened in 2010, with 12 episodes. *Recruits* focuses predominantly on a cohort of new entrants to the NSW Police College (now the NSW Police Academy), giving what the producer’s claim is a rare glimpse of what is required of those “we entrust to keep the peace and uphold the law” (CJZ [Cordell Jigsaw and Zapruder’s Other Films], 2015). It also features members of the previous class engaging in various policing duties and interacting with the public they police. This second group of officers have been “sworn in” as probationary constables, a status that the new recruits are working toward. The members of both groups are progressing towards becoming “fully-fledged police officers” (CJZ, 2015), that is, being confirmed as full members of the profession, and it is this premise that situates the series in the context of the police institution and its culture. Because of this predominantly internal focus on the police institution and the diminished significance of citizen encounters, the corresponding external element of police legitimation among its public, is a less
prominent feature. Nevertheless, the program’s attention on policing aspirants, and the favourable treatment it affords them, acts to legitimate the recruits and the institution.

The opening credits for the premier episode (Cordell, 2009) are overlaid against an aerial view of Sydney at night. Subsequent shots show police officers undertaking various operational activities including: travelling in a patrol car with flashing lights; racing on foot toward someone lying on the road, perhaps the result of a hit and run; trying to contain a riotous crowd; attending to another blood-covered body; listening to a distraught woman recounting what seems to be the violent circumstances of a domestic violence incident; and applying handcuffs to a shirtless man. Off-screen, a police officer reinforces the dangers shown in the accompanying images: “This game is serious. It’s a life and death battle out on the street. There’s a lot of demons out there”. He then addresses the camera to finish his statement by constructing police as society’s caretaker: “And we’re trying to protect the public in the best way we can”. The unseen male narrator, Australian actor Roger Corser, states the number of police officers serving in Australia, and the volume and type of crimes they “fight”. Corser’s voice-over is authoritative without being strident. Audiences familiar with his acting career will know that he has played policing roles in television drama series, including Water Rats (1996–2001), Underbelly (2008–2013), and Rush (2008–2001). On screen, a constable in what appears to be a station setting then recounts being thanked by a member of the public for “being a police officer”. He regards this as a rarity: “that’s one pat on the back”.

The setting moves to the NSW Police College as the narrator continues to recount police and crime statistics, this time stating the number of recruits undertaking police training in Australia each year. He tells the audience, “For the first time, the cameras follow the journey of young police, from student recruits learning theory, to probationary constables
getting a taste of real life”. The theory-versus-real life dichotomy, which implicitly privileges the latter over the former, is an article of faith in the police workplace culture. As Janet Chan, Chris Devery and Sally Doran (2003) note, the operational culture of the police delegitimates formal training, preferring the combination of ‘war stories’ and ‘urban legends’ at police academies and indoctrination at the station. A review of education and training in the NSW Police Force in the late 1980s recounted serving officers referring to the college as “Bullshit Castle” (University of East Anglia. Centre for Applied Research in Education & Macdonald, 1990, p. 55). The narrator of Recruits does not make the same criticisms, but he does make clear that the classroom is not where police are made.

Following the narrator’s initial statements, the title credits appear interspersed with short sequences of recruits engaging in simulated versions of the real policing activities previously shown. The overlaid music increases in volume and intensity. The staccato guitar introduction to Australian rock band The Angels’ “Take a Long Line” continues over the images of uniforms, firearms and batons until the title, in full capitals, appears against a background of a blue flashing light to conclude the sequence. It is noteworthy that the title credits finish before the start of the lyrics, which allude to a police state in which kidnap and torture are routine: “Shut him up in solitary, third degree” (Neeson, Brewster & Brewster, 1978). While the guitar riff might have been a suitable selection for conveying the intensity of police work, the story of a secret police force brutalising a citizen would not be part of the message the producers or sponsoring police force would have intended.

This title sequence, used in all episodes, projects the excitement and danger of the profession. The uniformed officers are presented as the defenders of the public, repelling the agents of crime and responding to the disorder they create, and helping the victims. The recruits, shown in gym clothes rehearsing the physical operational skills with the
accoutrements of the job, are identified as aspirants to the profession. These images convey the importance of physical power and the need for disciplined and practiced bodies (Foucault, 1977, p. 152) to perform it. They also show the proficient use of police tools—a car at speed, a gun, and a baton—as well as unarmed methods of self-defence and physical restraint. This footage suggests that the recruits, too, will be able to wear the uniform if they can prove they are good enough.

Following the opening titles, the initial episode begins with scenes from the passing out parade at the NSW Police College. This colourful display of police power is also a rite of passage for the new officers. The Commissioner of Police speaks about the commitment and hard work required for the job as the contingent of recruits stand to attention in lines of blue which are as uniform as their attire. Here, the discipline is shared by the recruits; they are a body of police, practised in the performance of ceremonial duties. The assembled body then “marches off”, as the recruits throw their hats in the air, thus re-enacting the custom of so many induction ceremonies for uniformed services. This is a clichéd money-shot for the attending media, allowing a glimpse of the human side of the recruits and their pride and relief in achieving their goal; they are more than their uniforms. From these several hundred recruits, four are selected to be followed throughout the series in their new role as probationary constables: “After eight months of theory” says the narrator, “they’re now entrusted with the responsibility of being a police officer”. Again, the narrator relegates the college and its theoretical learning to a lesser domain where recruits cannot take on the responsibility of office until they start “being” real police on the streets.

The next scene returns to the action of the city at night. It features again the flashing lights of a speeding police car and officers engaged in physical encounters with young men. In her first engagement as a probationary constable, Vanessa and her “buddy” officer, Gaby,
a senior constable, attend a street brawl. Vanessa describes her role in this situation as keeping the public away and ensuring their safety. Afterwards, in the patrol car, she says to her colleague, “Exciting! That’s what I was waiting for”. She has seen some action on her first assignment and, although her role required no physical engagement with any of the offenders or their injured opponents, she experienced being part of an incident and the team response. Nevertheless, the two women are not depicted as active agents in the altercation as are the other officers, all male, who are seen pinning suspects to the ground. Vanessa’s inexperience and her buddy’s supervisory obligations justify their distance from the centre of the action, but it means that this recruit’s introduction to the audience is as a peripheral player in the male dominated field of policing.

In the following scene, male probationer, Chris, from the regional city of Newcastle, is described by the narrator as being new to Sydney. He acknowledges the job will be a “big shock”, but it is the “mountain of routine paper work” that the narrator describes as a “different shock”. Chris and his buddy are interrupted from their computer work by a code red siren and they rush through the station to attend to a fight between a couple, both of whom are affected by alcohol. Unlike, Vanessa, Chris plays a role in the action, albeit a minor one. Nevertheless, he appreciates the excitement of having some involvement. This “adrenalin”, he says, is something that the college could not have prepared him for.

After these events on the beat, the probationary constables’ counterparts, the new recruits selected to feature throughout the series, are then introduced before they arrive at the Police College. Each in their familial setting, these recruits are shown as enthusiastic individuals whose personal lives are presented by the narrator as offering a mixture of potential and handicap for the role of a police officer.
“Country girl, Emily” is seen packing her four suitcases of clothes, seemingly self-mocking of all the shoes she wants to take to the Police Academy. “And then there’s Cec”, says the narrator as a young man is shown jogging toward the camera before stopping and declaring, “I want to be a police officer because I hate crime”. Gold Coast resident, Tula is playing piano and singing while the narrator explains she is sacrificing her passion for music to become a police officer. Indigenous recruit, Anthony, is also giving up an ambition, a promising rugby league career, to join the police, because, he says, “There aren’t many Black cops out there”.

These introductions demonstrate the diverse organisation that the modern police agency seeks to be; there are two women, one of the men is Indigenous and the other also has an ethnic minority heritage. The suggestions of equal opportunity in these scenes are then undermined by the gendered and ethnically connoted performances that follow. In contrast to Emily’s packing, Cec’s preparation for the college is an exercise regime of running, sit-ups and lifting weights. His body disciplining is shown through building muscles and stamina, hers in dressing; both are subject to the voyeuristic intrusion of the camera but posed in different, gendered ways. Anthony, too, has a disciplined body developed through his football playing and training, but in referring to his Indigenous identity, he casts himself as an outsider to police culture. The musician, Tula, like Emily, is pictured indoors whereas the men are outside engaging in physical activities. Although playing the piano and singing both involve levels of discipline, Tula’s musical performance, like Emily’s clothes packing, come across as more passive activities requiring less exertion than Cec and Anthony’s efforts. These scenes adopt the sentiment of the Television Producer’s comments in Chapter 4 about including women in police reality television programs: they “soften” the image of policing. In doing so, they draw upon stereotypical gendered identities and ascribe to women the right to
a different, lesser form of policing. This limited “soft” role is also assigned to the female lead character in the fictional series *Blue Heelers* that I analyse in Chapter 6, and its prevalence in television representations of women is again raised in the interview material discussed in Chapter 7.

After the four recruits are introduced in their home environments, the camera returns the viewer to the Police College. The two protocol officers are portrayed as being in charge of the enculturation of the recruits. Both are shown carrying symbolic staffs, which are the police equivalent of the military sergeant major’s pace stick. The inspector notes that he carries “the biggest of the big sticks” at the college, a metaphor for the power he holds over the recruits, as well as a comment on his ceremonial paraphernalia.

The senior sergeant lectures the recruits about their appearance, the nature of the organisation, the danger of the work, and the potential for injury: “What this place is about is discipline. We are a paramilitary organisation ... You’ll bleed. Some of you might die”. He tells them they need to “conform to dress and bearing standards set by the NSW Police College”. His description of the police as paramilitary is not in keeping with either the Peelian tradition (Reith, 1956) or the modern understanding of community policing (Findlay, 2004). Rather than a claim of fact, his definition appears to be hyperbole for the purpose of moderating the behaviour of the recruits. In a berating tone, he contends that complacency can be an invitation to violence; those who do not conform to the dress and bearing standards not only contravene the norms of the organisation, in going against “all our rules and our regulations”, the slovenly officer will also get “flogged by a crook”. In concluding the lecture, he issues a reminder regarding haircuts and tells the assembled recruits to make the appropriate changes to their grooming. The following scenes show first the men giving buzz cuts to each other and shaving facial stubble, then the women applying make-up and brushing
their hair into the approved “bun” style. The narrator refers to Emily’s ten pairs of shoes and collection of jewellery, to which Emily states to the camera: “Police are very strict about jewellery and hair. No jewellery, no earrings, no necklaces, none of that”. Tula also refers to her attire as being considered not conservative enough and the cause for being “called into the office already”.

These scenes display the police codes of acceptability regarding appearance, and while the cohort includes men who already have suitable haircuts and women whose hair is short enough that it does not require fixing into a bun, the images operate as demonstrations of the requirement to adhere to a uniform and conservative appearance. Evidently, that appearance is gendered by the police protocol officers, the recruits themselves, and the program’s producers, who choose to feature these images and interactions. This marking of gender is reinforced in the subsequent scene which shows some of the newly shorn men being paraded before the rest of the cohort the following day. They are mocked for their shaved heads as the inspector congratulates them on having shown “great courage and very poor hairdressing skills”. While this scene is included as comic relief for the assembled recruits and the television audience, it demonstrates the conformity expected from prospective members of the police. The focus in this scene is the men who have sacrificed their hair for membership of the profession. There was no comparable line-up of women demonstrating their commitment through changed physical appearance. Although such a scene, were it shot, may not have been considered as effective for the series by the producers; the absence of women showing “great courage” establishes the maleness of commitment to the role.

The physical appearance of the recruits is not the only site of differential treatment for women and men, and police from citizens; it is also in performance—how they “do” policing
when engaging in practical exercises—that gender is examined. Tula is shown as giggly and inattentive when conducting a simulated policing activity in what the narrator, repeating himself, refers to as “her first taste of life on the beat”. Her actions and responses to the instructing officer’s questions and directions do not match the seriousness of the circumstances replicated for the training activity. Addressing the camera, the female instructor expresses concerns about Tula’s performance and her attitude: “If she doesn’t start taking it more seriously, it’s not going to be good for her”.

Cec’s challenge relates to his physical fitness. In the final sequence for the episode, he struggles to complete push-ups and collapses during a long-distance run. While being attended to by onsite nurses, he describes himself as “a pussy”. In doing so, he questions his masculinity, believing that he has to demonstrate he is “fit” for the job. He needs to meet the fitness requirements, as do the women, but he sees his struggle as a challenge to his masculinity. To camera, the officer supervising the physical training exercise says Cec may fail the course if he does not improve his fitness, to which Cec responds, “I’m going to go home a cop, or in a body bag”. The episode concludes with a teaser for the following instalment in which, says the narrator, a “violent brawl … out on the beat” will test probationer Vanessa, and at the college, recruit Tula is shown on a stretcher as we hear that her “future is suddenly under a cloud”. In these scenes, the two recruits are regarded by police officers as yet to demonstrate their entitlement to be members of the profession, and the basis for these judgements are gender determined. For Tula, it is her refusal to tone down and conform that puts her at risk; for Cec, it is his poor physical fitness. Both are portrayed as lacking physical discipline: their bodies not (yet) having been made docile (Foucault, 1977) and suitably improved to meet the requirements of police membership.
The camera work acts in concert with the lecturing of the protocol officers. In a tracking shot focusing on the military dress shoes and the regimental stick held by the officer as he parades through the college, the television imagery is complicit with that of the regimented nature of policing promulgated by the sergeant. This element of policing that features at the college seems to be at odds with the operational experiences of the previous cohort. Away from the college, the rough-and-tumble of the street, and the laid-back moments of reprieve in the station and the patrol car, do not accord with the parade ground and the spit-polished boots and Sam Browne belt¹ worn by the protocol officers. This visual incongruity parallels the college-versus-street disjuncture that the old hands refer to when talking about the newly arrived probationers. By focusing on the formalities of policing in the many scenes featuring the protocol officers and their constant policing of dress and appearance, Recruits appears to propound the notion of a disciplined state apparatus. Yet the individuals, whether studying at the college or working at a station, are ordinary citizens who happen to be prospective or serving police officers.

The Recruits series was commissioned as an informational vehicle—“an honest documentary of the job” (Shearer, 2009, p. 54)—to explain the work of the police force to the public, rather than as a tool to encourage recruitment. Nevertheless, the police as an organisation is subject to the viewer’s attention as much as the work of its members, whether or not that attention is motivated by career ambitions. In revealing the police workplace, the program offers glimpses of an equal opportunity employer. Among the recruits are men and women of varying ages and of many ethnicities. However, the corporate message of inclusion is often subverted and undermined by the narrative. The depiction of women through

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¹ “A military belt having a supporting strap over the right shoulder, worn by officers. [Designed by after the sword belt invented by Sir Samuel James Browne, 1824-1901, British General]”. (Delbridge, 1997, p. 1881).
traditional gendered tropes suggests they are of lesser status within the profession. Their bodies, like those of the men, are governed or disciplined (Foucault, 1977), but the modes of that governance are different; they are not in unison with a “disciplined organisation” that the protocol officer speaks of, and they are subject to different treatment to the men in both the narrator’s language and the screen images.

Recruits differs from most police reality television programs, including The Force, Behind the Line, and RBT, which are analysed in this study, and others such as Highway Patrol (2009–), Beach Cops (2015–), and Territory Cops (2012–2016). Recruits focuses on a selection of police students, documenting the individual trials and successes of these central characters in their “journey” toward a policing career. In this way, it aligns more closely to the category of reality television referred to as “docu-soap” (Bonner, 2003). It is also a study of indoctrination into a workplace culture, specifically that of the police profession. The student protagonists are cast as undertaking a rite of passage while the guardians of the profession judge their suitability and right to police.

The operationally focused The Force: Behind the Line and RBT employ a different narrative to that used in Recruits. These two programs present the police work itself without any personal back-stories or extended focus on the officers involved. In Paul Mason’s (2003, p. 2) typology, they align with the “media-ride along” form of reality television, a type of “fly on the wall” program. In The Force, the police work featured is predominantly action-oriented law enforcement; in RBT it is depicted through police-citizen interactions, most instances of which are devoid of crime. These programs are discussed in the following section, commencing with The Force: Behind the Line.
The Force: Behind the Line (2006–)

The opening credit sequence for the first episode of The Force: Behind the Line (Noonan, 2006) consists of a man delivering a monologue to camera as he walks through a police station. The mise-en-scène features non-descript office furniture bathed in fluorescent lighting. Officers sit at their desks, looking busy talking on telephones and typing on computers. The narrator is dressed in a suit and wanders between seated, uniformed police officers. Identified by caption as Simon Reeve, the narrator speaks directly to the audience: “Australian police patrol some of the roughest and most remote places in the world, from the major cities and towns to the outback, where policing can be lonely and dangerous”. A newsreader for morning television program Sunrise (Duck, 2007), Reeve has an authoritative voice and a trusted reputation. He explains the concept of the series:

Police have given us extraordinary access to accompany them in their daily work. Now, their job is to protect us, but the challenge is never ending. In the struggle to maintain law and order there is life and death. But that’s all in a day’s work for the brave men and women of the force. (The Force, 2006)

This introductory sequence articulates the ideological purpose of The Force. From the narrator’s description of the program, it is evident that the series is a promotional tool for the police. His claim to “extraordinary access” appears to be a proclamation of exclusivity that boasts of the program’s quality and the television network’s superiority over its unnamed rivals. However, his fawning over the police through reference to their bravery and the difficulties under which they work, suggests that such extraordinary access is conditional on a favourable depiction. Reeve’s introduction tells viewers they can expect The Force to provide some insight into the “daily work” of the police, although such insight will need to be drawn from selected events and heavily edited footage. Viewers might also anticipate from Reeve’s prologue, that the program is a vehicle through which the police are legitimated to its public.
They would not be likely to assume that The Force would be critical, or even neutral, in its treatment of law enforcement.

The establishing office scene dissolves to a dark blue background with several different images spread across the screen. These include a graphic of white boxes which, set above the background, make up the chequered band symbol of the police. The program title appears as a written refrain of the host’s last utterance. An in-set image then expands to take up the full screen which shows police in action as the host in voice-over introduces the three stories for the episode: “Tonight, police mount a drug raid, an identity crisis has police baffled, and a killer is on the loose”. Although it is not mentioned in this introduction, there is a fourth story in the episode involving a dispute between neighbours. After these three brief teasers, a larger graphic appears with the name of the program in full: The Force: Behind the Line.

The stories are then recounted in alternating instalments separated by commercial breaks. Each story has a clear beginning, middle, and ending in keeping with the simple structure acknowledged by the Liaison Officer in Chapter 4 as favoured by producers. The beginning introduces the players and the circumstances. The police are always featured as central players, with at least one from each story being identified by the narrator and with their name and rank displayed on the screen. Some of the offenders, witnesses and victims are introduced at this stage when their presence is relevant to the story. In the traffic stop story referred to as an “identity crisis”, the driver is introduced at the same time as the officer, whereas in the drug raid story the offender is a nameless target until he is apprehended.

The beginning sections also contain descriptions of the circumstances of each story. In each case, the narrator describes the situation shown on the screen, expanding on the
prologue and the story title displayed in a subtitle strap. In this episode, the introductory sequences consist of a traffic stop, a briefing before a drug bust, a radio call-out to a job, and a television news report of a murder. Some stories include footage of officers engaging in action-oriented policing in response to serious crimes, as in the cases of the murder and manhunt, and the drug raid. Others consist of police-citizen interactions, as we see in the identity crisis story and the neighbour dispute. During the last section of the episode, the narratives are presented as having been resolved, with the chronicler generally attributing the credit to the police involved. Each plotline has its own epilogue in the form of text detailing the consequences. In three cases we are told the details of the charge and punishment. Although the neighbour dispute does not result in an arrest, the text advises that one of the families has moved and the police were not called-out again.

As well as adopting a three-act structure for each of the stories, The Force also draws upon the element of repetition which often takes the form of narrated story summations every time the audience is returned to a plotline, often after a commercial break. These reviews reacquaint the audience with the events so far, and explain the actions of the officers, often clarifying legal and procedural elements that underpin the activity. They also continually reinforce the messages that the sponsoring police agency seeks to communicate through the program. For example, each time recapping the drug raid story, the narrator repeats the statement about drugs being taken “off the street”, and in the murder and manhunt story he refers several times to the “net tightening” on the fugitive murderer, invoking the notion of an omnipresent police.

These stories present police work in various specialities: traffic, drugs, general duties, and investigations. Regardless of the area of police practice, the strategies underpinning police sponsored reality television are present in each story. They inculcate responsible
behaviour, promote the organisation, and legitimate the police (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, pp.71–72). The type of story determines which message is foremost and depends on the nature of police action and the officers’ interactions with the public. The drug bust, and the murder investigation and manhunt, are predominantly messages of image management and police legitimacy. In the drug bust story, the police are portrayed as strategic in planning their stake out and raid. The raid is a show of action-oriented policing in which officers are seen arriving in speeding cars and then chasing down an offender on foot. It also works in support of image management in depicting the professional thoroughness of the officers as they collect evidence. They find cash and drugs, some cleverly hidden, some flushed in panic. Similarly, the murder and manhunt story portrays the police as brave and methodical as they search bushland for an armed man, who has killed his estranged wife and her daughter, and threatened further harm to other relatives and to the police.

The epilogue for each of these stories recounts the respective court decisions and prison sentences in order to convey a just ending. While the drug bust story also issues viewers with a “responsibilization” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, pp. 71–72) warning about criminal behaviour, the seriousness of the crime, “possessing prohibited drugs with intent to supply”, ensures that the responsibility message is of less effect to most of its audience than that of police legitimacy and public relations. The murder and manhunt story is even less capable of communicating a lesson of warning to would-be offenders due to the exceptional nature of the crime. Although this crime is horrific in comparison to the other stories, it is a less predictable and uniform event, making it difficult to craft a cautionary message through television. In both cases, police capability is articulated more as a comforting message to law abiding viewers than a caution to potential offenders; the drug bust is cast as a “successful
afternoon” having netted drugs “with a street value of over $30,000”, and the murderer is “off the streets and no one else is hurt”.

The identity crisis story, on the other hand, primarily articulates a message about responsible behaviour. In this incident, a young driver is pulled over by the police. He is unlicensed and, rather than admitting to this minor offence, provides the police with a false name, that of his brother. The police officer, in an illustration of Worrall’s (2013) “street smarts”, is suspicious and investigates this claim with the driver’s passengers who do not corroborate the story. The driver maintains his pretence and is invited to the police station to confirm his identity. At the station, he changes his story, confesses to his deception, and is charged with more serious offences. He acknowledges his foolishness, which the officer describes as having escalated from something small to the point where “he’s now got arrested and finger-printed”. The narrator joins in on the admonishment as the man is fingerprinted and photographed. He presents the man’s “brush with the law” as a salutary lesson. Both the officer and the narrator articulate authoritative messages about public behaviour and responsibility which, when played out on national television, communicate a warning intended for all viewers to heed.

The story referred to by caption as “neighbour dispute” shows officers encouraging responsible behaviours in the absence of evident criminality and in circumstances that do not appear to warrant police involvement. The police are called to a suburban house where the resident tells them he had reprimanded his neighbour for “doing burnouts” in the street, to which his neighbour responded with an implied threat of violence. The police question both neighbours and move to-and-fro between the two houses, unable to establish whether either alleged offence has been committed. There appears to be a long history of niggling, but non-violent, conflict between the two households, and the current police involvement seems to be
an inevitability to all the officers involved. The senior officer is clearly frustrated by the waste of police time and resources on such petty matters. Speaking to camera, he says, “When people ask me what I do, you’re like trying to be society’s parents and teach people how to act as well as what’s right and what is wrong”. While the police are expected to deal with issues of this nature, being society’s parents and teaching them how to behave is an often-frustrating component of their work.

*The Force* fulfils the narrator’s promise of showing police at work and, in so doing, communicates the “logics” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 40) of police sponsored reality television. However, the presence, actions and words of the officers who appear on screen are not the sole means by which the idea of police is constructed. There are other components of the text that articulate what policing is and what it means in contemporary Australia. The words and tone of the narrator, the style of camera work, the selected editing of the footage and the addition of music all work together to create a dramatic version of the police which is often at odds with the demeanour and utterances of the police officers featured in the program. In the first story, for example, the narrator’s exaggerated description of the scene in the detective’s office does not reflect the language and tone used in the briefing, which sounds more routine than exciting. The narrator tells the viewers the police are “planning to storm a suburban house to catch a drug dealer”, although the senior officer describes him as “Mr Average”. The narrator frames the subsequent car journey to the raid as “closing in on the home of the suspected drug dealer”, despite the fact the location of the house had already been established. His exaggeration of the danger—the detectives “are prepared for anything”—contrasts with the lead officer’s more prosaic list of likely scenarios: “one may expect he’d run, not open the door, flush [the drugs] or go for a runner over the back fence with it”. When the target returns to his house, the drama is heightened by music, which, apart
from during the opening credits had been absent from the program. The raid itself is filmed with a handheld camera as the television crew accompany the officers entering house, thus crafting additional immediacy to the action.

Similarly, in the neighbour dispute story, the narrator plays up the prospect of danger to the officers who respond to the job: “passions can run high in these circumstances, so officers must approach with caution”. Certainly, every call-out does present unknown risks to the police and the public, but the officers attending appear to be well prepared. Their insightful comments and calm demeanour do not match with the narrator’s perilous scene-setting. One of the officers, in speaking about this call-out, provides a more instructive generalisation about police work: “there’s always three sides to the story and we’ve just got to find out which one’s the truth”. Rather than dwelling on the potential for harm, as the narrator does, this officer recognises the neighbour dispute as yet another social problem for contemporary society: “it’s getting more prevalent nowadays, people don’t get out and socialise with their neighbours as much as they used to”. The story is uneventful, and no criminality is detected, thus providing a representative example of the mundane nature of the majority of police work. However, the melodramatic narration overplays the banal reality of the story, and jars with the footage of the back and forth between the neighbours’ doorsteps that is used to tell it.

*The Force* not only articulates an idea of policing that differs from the reality of the job, it also appropriates some of the agency of police work. Although *The Force* shares its surveillance function with the audience, ensuring the program acts as a synopticon (Mathiesen, 1997) for social control in tandem with the police, the program promotes its alliance with the police in order to give it and its broadcaster, the Seven Network, policing cachet. Throughout the episode, the logo formed by the title, *The Force*, and the banner
graphic appear whenever superimposed text is displayed. These straps are used to identify police officers, by rank and name, or by operational teams. This styling appears to associate the officers and units with the television program and its broadcast network rather than the policing organisation, which in this episode, although unidentified, is the Western Australian Police. The epilogue graphics have a practical purpose in that they provide a method for closing the stories with information not available during production, including court judgements and sentencing. Nevertheless, these graphics, also act to give the program, rather than the police officers who appear in it, the authority of justice.

*The Force* does act to legitimate the police to its public, albeit with some of that legitimacy arrogated by the program itself. Despite the narrator's claim to extraordinary access, the program does not explore the back-stage of policing, therefore giving little insight into police culture. However, there is one aspect of the police workplace that the episode communicates: the near absence of women and the lack of agency permitted to them. Women are absent from the action and those few who are shown are station-bound, silent and passive listeners to the men. One female detective is seen in the drug raid briefing, and two uniformed women nod quietly while senior male officers expound on their theories and strategies in the murder and manhunt story. Despite the claim in the narrator’s opening statement that the program will show all that is involved in “a day’s work for the brave men and women of the force”, the women appear to be excluded from the heroics. This aspect of policing on television was identified in the interviews I conducted with police-affiliated participants, as I discuss in Chapter 7. Student 8, for example, a male policing student in his early 20s, observed that there was “a lot more diversity in the actual police”, and Student 5 (male, late 20s) said that television versions of police were “too male dominant” in comparison to the real world of policing. The paucity of female officers in the program
suggests a profession that is more male dominated than is the case of the modern police agency; a message that conflicts with the corporate strategies of the sponsoring police agencies (Australia New Zealand Police Advisory Agency, 2013).

**RBT (2010–)**

Random breath testing (RBT) operations began in New South Wales in 1982 (NSW Police Department, 1983). Since that time, fatalities resulting from motor vehicle accidents involving alcohol have fallen from nearly 40% of all deaths to around 15% (Centre for Road Safety, 2014). In NSW alone, police conduct over 5 million breath tests each year (Centre for Road Safety, 2014). The RBT station has therefore become one the most common points of contact between police and citizens (Terer & Brown, 2014). The high profile and continuing presence of this effective public safety strategy over such an extended period has rendered clarification of the acronym unnecessary for Australian citizens. As a result, the television series *RBT* is marketable for its succinct and recognisable title.

Unlike the other reality television programs considered in this chapter, the first televised episode of *RBT* (Dabro, 2010) does not feature a series prologue prior to the opening credits. Although the production company, Screentime, made what its producer described as a “supertease” for the series, the Nine Network chose not to include it in the broadcast version of episode one (personal communication, October 14, 2017). The non-commercial recording of the episode used for this analysis included some additional introductory content that was most likely made as a series tease, but it may have instead been used for promotion in the weeks leading up to the season. This segment included jump cut editing of street operations interspersed with officers providing comments to the camera:

People continue to run the gauntlet and risk the lives of other people on the road.
[Offenders are] potentially driving a bullet that can kill five people straight away.

Operations are out there all the time.

If you drink drive we’re going to catch you eventually.

In the same vein, the episode itself opens with the unseen male narrator, Andrew Daddo, stating “ Tonight on RBT”, after which a series of police-citizen interactions appear on the screen to the accompaniment of dramatic music. Daddo, as a perennial host of variety television programs and an author of several children’s books (Creative Representation, 2017), is a trusted voice, but perhaps with a different kind of authority from the crime series actor that Corser brought to Recruits, or that of the news reader that Reeve gave to The Force: Behind the Line.

The opening credits that follow the episode preview clearly signal the premise of the series. Like the series promotion, the vision consists of the paraphernalia of road traffic and water policing operations, including insignia-bearing patrol cars and boats, uniformed officers, road blocks, flashing lights and signage. These images are paired with audio of police giving instructions to citizens to the accompaniment of bland, electronic music. This combination of images and sound communicates an omnipresent police road traffic and water patrol which, when televised, articulates a form of simulated policing in that it attempts to achieve “operational policing outcomes through image-related modes of policing” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 206). The omnipresent breath testing station and the inevitability of the RBT operation, already a familiar policing activity, have been normalised such that citizens should expect that they may be subject to random testing anytime and anywhere. While the stories communicated in the events of each episode show the process of testing and the consequences of being detected driving over the limit, the images of the police at work in the
opening credits suggest the inevitability of experiencing that process and constitute a warning against drink-driving.

The episode consists of four stories which, as in the case of The Force, are told in a series of alternating instalments separated by commercial breaks. The first story is situated at an RBT station on a major inner-city Sydney road early on a Saturday morning after the “city’s pubs and clubs empty”; the second shows officers from the water police patrolling Sydney Harbour; an RBT road-side operation near the country town of Tamworth features in the third story; and a combined breath and drug testing station in Sydney’s Kings Cross makes up the fourth. At each of these sites, the testing of an individual citizen provides the story.

The stories are told through the same three act structure as deployed in The Force and recognised as a preferred mode of storytelling (beginning, middle and end) as described by the Liaison Officer and the Television Producer in Chapter 4. The program also deploys repetitive recaps, dramatic music and earnest voice-over in the same way as Recruits and RBT. Additionally, the breathalyser apparatus, the “ticker” as the Television Producer referred to it in Chapter 4, is a signature device. Each breath test is accompanied by a graphic at the bottom of the screen that depicts a digital meter flickering its numerical readings frantically to the accompaniment of equally hectic electronic sounds. The scene always ends before the ticker comes to rest on the alcohol reading, thus creating suspense and signalling the return to another story or a commercial break before the result is shown. The breathalyser becomes a symbol of authority for the program, combining the certainty of science, through the measurement of blood alcohol levels, with the weight of the law in the form of the police administering the tests.
In the first story, a young male driver, Dean, is shown to “blow over the limit” in a roadside breath test. The narrator tells the audience that Dean has been arrested and taken to a “booze bus” for a subsequent test which, the arresting officer explains, is for evidential purposes “that will end up in court”. Dean’s story is played out in the booze bus as he recounts what he has consumed throughout the evening and the various nightclubs he has visited. The officer comments on Dean’s blood-shot eyes as the camera lingers on his face long enough to allow the audience to hold the same suspicion about his appearance. Dean attributes this to conjunctivitis, but his stumbling over the word makes this claim sound dubious. A moment of silence with the focus held on Dean’s face provides the audience with just enough time to make that judgement before the narrator outlines the consequences of being over the limit: “Dean needs to drive for work and losing his licence could result in losing his job”. Indeed, Dean does register a positive reading and his licence is immediately suspended. The ending for Dean’s story shows him reflecting on his plight: “I think people who drink too much and drive are idiots, but I thought one drink an hour, which is what I had [inaudible]. I paid the consequences. I’m not looking forward to telling my parents. Not good”. He is shown walking home as the sun rises while an overlaid graphic records his penalty which is also read out by the narrator: “Dean was convicted and fined $750. His license was suspended for 8 months”.

The stories played out on Sydney Harbour provide an opportunity to display the work of the Water Police. One of the officers explains that their role is to detect anyone in charge of a boat being over the limit and “get them off the water”. This strategy is shown through two police-citizen encounters. In the first of these, they pull up a boat hosting a stag party. The skipper, a professional sailor, states that he has not been drinking and is tested immediately, recording a zero reading. The ticker is not shown in this encounter, and no music-accompanied
drama is manufactured. Instead, the segment is included as an example of responsible citizen behaviour and, through the officers’ polite responses, favourable image management for the organisation. The police interact good-naturedly with the boat passengers—young men who are being served alcohol by semi-clad women, whose breasts are obscured through pixilation for the benefit of prime-time, family viewers. The second police-citizen encounter on the harbour involves a small boat with four people aboard. One claims to be the skipper and, because he says he has recently consumed a can of beer, he must wait with the police for 15 minutes to be tested. After he records a safe level of alcohol and is permitted to leave, the officer reflects on the encounter. He says that his experience gave him some suspicions about who was the piloting the boat, but he was satisfied that his intervention had ensured that “as long as you’ve got someone [under the limit] to drive, it’s all good as far as we’re concerned”.

The third story involves another roadside random breath testing operation. In contrast to the early morning testing in the city involving Dean, the Tamworth RBT operation features Michael, a young plumber. He is an entertaining character; smiling and joking, he speaks in a broad Australian accent and, in his tradie hi-vis clothes, he appears as a likeable country lad. Like the boat skipper in the earlier segment, he has recently consumed alcohol and must wait to be tested. When Michael is subjected to the roadside test, like Dean, he records a positive reading and is told by the officer that he has been “placed under arrest for the purposes of a breath analysis test”. While he waits in the booze bus knowing his licence is at stake, he makes light of his circumstances. The officers laugh along with him as he tells them that the worst part of the situation is his dislike for the brand of beer he had been drinking. He also quips about his wife’s likely reaction and the propensity of locals to engage in drink driving.

The inclusion of Michael’s story is not just for comic relief. He asks the officers questions about RBT operations, their responses giving insight for the viewer, too. His
circumstances provide the opportunity for the officers and the narrator to detail technical aspects of the process. The audience learns that extreme heat prevents the police from calibrating the booze bus breathalyser, making it necessary to take Michael to the station for the supplementary test. This change of scene allows for another explanation of police procedures and, as the narrator tells us, the various implications for his sobriety: “nearly an hour since the roadside test, but have four beers on an empty stomach in the heat pushed him over the limit?” Michael’s story also contains the type of self-reflective moment that can convey the preferred police message. Like Dean, but in his own style, he acknowledges the risk he has taken: “I’ve driven. Play the game, accept the trophy. Isn’t that what they say?”. When he eventually undertakes the test and records a safe reading, he reacts with a mixture of relief and penitence, further justifying his inclusion in the program as he both entertains and teaches the audience.

The fourth story in the episode is filmed at Kings Cross in Sydney which, as the officer on camera explains, is well known for crime, drugs and alcohol. This roadside operation is set up to conduct both drug and alcohol testing. The narrator describes the driver in this story as “suspiciously happy, Scottish Deborah”. She and her out-of-shot passengers treat the situation as an opportunity to joke with the film crew and the officer. Flirting with the officer, she says “we love uniforms”. The officer maintains an affable if somewhat embarrassed manner as Deborah makes risqué comments about the breathalyser procedure. The breath test confirms Deborah is not affected by alcohol, but, as the host tells us, she still has to undertake a drug test which can detect cannabis or methamphetamines. The officer asks her to lick the drug test device, which presents her with another opportunity to make a suggestive remark, much to the delight of her passengers. The narrator explains how the test strip would show a positive reading. Deborah’s story finishes with her passing the drug test as
she declares she is “intoxicated with nothing but life”. This is another light-hearted story that shows the police going about their work in a friendly manner. It also provides the opportunity to explain the mechanics of the drug test. This expository element, while providing an important component of the program, demonstrates the observation made by the Liaison Officer in the previous chapter: the drug testing process is not as suspenseful as the breath test and, even in the first episode of the series, it is evident that this device is not able to create the same viewing experience as the ticker.

As well as these four stories, a medley of police-citizen interaction sequences are included as fillers between stories and after commercial breaks. These segments, featuring drivers framed by their car-door windows as they undertake—and pass—breath tests, add more characters to entertain the viewers. The police are mostly out of frame, but they can be heard engaging amicably with the drivers. These vignettes show that breath testing operations cast a broad net and act to reinforce responsible driver behaviour; many people are tested but most are under the limit. They also work to legitimate the police who, in their low-key appearance and respectful demeanour, are seen as engaged in mundane activities that are more aligned to community service work, rather than action-oriented law enforcement. Like the more extended sequences, these cameos articulate the messages at the centre of police-sponsored reality television strategies identified by Lee and McGovern (2013a), in encouraging responsible driving behaviours, managing favourable public relations for the NSW Police Force, and legitimating the institution of police in Australia.

In the previous chapter, I observed that the Television Producer stressed that RBT is about the drivers rather than the police. Episode 1 of the series bears this out. While officers are present in all of the stories and some of them are identified and speak to camera, the citizens featured in the main stories occupy most of the screen time. Most are likeable
characters; Michael the country plumber and Deborah the Scottish joker are particularly entertaining and give the program its appeal. Importantly, the people featured are not “crooks” like many of those in The Force. Traffic policing is the principal point of contact between the police and the law-abiding citizen (Corbett, 2008; Emsley, 1993). In showing that connection, RBT promotes responsible driving while showing the NSW Police Force in a favourable light.

The program also communicates meaning about the institution of policing, if not stories about individual police officers. The police are omnipresent, and members of the public who are caught driving under the influence of alcohol, either by their own admissions or as expressed by the arresting officers, have themselves to blame. The ordinariness of the motorists and their lack of threatening criminality ensures that what is communicated about the crime of drink driving is ambiguous. Michael’s good fortune in having a delayed test at the station is depicted as much a matter for celebration and relief as it is for admonishment for drinking and driving. His genial nature ensures viewer sympathy despite his self-acknowledged recklessness. In contrast, Dean is framed as deserving his punishment. The two men are equally responsible for their behaviour, a mistake they both concede. However, Michael, the laconic tradesman, is presented as deserving of his lucky break in a way that Dean, the regular clubber, proves not to be. The delay in Michael’s testing at the station could have been long enough for his blood alcohol concentration to dilute, meaning he, too, may well have been over the limit when he was pulled over. He is judged by the narrator and the police as lucky rather than irresponsible. Nevertheless, despite the negative result this time, Michael, like all other drivers, can expect to be subject to a random breath test in the future. This continuing possibility is the lasting observation for Michael, and in sharing it with the program’s viewers, RBT makes this message clear to the road users of New South Wales.
Although women officers were under-represented in the first episode of *The Force*, they are entirely missing in *RBT*. The absence is likely to be attributable to a lack of female officers in the units deployed to traffic and water policing. As the interviewees in the previous chapter stated, operational circumstances dictate which police officers are available, and the narrative merits of each police-citizen interaction further limit which stories, and therefore who, progresses to the final edit. Nevertheless, women are underrepresented in specialist roles in policing including those featured in *RBT* (Irving, 2009). Despite the Television Producer’s contention that the program is about the citizens rather than the police, it does communicate the notion that police are omnipresent but, in its male-only ubiquity, the police force of *RBT* inaccurately constructs the profession as one from which women are absent.

As a vehicle of public relations, *RBT* depicts a police force engaged with its community. It also projects a favourable image of New South Wales through the places and people featured in the program. Sydney Harbour and the town of Tamworth are scenic and emblematic locations. The police officers are cordial and proficient in their duties, and the citizens, for the most part, are affable and compliant.

The stories in this episode of *RBT* deliver on the strategies of contemporary police engagement with the media as defined by Lee and McGovern (2013a). The “responsibilization” of driver behaviour is communicated through the consequences that befall Dean and the continued freedoms of others who pass the breathalyser test. The image management dividends for the NSW Police Force are achieved through the demeanour and politeness of the officers appearing on screen. The interactions between the officers and the public ensure that the institution of policing and its operations are legitimated to the television audience and the wider community.
The reality television programs analysed in this chapter are vehicles for communicating the preferred message of the police organisation. As sponsored productions, this is to be expected. However, it is clear that *Recruits* differs from *The Force: Behind the Line* and *RBT* in the way it delivers its messages, and what those messages communicate about the police. *Recruits* concentrates on a group of policing aspirants, allowing their personalities to present a favourable face for future policing. Its purpose is image management. *The Force: Behind the Line* and *RBT* feature police-citizen interactions. As such, they extend beyond a public relations function to engage in the promotion of responsible behaviour and the legitimacy of the police institution.

As well as products of police public relations, these programs function as simulated policing operations in that they remind the viewer of the constant presence of the police in the public sphere. Again, *Recruits* does this in a different way to *The Force* and *RBT*. The four aspirants at the College and the two new probationers each have their own stories which are informative and entertaining. They are the chosen few from the many of their respective cohorts and, as potential police officers, they represent the police institution. In standing in for their colleagues, their presence on television testifies to the seemingly inexhaustible line of past, current and prospective officers ready to enforce the law. In *The Force* and *RBT*, the officers are more directly engaged in operational policing, consequently their simulated police function is more immediate. But, all three of these programs portray policing as a performance of “permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance” (Foucault, 1977, p. 214). These programs act as “tiny theatres” (Foucault, 1977, p. 113), not of punishment, as Foucault contends of the panopticon prison, but of public order through the synoptic device of the television.
Although these programs convey messages of self-responsibility, image management and police legitimacy, they also communicate messages about who the police are; indeed, who has the right to police. In addressing the second research question, which asks how Australian police are represented in cop shows, it is evident from my analysis that, although officers are shown in a favourable way in reality television series, they are not representative of the modern police agency, particularly in regard to gender. *Recruits* constructs an occupational experience for women that is vastly different to that of the men, an expression of discrimination that conflicts with corporate policies that advocate for women to engage in all aspects of police work (NSW Police Force, n.d., 2013, 2015). Although women constitute only a third of the police workforce (ANZPAA, 2013), *The Force* and *RBT* construct one of even less diversity through the almost exclusive presence of white male officers. Despite these inaccuracies, the police institution is endorsed by the images communicated through the three texts.

In this chapter I have analysed three reality television programs featuring policing. As objects created through partnerships between the police institution and the television industry, they project positive images of policing. In the following chapter, I examine three drama series that feature police to determine what their stories and characters communicate about police in Australia.
Chapter 6: Texts 2: Police Drama Series

Following on from the previous chapter, which focused on reality television programs featuring police, in this chapter I consider police drama series. In doing so, I apply the same formal or discursive analysis to elements of the narrative, with the aim of explicating the symbolic meaning of police and policing constructed in the Australian cop show. The texts analysed for this chapter are Blue Heelers (1993–2006), Wildside (1997–1999) and East West 101 (2007–2011).


The first episode of Blue Heelers entitled A Women’s Place (Morphett, 1993), was broadcast at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 18 January 1994 (Matthews, n.d.-a). The series continued for another 509 episodes over 12 years (Screen Australia, 2016a). Arguably, Blue Heelers is a drama series in a police setting. That is, the policing milieu of the station and its officers are at the centre of the dramatic events that constitute the stories the program tells. The characters and their relationships drive the narrative throughout the series, providing the circumstances in which crimes and other events requiring police action are related. The policing stories are not always the raisons d’être of the program in the way they are to archetypal procedural cop shows, such as Homicide and Matlock. Despite its soap opera elements, it does fit within Robert Reiner’s (2010, p. 198) “community police” category of law enforcement story. In this way, Blue Heelers articulates the “harmonious relations within the police force and between it and the wider society” (Reiner, 2010, p. 199). It therefore legitimates the police to its television audience.

Each episode of Blue Heelers typically features a crime story which Kate Matthews (n.d.-a) refers to as the “more serious ‘A’ storyline”. This story is often “offset by a lighter, briefer ‘B’ story” (Matthews, n.d.-a). But, the stories, both personal and professional, of those
working in the police station of the fictional country town of Mount Thomas are at the centre of the narrative. Matthews identifies this as a combination of police drama with soap opera elements. It is not, however, primarily a soap opera in a police station or, like *Home and Away* (1988–), a soap opera in which there happens to be a police character. In this way, *Blue Heelers* participates in rather than belongs to these genres (Derrida, 1980, p. 65). Devoid of the typical soap opera’s continuing story, *Blue Heelers* is a series rather than a serial. Its stories are not necessarily carried over to the next episode but tend to be resolved in the allocated time. Unlike most police procedurals, the personal lives of the officers in Mount Thomas are also incorporated into the stories. This aspect of *Blue Heelers*, in which characters develop and relationships between them evolve, features strongly in the program and can be seen as a key factor in its popularity and longevity.

Despite the program’s genre hybridity, it works primarily as a cop show. In placing police at the centre of the narrative it necessarily communicates much about the profession and the ideology of law and order even though this is not always in the same action-oriented, crime-solving style seen in other police drama series that do not have soap opera elements. Reiner (2010) describes this emphasis on the “human rather than organizational or technological resources of the police” (p. 199) as typical of the community police category of law enforcement story. In this context, through the police of Mount Thomas, *Blue Heelers* also provides some insight into Australian society more broadly. The following analysis of the first episode of *Blue Heelers*, including the opening titles, expands on this statement.

The opening credits for *Blue Heelers*, which to 2018 viewers may appear as unsophisticated in style, make clear to the viewer the setting and genre. They establish the country locale and the focus on police officers at work. Following a written statement of production ownership by Hal McElroy/Southern Star, the image of a generic police badge
and the program title appear overlaid against a still photograph of a blue heeler cattle dog with rolling Australian countryside in the background. The sequence continues with repetition of this format of a backdrop of stills of arcadian country scenes, but it replaces the badge image with an inset frame in which moving footage depicts each of the main cast members in turn. As the characters are introduced individually in medium shot beside text bearing their names, the backdrop transitions to a new image. These pictures include: a tractor in a paddock; stockmen on horseback mustering cattle; a panorama of a country town; road signs depicting wombats and kangaroos as driving hazards; windmills at dusk; rows of steel drums farm-fashioned as mail boxes; and a post and rail fence. Inset, the younger police characters are depicted variously running, using a radar device, adjusting uniform, and using police mobile communications. Three other cast members, the sergeant in charge of the station, the wife of one of the officers, and the publican also appear. These characters simply acknowledge the camera in their respective sequences. It is clear from the pairing of the officers with the photographs of rural settings that the police characters are presented as having a strong connection with the citizens of their town and district. Oddly, the theme music, *Reckless Eyeballing*, an instrumental by Australian indie band, The Cruel Sea, is almost a parody of country music\(^2\). Its style may have some country music characteristics, but its rhythm and pace, and the reputation of its performers, ensure that it is clearly a metropolitan variation of the genre. This misalignment of an alt-country theme tune with *Blue Heeler’s* setting, in which a more traditional form of country music might be preferred, is indicative of the program’s construction of rural life for its predominantly urban viewers.

\(^2\) Ian McFarlane (1999) classifies The Cruel Sea’s style as “surf, blues, funk”, noting that “it was not without irony that the band’s atmospheric music evoked the feel of wide open spaces, yet they commanded a fanatical following on the Sydney inner-city pub circuit” (p. 148).
Like most of the programs throughout the 12 series, the debut episode does include a more serious “A story” (Matthews, n.d.-a) featuring a crime, but much of the program consists of establishing scenes. The purpose of these scenes is to familiarise viewers with the characters, locations and the premise of the series; that is, a depiction of life in an Australian country town told through stories that feature the professional and personal experiences of the local police officers. *A Woman's Place* presents these features to the audience through the introduction of a police officer to her new posting in the town of Mount Thomas. As the episode unfolds, it is evident the title is ambiguous. Initially, it appears that the woman in question is Constable Maggie Doyle (played by Lisa McCune), the newly posted officer to the all-male local police station. Her place, that is her legitimacy as a police officer, is at first questioned and, through a series of incidents that prove her professional and cultural suitability, she is subsequently recognised as one of the team. As I argue later, despite being accepted by her colleagues, her right to police is qualified. The title just as readily refers to the crime story in which another woman, Sally-Anne Williams (Radha Mitchell), has been raped by her boyfriend and is then subjected to further victimisation for reporting the offence. Her place, too, is challenged. In Sally-Anne’s case, her civil and legal rights, first to say no to a man’s sexual demands, and then to obtain justice for the harm done to her, are subject to question.

The introductory elements of the plot serve the purposes of a pilot in an effective way. The circumstances in which Constable Maggie Doyle begins her new posting are shared by the audience as her first days unfold. Viewers learn about Maggie as they witness her initial experiences. At the same time, they learn about Mount Thomas and what awaits Maggie in her new life as one of its police officers. As well as familiarising the audience with the setting and the characters, the episode also serves as an introduction to the attitudes held by the
officers about themselves and those they police, aspects that dominate and define the profession. Indeed, Maggie’s arrival constitutes a series of encounters with various manifestations of police occupational culture, particularly machismo (Waddington, 2012), sexism (Westmarland, 2001), cynicism, and conservative isolationism and solidarity (Reiner, 2010).

In the opening scene, a car passes a road sign indicating the distance to Mount Thomas. The young woman driving the car travels toward a random breath station being conducted by two police officers, one in uniform, the other a detective in plain clothes. Using binoculars to spot drivers and noticing a woman in the approaching car, the detective, PJ (Martin Sachs), claims from his colleague, Constable Nick Schultz (William McInnes), the opportunity to stop and test her: “I’ll take this one, Nick”. The uniformed officer advises him to “make sure she isn’t married this time”, a comment that suggests PJ has a reputation for promiscuity. His demeanour as he engages with the driver supports this suggestion. The camera adopts PJ’s point of view when he administers the breath test, in doing so the woman is shown at a subordinated angle having to look up during the encounter. The driver questions being breathalysed by a detective, noting it being irregular “where I come from”. Misreading this statement, PJ presumes the woman knows about police from fraternising with them, ignorant of the possibility she may in fact be a fellow officer. He says to his partner, “looks like we’ve got a police groupie. Might have to discuss it with her over a cup of coffee”. When the woman subsequently identifies herself as Constable Maggie Doyle, the new posting to Mount Thomas, PJ is clearly taken aback. His authority challenged by Maggie’s assertiveness and her professional status, PJ responds awkwardly: “Sorry, constable, I thought you were a girl, I mean a woman”. Maggie’s expression implies she is both familiar with and annoyed by this attitude to women that prevails in Australian society and dominates the culture of her
chosen profession. The scene ends with PJ asking if she will be staying at the hotel and, despite her non-verbal cues making plain her displeasure, he recovers his composure and says he expects to meet her there for a drink that evening. Her response to his flirtatious attempts is non-committal: “We’ll see”.

The interaction between PJ and Maggie in this opening scene hints at a conflictual professional and personal relationship between the two officers. In fact, despite the awkward start, they do become romantically involved later in the series, binding the narrative course and character development of the series to conservative notions of a woman’s place being relative to a man. Although gender is often used as a site of conflict in conventional narratives, the implications for Maggie’s professional status are made clear in this display of policing hyper-masculinity. PJ assumes the role of the dominant male to impress a female motorist using the authority of his office as well as what he vainly appears to consider as the allure of his masculinity. When Maggie reveals her insider status, PJ is embarrassed because he had regarded her as a potential conquest. In presuming she was a police groupie, he falsely saw his chances improved. His awkward response has left him looking foolish and less commanding. His detective skills have been shown as wanting because he did not register her hint: “where I come from”. He saw her as “a girl, I mean a woman”, failing to consider that this did not disqualify her from being a fellow officer. Had it been a male in these circumstances, he would not have made this professional misstep; he would more likely have offered a manly, or in the Australian vernacular, a “blokey” welcome. Instead, he has shamed himself and slighted a fellow officer. Despite his alpha-male, police manner being exposed as a ridiculous affectation in front of his fellow officers, he nevertheless expects Maggie to accede to his request to have a drink with him at the pub after work.
In subsequent scenes at the hotel and police station, Maggie meets her new colleagues and other citizens of the town. Her arrival provides the means for the audience, too, to be introduced to the traditionally conservative contexts of country Australia and police culture through these characters, and to witness the reception of the new officer by her colleagues and the locals. Checking into her temporary accommodation at the hotel, she is met with surprise by both the publican and one of her new colleagues, neither of whom were anticipating a woman as the new officer. Maggie establishes rapport with Chris Riley (Julie Nihill), the publican. With wary expectations of the evening ahead with her new colleagues, Maggie co-opts Chris’s assistance, saying to her, “Sometimes when a police officer arrives at a new station the other officers think it’s funny to get them drunk on their first night”.

Reporting to the police station, the officer in charge, Senior Sergeant Tom Croydon (John Wood), also fails to recognise that Maggie is the anticipated new arrival, although he is the only person among the police and locals to know that a woman officer is expected. Having addressed her as “girly”, which she again bristles at, he tells her to report for duty in the morning and sends her on her way. Returning to the pub, she eats dinner by herself until she is joined by PJ and Nick. With Chris substituting water for the vodkas she orders, Maggie keeps pace with her colleagues until they discover the ruse. Later, one of the hotel employees visits Chris to tell her she has been raped and beaten by her boyfriend. Chris wakes Maggie and asks her to speak with the victim.

Adding to PJ’s sexual opportunism under the guise of police-citizen interaction that Maggie experiences in the opening scene, she is exposed to gendered elements of police culture from the outset. She is referred to dismissively as a girl or girly by two police officers; her bona fide status as a police officer questioned each time she introduces herself; her induction to the work team is through a drinking session; and she is expected to deal with
a sexual assault case, which is regarded as fitting work for policewomen, particularly in relation to victim care (Westmarland, 2017). A Women’s Place appears to highlight some of these manifestations of police culture and the contested place for women in the profession. Some of the macho behaviours are mocked humorously, and it appears inevitable that Maggie will prove she has a valid place in policing before the end of the episode. While the program might challenge some aspects of policing and Australian society more broadly, Blue Heelers nevertheless perpetuates the culturally approved role for women. Maggie may prove her place in policing, but her role is limited to working with women, and the crimes that affect them.

Despite the increasing number of women pursuing a career in policing, they still account for only a quarter of sworn officers in Australia (Irving, 2009). The expectation that a police officer would be a man is partly a legacy of the absence of women from the profession until wartime disruptions created opportunities out of necessity. Permanent employment in peacetime, however, did not include equality in the form of police powers and employment entitlements until as recently as 50 years ago (NSW Police Force, n.d.). The “idea of police” (Klockars, 1985) has also been conflated with an “amplified masculinity” considered necessary for law enforcement, a combination that works to make women officers “invisible” (Belknap, 2014). Women often find that their standing as police officers, when recognised, is marginal and conditional. The police workplace has historically created “gendered specialists” (Westmarland, 2001, p. 15) of women, relegating them to what are considered low status duties involving victims, particularly those of their own gender, and children (Silvestri, 2003; Westmarland, 2001). Male officers can elect to follow hyper-masculine specialist paths, such as tactical operations squads and highway patrol, while women are often assigned less privileged “specialisations” regardless of their career aspirations. Louise
Westmarland’s (2001) ethnographic research with women officers indicates that the gendering of police roles has lessened and women are increasingly being assigned to what were traditionally regarded as male duties. In Blue Heelers, however, Maggie’s assignment to the gendered specialist role is in keeping with police and societal expectations that female officers “will be ‘naturally’ more sympathetic when dealing with victims of sexual assault because they ‘know how it feels’.” (Westmarland, 2017, p. 3).

Despite the initial questions Maggie faces and some missteps in applying her craft, by the end of the program she is able to demonstrate that she is a capable officer, thus fulfilling the episode’s title statement and showing that there is a place for women in policing. In the final scene, she confronts Bruce McLaren (Josh Picker), the offender at the centre of the main plot or “more serious A storyline” (Matthews, n.d.-a), when he refuses to leave the pub at the direction of the owner. Bruce is contemptuous of Maggie for her assertiveness. He is as disdainful of her gender as he is dismissive of her professional status. He goads her to make him leave. Rather than engaging him in the physical action that he tries to provoke, she challenges him verbally over his behaviour to women in front of his football team, thus emasculating his macho position. When he leaves the pub in a confusion of hatred and shame, her station colleagues, who are watching on, show their approval. Sergeant Croydon buys her a drink and invites her to call him Boss, as do “my men”. While this might appear as acceptance into the policing brotherhood, she has demonstrated her policing credentials only in the field of “emotional labour” (Brown & Heidensohn, 2000, p. 92) suited to women, rather than in the physical realm of men’s work which is regarded as “real (male) police work” (Brown, 2007, p. 216). Furthermore, Croydon demonstrates that it is still a man’s privilege to bestow the right to police: Maggie’s right is not only contingent on doing women’s work, her competence can only be determined by a man.
The crime that constitutes this episode’s “A story” exposes police and community attitudes to gender and to domestic violence. The investigation into the rape of a young woman by her partner presents issues related to police culture in the form of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), and male colleagues’ attitudes to women as victims (Westmarland, 2001). As part of this story, some of the locals express similar views about gender, replicating broader societal attitudes to women and class (J. Butler, 1999) which is hinted at by the title of the episode.

In this plot line, the character of Sally-Anne Williams, a kitchen hand at the pub, is raped by her boyfriend, Bruce McLean, the son of one of the district’s more wealthy and influential families. Bruce also derives masculine kudos as the captain of the local football team. During the two early scenes in which Maggie visits the pub, the audience is given some insight into the nature of Bruce and Sally-Anne’s relationship. In the first of these scenes, he is seen celebrating and drinking excessively with his team while she looks on sadly. In the second, Sally-Anne is heard telling Bruce she is tired of his infidelities, but he denies there are “any other girls”. Sally-Anne attempts to leave without him, but Bruce forcefully escorts her from the bar, telling her he will drive.

Later that evening, after Bruce beats and rapes her, Sally-Anne returns to the pub. During her initial interview with Sally-Anne, Maggie tells her that Bruce’s action is a crime and she encourages her to make a statement to that effect. However, some of Maggie’s male colleagues appear less sympathetic to that course of action. These characters are portrayed as having more extensive policing experience which would give them greater awareness of the realities of the justice system and the poor likelihood of a successful prosecution for rape, particularly in an intimate relationship (Lievore, 2004). But, some of their comments are unsupportive of the victim and cast sex offences and domestic violence as less serious crimes.
Sergeant Croydon is aware that the legal system makes rape prosecution a painful experience for victims and often fails to provide justice. He also knows that the McLean family is wealthy enough to have a strong legal team and therefore able to deny Sally hers. PJ, too, appears to recognise that the legal process will not be easy for Sally-Anne: “His mates will just go into court and say she’s the town bike”. Nevertheless, immediately after this acknowledgement of victim blaming as a tactical legal ploy, PJ responds sceptically to Sergeant Croydon’s instruction to arrest Bruce: “Well, she’s his girlfriend, mate. It’s not as if she hasn’t had it before”. Similarly, Constable Wayne Patterson (Grant Bowler), Bruce’s football team-mate and PJ’s assisting officer in the arrest, says: “Some guys won’t take no for an answer”. Wayne’s wife, Roz (Anne Burbrook), challenges this as more victim blaming: “So, it’s her fault he raped her?”. Wayne’s response, “I didn’t say that”, is equivocal. He does not need to say what he thinks for the audience to understand his view: Bruce is a football teammate and Sally-Anne is Bruce’s girlfriend. These relationships seem to determine for Wayne the rights of the man—inalienable ownership—and the place of his woman—the possession.

The male officers’ comments are echoed by the perpetrator. When he is arrested, Bruce makes clear his sense of entitlement over Sally-Anne’s body: “You’re talkin’ rape? She’s my girlfriend”. He does not contest the facts, only the unlawfulness of his actions. When on bail, he ignores the condition not to contact Sally-Anne; instead, he purposefully intimidates her with the threat of his team mates giving evidence in the way that PJ had predicted. As a consequence, she tries to have the charge withdrawn, but when she is told it is too late to do so, she attempts suicide.

In revealing the injustice suffered by Sally-Anne, the narrative seems to adopt a more progressive turn. However, the resolution of her story in which she is rescued by PJ replicates
the cop show narrative that privileges macho action and heroics. Maggie’s presence in this scene is reminiscent of the image of probationer Vanessa on her first assignment in *Recruits* in which she, too, is cast as a peripheral player to her male colleagues who are engaged in physical conflict with male offenders. The action combines hypermasculinity with “police fetishism”, the notion held by much of the population that there can be no social order without the police (Reiner, 2010, p. 202). The audience is shown that the place for Sally-Anne and Maggie, like that of all women, is under the protective watch and, when necessary, actions of a policeman.

Accusatory views about women in the context of victims of sexual assault are also held in the wider Mount Thomas community. Unsurprisingly, Bruce’s father (Richard Moss) describes both his son’s crime and the police action as “mistakes”. It is not until Sally-Anne attempts suicide that he recognises the harm done to her by his son. Chris, the licensee and Sally-Anne’s boss reacts in a different way. Before Maggie interviews Sally-Anne, Chris tells her, “Her parents are nice people”. While Chris is portrayed as a feisty independent woman who takes no nonsense from her sometimes-rowdy male patrons, her statement is problematic in a number of ways. She seems to suggest that rape is not something that happens to the daughters of nice people. This is a class-based observation that implies Sally-Anne’s parents, in their respectable niceness, do not deserve their daughter being raped. It also implies that there are other parents who, through their own less than nice behaviour or character, are more likely or even deserving of having children who become victims of serious crime, indeed victims of this particular crime. It also disregards the real victim whose experience of violence and harm is personal, immediate and traumatic. Instead, it attributes primacy of injury to indirect victims.
In *Blue Heelers*, women in policing are regarded differently to their male counterparts. This is indicative of real-life policing, although more exaggerated and less reflective of contemporary attitudes. The program also depicts policing attitudes to women who are victims of crime, showing the predominately male propensity within the occupation to attribute a share of blame to those suffering sexual violence, particularly when committed by their intimate partners. In showing these elements of police culture in the way it does, *Blue Heelers* is critical of these negative attitudes and behaviours. However, it uncritically assigns Maggie to the gendered specialisation reserved for women in the masculine culture of policing, thus perpetuating the marginal position of women in police culture.

As well as portraying elements of police occupational culture, notably in regard to gender as the title suggests, *A Woman's Place* articulates a legitimised police presence within its community. As a pilot episode, it signals what the viewer can expect from the series. As an apparatus of the state, the police institution in *Blue Heelers* is not one of oppression, but of community service and protection. The sometimes avuncular, sometimes crotchety, long-serving self-described “country cop”, Sergeant Tom Croydon, who once coached the local football team, is the totem for this representation of police and community relations. Croydon knows most of the locals and treats them respectfully; they know and respect him. The audience also sees that he does not compromise his professional integrity at the behest of the offender’s father, an established and wealthy resident who, although appearing to share his son’s sense of entitlement, does not refrain from berating Bruce’s disreputable behaviour when he understands his culpability.

It is the “B story” (Matthews, n.d.-a), however, that provides the narrative for exploring police-citizen relationships and puts forward the program’s expression of police legitimacy. This strand is, as Matthews (n.d.-a) says of most secondary threads in the series,
lighter and briefer than the main story. It depicts an attempt at proactive policing instigated by Sergeant Croydon, but it is conducted ineptly, and comically, by the two junior officers: the newly arrived Maggie and her police academy contemporary and former boyfriend, Constable Wayne Patterson. Sent by the sergeant to remind an elderly resident of his overdue parking fees and gently prompt him to pay them, the officers are attacked by the man’s dog and respond by shooting it. The following scene shows them recounting the events of the debacle to their boss back at the station. They explain that the man responded in kind by shooting holes in the police car and then running away. The sergeant is furious at their ineptitude and the resultant escalation of a simple task into a critical situation. Croydon attributes this to their city backgrounds where, he says, the default mode is an armed response to every crime, but “around here”, he says, “policing is people”.

In addition to being a lecture on how legitimacy is achieved and the way in which law enforcement is conducted in his town, Sergeant Croydon’s articulation of community policing practices in Mount Thomas also constructs particular “national attributes and cultural contexts” (Rogers, 2008, p. 78). While neither he nor anyone else makes any explicit declaration of an Australian style of policing, his denunciation of the type practised in the unnamed city where Maggie and Wayne learnt their craft ascribes a foreignness to more depersonalised and confrontational styles of policing. In this sense, Mount Thomas is representative of the acceptable expression of democratic policing. In contrast to the anonymous and impersonal metropolis, the police under Sergeant Croydon’s command live by his mantra: policing is people.

The police in Blue Heelers, too, are people. The officers at Mount Thomas, making up the majority of the regular ensemble of the program, are all identified characters. There are no nameless extras. The police roles do not overshadow their individual personalities and
character traits. This manifestation of Peel’s principle of policing by consent that casts the police as citizens in uniform—“the police are the public and the public are the police” (Reith, 1956, p. 287)—is also reinforced by the conventions and audience expectations of the drama series and soap opera genres in that the characters have lives outside their jobs. By showing there is more to the officers’ existence than their work, the audience learns that the police are not just instruments of government authority. To Blue Heelers viewers, the police are portrayed just like “us”. As “us”, they stand in for police in the real world, even those working in real, nominal cities, if not the nameless city that stands proxy for places other than Australia. This device articulates a citizen police force serving and protecting fellow citizens; the pinnacle of legitimated policing.

In the interviews I conducted with serving and retired officers and policing students, those who mentioned Blue Heelers identified characteristics of the fictional Sergeant Croydon and his station colleagues as legitimating the police role. Croydon was regarded by the older and retired officers as a typical and authentic country sergeant: variously fat, old and grizzled, but ultimately fair and decent, his gender, not surprisingly, unremarked upon. The students also endorsed the representation of policing in Blue Heelers. Student 3, although misnaming him, referred to the sergeant’s standing in the community: “The commander of the Mount Thomas police station was outstanding. I’ve forgotten his name. John someone, the sergeant. He was very well regarded…. respected internally and externally and he had control of that town, it seemed anyway.” Student 2, noted the camaraderie of the team and the respectful relationship the officers maintained with those they policed: “I particularly liked it because it showed police involved in their community.” Student 7, who watched Blue Heelers for its depictions of police work, despite his dislike of the personal dramas in the program, spoke of the series as an influence on his career: “it partly formed the foundation of
what I’m doing now”. Notably, it was the projection of community policing that he found attractive about the program and the profession, a narrative that he thought was now out of favour: “it’s all exciting and car chases and shooting.”

In this episode of Blue Heelers, the audience also witnesses some elements of police occupational culture. Some are censured; some endorsed, or at least presented without criticism. Its portrayal of police attitudes to women is challenging of the culture in one regard, while complicit in another. The narrative of Blue Heelers, in demonstrating the questioning and subsequent recognition of Maggie’s policing credentials, articulates a progressive attitude to the role of women in Australian law enforcement. Yet, cast as a gendered specialist, Maggie’s policing role is qualified and limited. This may have been a depiction at odds with policing in 1990s Australia, but ideologically it is an explication of a woman’s place in the work force and society.

The ideological function of the series is the articulation of a legitimated police force. The police ensemble in Blue Heelers are citizens in uniform, and as members of the community, they serve and protect their town and district. In keeping with Peel’s Nine Principles, they practice policing by consent (Reith, 1956) in that their authority comes from the will of the people rather than the power of the state (Home Office, 2012). As police serving in the country, the Mount Thomas officers also derive their legitimacy from a type of seductive nationalism that privileges the country over the city as part of its template (Davison, 2012). Although a romanticised exaggeration (Ward, 1958), the characteristics scrutinised in the Bush Legend still influence Australian constructions of self-identity and frequently feature in fictional representations of the national character (Turner, 1986). The rural setting itself contributes to the legitimacy of the police in Blue Heelers and, through them, the institution they represent.
Wildside (1997–1999)

The second of the three police drama series examined in this chapter, *Wildside*, contrasts with *Blue Heelers* in a number of ways. Set in the inner city, *Wildside* conveys a sense of danger, which for Sergeant Croydon in *Blue Heelers*, is characteristic of the metropolitan “other” in opposition to Mount Thomas. However, as in *Blue Heelers*, the personal relationships outside of the immediate work unit bring some soap opera qualities to the drama.

*Wildside* was produced by Cannon Jenkins Television for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the Australian public service network. Its 60 episodes aired on the ABC from 1997 to 1999 as two series (Matthews, n.d.-b). A weekly hour-long program, *Wildside* was originally broadcast as a four-part miniseries pilot with an individual crime story that continued throughout each of the four instalments (Hooks, 1997). In subsequent episodes the series was recast as a more typical police drama, each with its own self-contained crime story, rather than the serial format. The untitled episode (Shreck, 1997) analysed in this study is the first of the mini-series which, instead of concluding with a resolution of the crime story, continues into the following three episodes. The episodes subsequent to the mini-series do maintain the overall narrative premise and police-related themes established in the first instalment.

As Lee and McGovern (2013a) observed, the NSW Police Force ceased providing consultancy and other support for the program due to its concerns about the portrayal of questionable police behaviour. This action gives further justification for the program’s inclusion in this study. It is unlikely that any irritation over the “increasingly ‘negative’ storylines” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 211) in *Wildside* would have been present when the first episode was aired. However, the depictions of corrupt and improper activity that gave
cause for the NSW Police Force to disassociate itself from the program were in evidence from the outset. In focusing on *Wildside*’s depiction of the often blurred and sometimes breached line between law enforcement and law breaking (Lee & McGovern, 2013a), the following analysis addresses the negative side of police culture that foments corruption and diminishes police legitimacy among those roughly and wrongly policed.

The episode commences with the title credits. The sequence consists of bold text denoting the production partners and the cast, overlaid on less clearly discernible long shot images of run-down city locations. The more decipherable of these include graffiti covered walls, neon signs in Vietnamese and English, a street sign establishing the location as Wylde St, and a back alley. All of the images in the sequence have a hazy, blue tint that, coupled with the louche sounding saxophone and harmonica of the theme music, suggests the seediness of the urban setting. Only four characters—two men and two women—are shown, each in a separate shot with the actor’s name superimposed. The male characters are identified during the episode as a former police officer, and a lawyer working at a crisis centre; the women, a doctor and receptionist also from the crisis centre.

The shady and dangerous atmosphere established in the opening credits continues throughout the episode. This is achieved using handheld cameras and abrupt, jump-cut editing that give a shakiness to the images. The framing of the actors in close-up throughout creates a stifling effect that suggests an absence of personal, professional or moral freedom for the characters. These techniques accentuate the precariousness of existence for many of those involved in the narrative, including a former police officer looking for his estranged teenage son, the medical and legal staff of a busy crisis centre, and the street kids and other marginalised people who make use of its services. Matthews (n.d.-b) makes note of the semi-improvised dialogue. This reinforces the disorder experienced by the characters in their own
lives and through their work as police officers and crisis workers. The unscripted conversations result in a production that is less staged and one that gives authenticity to the story as well as to the characters who are its tellers.

The opening scene intensifies the suggestion of menace and lawlessness established in the title credits. In a frenetic sequence, a group of three young teenagers ram-raid a shop and steal fashionable sports apparel. They are pursued by police in a dangerous high-speed car chase across the city. During the chase, one of the teens taunts the police through the rear passenger window and encourages the driver to go faster. Her appearance and recklessness suggest she is drug affected. The other teens exhibit similar behaviour. Despite being directed to stop the pursuit by police radio operators, the officers continue to close in on the teenagers. The chase ends with the police crashing into a truck, killing one of the two officers trapped in the vehicle and critically injuring the other, who later dies in hospital. The juveniles escape.

In the confusion of the accident scene, which is emphasised with constantly panning, unsteadily handheld camerawork, several other police arrive to help, among them, the dead officer’s brother, detective Brian Deakin (Richard Carter).

The tight bond between officers is recognised as both a positive source of camaraderie that “buffers the strains” (Paoline, 2003, p. 200) and engenders mutual protection in a highly challenging job, and a site of lurking potential for corrupt behaviour resulting from the exclusivity and group loyalty of police solidarity (Chan, 1999; Cockcroft, 2013; Crank, 2004; Waddington, 2008). The presence of this element of police culture in the opening sequence anticipates the bad side of the brotherhood that prevails at Wildside’s Police Central. The investigation that follows is conducted by vengeful members of the police force. Because of their grief and anger, they choose to disregard and hide from the media the incontrovertible evidence of the culpability of the speeding police officers in their own deaths. Two of the
teenagers involved in the ram raid, the girl, Heidi (Rose Byrne), and the other passenger, Joe (Paul Pantano), are street kids known to police. Despite the legal protections they are entitled to as minors and even when under the care of a medical professional, the pair are intimidated and threatened by the investigating detectives, Deakin and Kim Devlin (Tammy MacIntosh).

In a narrative thread that ties into that of the detectives and the street kids they are harassing, a former police officer, Bill McCoy (Tony Martin), arrives back in the city from self-imposed exile in Vietnam. Having been warned by an old friend that his own son, also a teenage runaway, is in danger, McCoy has returned to find him. McCoy’s presence introduces to the narrative a serial killer thread and a representation of policing that contrasts with that of the officers pursuing the street kids involved in the ram raid. McCoy had testified before the Royal Commission into Police Corruption and exposed criminality among police officers. The publication of the final report of the Wood Royal Commission (Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service & Wood, 1997) six months before Wildside was broadcast ensured that systemic corruption in the NSW Police Force was widely known, and a topical source for incorporating into a fictional account of 1990s policing. After blowing the whistle on the corrupt activities of “bent cops”, McCoy quit the police and left the country: “I made the mistake of thinking I could do something about it”.

To some of his former colleagues, including Deakin and Devlin, McCoy is a “dog”; to his former partner, Frank Reilly (John Howard), he is a good cop, although a sometimes-misguided zealot; and to the new inspector, Virginia King (Victoria Longley), he is an exemplar of what the post-Royal Commission Police Force could be. Indeed, in a later episode, McCoy is persuaded to re-join the police and thereby restore its reputation as well as boost its investigative capacity through his skills. Nevertheless, McCoy, in admonishing himself for ignoring corruption during his career (“I closed my eyes to it”) acknowledges that
group loyalty not only shields crooked police from the law, it protects all officers from the
dangers of the street and the malevolent vagaries of the police hierarchy. McCoy’s
endeavours to find his son align him with the street kids involved in the ram-raid and the
crisis centre they depend on. This further antagonises former police colleagues and reinforces
his honest (ex)cop identity that contrasts with the old occupational culture represented by
Deakin. The more hostile detectives’ resentment of what they regard as McCoy’s duplicity
ensures that his investigative experience and knowledge is ignored.

The police station and crisis centre are next door to each other in Wylde Street, the
locale alluded to in the title. This setting is more than a device of narrative and production
convenience. The occupants stand for different institutions and cultures. As a site of constant
conflict between law enforcement and legal and medical support services, *Wildside*’s setting
articulates the oppositional cultures of policing and social justice. The crisis centre, where
doctor, Maxine Summers (Rachel Blake), and lawyer, Vince Cellini (Aaron Pedersen), work,
is the safe zone that a police organisation with a mission to serve and protect should be. That
the police do not serve and protect the vulnerable characters in *Wildside*, and the legal and
medical professionals do, is an expression of the former’s failure rather than the latter’s
success; the social issues faced by the crisis centre’s clients, including drug addiction,
domestic violence, homelessness and prostitution, are perennial. The contrast between the
neighbouring services cast the police culture as bad, and the actions of the medical and legal
aid professionals as good. The differing cultures ensure that the crisis centre is legitimated to
its public and the police—the institution as much as the individual officers who are central to
the drama—are not.

The narrative also exposes racist attitudes within the police and the community.
Boarding-house landlady, Anna Carmody (Gillian Jones), reports her tenant, Lenny Maddox
Kevin Smith, an Aboriginal man, to the police, accusing him of the recent murders of young male prostitutes. Lenny, a lapsed alcoholic, cannot remember where he was at critical times or how he came to be in possession of damning evidence. Lenny is interrogated by Deakin, who racially vilifies him, calling him “Koori drunk”. He maligns Lenny and Vince’s Indigenous heritage: “What’s wrong with you people? Don’t you know you’re black?” While the police are determined to pin the blame on Lenny, McCoy maintains that they have the wrong man. Lenny does not match the profile that McCoy contends fits the murderer, despite the evidence implicating him. When Lenny is later able to establish an alibi, he is released. This infuriates Deakin, whose anger is only partly attributable to being proved wrong in presuming Lenny’s guilt; his ire compounded by McCoy’s more insightful judgement on the case. But, it is his loathing for Vince and Lenny as Aboriginal men that most enrages him.

In his racism, Deakin shares in a long history of police oppression of Indigenous Australians (Cunneen, 2001; Finnane, 1994). There is strong evidence of the colonial police forces leading campaigns of genocide against the First Australians (Elder, 1988; Reynolds, 2001). Public inquiries into two subsequent sites of police maltreatment of Indigenous people, the forced removal of children and deaths in custody, demonstrate the reality of this legacy. The police, along with the church, were instrumental in the administration of national and state policies of forced separation of children from their families leaving in its wake the Stolen Generation. Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Dodson & Wilson, 1997) identified the breadth and depth of harm caused by the various Aboriginal protection acts, which the police were responsible for enforcing. Similarly, the disproportionately high rate of Aboriginal deaths in custody aroused public attention in the 1980s and led to a royal commission. While the deaths themselves were not found to be a “product of deliberate
violence or brutality by police or prison officers”, the Commissioners considered that “generally, there appeared to be little appreciation of and less dedication to the duty of care” (Biles & McDonald, 1992, p. 3) owed to Aboriginal people in custody. The lack of attention to duty of care and the heavy-handed approach to policing Indigenous people is a systemic problem that is not limited to custodial circumstances (Cunneen, 2001).

In contrast to Lenny’s experience, most Aboriginal people encounter police in circumstances less serious than murder. Although convictions for crimes of violence have increased in recent years, public order and minor offences such as offensive behaviour, drunkenness, vagrancy, and traffic violations predominate for Indigenous Australians coming into contact with the criminal justice system (White & Habibis, 2005, p. 261). Vince identifies an abuse of process against his client that was, until recently, a widely shared experience for Aboriginal people. Here he refers to the contrived practice known as the “trifecta”, a strategy that encapsulates the way police deal with troublesome people, particularly in the Aboriginal community. The trifecta involves arresting a person for the minor offence of offensive language, usually the result of provocation by the police themselves. The ensuing arrest inevitably prompts an escalation of the conflict that results in the addition of two more charges; resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer (Chan, 2000, p. 87). This is perhaps the nadir of police cynicism, in practice and in the language used to describe it; a trifecta is a combinational bet in horse racing parlance, but in the policing application the odds are far shorter for the citizen’s liberty.

We also see that similar attitudes to Indigenous people prevail in the broader community. When Vince returns Lenny to his boarding house, they are confronted by Anna. She is disappointed that her accusations against Lenny have been exposed as unfounded and that she has to allow Lenny back into his room. She contends that it is his drinking that
concerns her, but his lapse is only recent and short lived, which suggests her real reason to have him removed is racially motivated. Anna’s racism was revealed in an earlier scene in which she complains about Lenny to Maxine: “’cos he’s black he’s got more rights than I do”. She confirms her attitude when she evicts Lenny, saying of Lenny and his friends, “They shouldn’t be allowed alcohol”. Lenny defies her and returns to sobriety, attending an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting with Maxine in the final scene. As a white, middle-class, professional woman, Maxine’s status as a recovering alcoholic undermines the stereotype projected onto Lenny by Anna, the police, and others who conflate his drinking problem with his racial and cultural background.

*Wildside* depicts policing as a compromised institution and profession, with the more sinister elements of the occupational culture prevailing at Police Central. The detectives based at this station are highly insular, privileging group loyalty over their duty to the community they are supposed to serve. They oppress vulnerable minority groups, which in this episode include street kids and an Indigenous man. While the police abuse their authority and inflict further wrong on those least able to protect themselves against exploitation and crime, it is left to other institutions and individuals to provide social justice. The protectors include Maxine and Vince, the doctor and lawyer at the crisis centre, and Bill McCoy, the honest ex-cop. While McCoy has his own motivation in the form of his missing son, his presence offers the locals and the audience hope that the police can be redeemed and re-legitimated to its community. For most of its audience, *Wildside*’s mean streets and inner-city location construct an unfamiliar world. The majority of scenes are interior, and the location images offer only glimpses of the tourist-trail landmarks of Sydney behind the rundown buildings and dirty industrial sites. Policing itself is outside the experience of most viewers. Nevertheless, with the sorry history of police corruption still fresh after the Royal
Commission, *Wildside* depicts Australian policing as a flawed institution. The ex-cop soon to return to the force offers a counter narrative to the corruption, thereby ensuring the tainted institution is not beyond redemption. In this regard, it is characteristic of the “police deviance” category of story that Reiner describes as the “good apple in the rotten barrel” (2010, p. 195). Regardless of McCoy’s good apple presence, the policing depicted in *Wildside* conflicts with that of the exemplars of police integrity seen in *Blue Heelers*. In this way, *Wildside* draws on the established crime fiction trope that casts urban police as cynical, damaged, and compromised, in contrast to their wholesome counterparts from the country.


Like *Wildside*, *East West 101* also portrays policing very differently to *Blue Heelers*. Its setting in the western suburbs of Sydney is, like the inner city of *Wildside*, a site of conflict between the police and their community. Whereas *Blue Heelers* presents a homogenous white, Anglo, rural community, *East West 101* “centralizes cultural difference as the context and, often, the source of the drama” (McClean, 2011, p.177). While street kids and Indigenous people were the subject of police attention in the first episode of *Wildside*, *East West 101* depicts harsh treatment of the Muslim community in the Sydney suburb of Lakemba by the Major Crime Squad. *East West 101* also shares in the immediate visual style of production used in *Wildside*, in which the camera work is mostly handheld. Additionally, the two series endeavour to depict human interaction authentically. This is exemplified in the way that the actors speak over each other, sometimes making the dialogue unclear. This technique, reminiscent of the American series *Hill Street Blues* (1981–1987), shows characters behaving naturally, rather than acting and making speeches to camera (O’Hara, 2008, p. 131).
Like the other drama series analysed above, the first episode of *East West 101*, titled *The Enemy Within* (Knapman & Wylde, 2007), opens with credits. However, in contrast to *Blue Heelers* and *Wildside*, this introduction provides very few visual prompts for what is in store for the viewer. Instead of images of lead characters and locations, the credits consist of text naming the performing and production crew. There are flashes of colour that suggest police vehicle signage and emergency lights, but these are momentary and indistinct. In the absence of more perceptible visual cues, it is left to the theme music to provide the viewer with some context. The instrument, an oud, carries the melody and cadences of the Middle East. The sound evokes a sense of place that is unlike Mount Thomas and Wylde Street, and not one traditionally expected of the Australian suburbs. However, in many parts of contemporary Australia, these are indeed familiar sounds. The music alludes to a different cultural setting to that of *Blue Heelers* and *Wildside*, but without more discernible images the credits only hint at the implications for policing in such a location.

In contrast to the credits, the opening scene provides some policing context, but the connection is only made clear for the viewer later in the episode. In this scene, a teenage boy (Bardiya McKinnon) sits behind the counter of a corner shop. He is doing his homework as he takes his turn working in the family business after school. The camera focuses briefly on the sheet of paper on which he is writing. Three words appear repeatedly: separate, ambition, identity. It appears that he is practicing the words he has misspelled in a school test. Regardless of the context in which he is writing them, they carry significant meaning for the man the boy grows up to be, and for the meaning of policing constructed by the series. As the boy writes, a man wearing a balaclava emerges from a car in front of the shop. He points a gun at the boy and demands money from the till. Another man, the boy’s father, Rahman (Taffy Hany), enters and tells the boy to give the armed man the money. When the boy
refuses, the man in the balaclava pistol-whips him across the face and fires a shot at the old man. The scene dissolves from the close-up image of the boy’s distraught face to that of a man in his late 30s—his future self, Detective Zane Malik (Don Hany)—at prayer in a mosque.

The scenes that follow set up the crime story for the episode while also foreshadowing the themes of the series and providing some explanation for the cryptic association of the sound of the oud and the image of police signs in the opening credits. These themes are political and ideological, as well as personal. The political and ideological themes relate to the police relationship with the Middle Eastern community. These themes are included in the young Zane Malik’s spelling words: separate and identity. In the temporal and social space that is commonly referred to as post-September 11, those identifying as Muslim or characterised as “of Middle Eastern Appearance” are among the most separate of identities in, and from, Australian society (Poynting & Noble, 2004). The personal element relates to the adult character of Zane Malik and his ambition. The boy in the shop is now a police officer, motivated as much by his commitment to his local community as by vengeance for his father’s debilitating brain injury at the hands of the armed robber.

The episode’s story commences with a police radio alert announcing an armed hold-up in which “the two offenders are described as male, Middle Eastern”. Two plain clothes officers in an unmarked car, on hearing the alert, chase two young men into a railway station carpark presuming them to be the offenders. In a chaotic confrontation, one of the officers is shot and killed and the young men run away. The episode title appears on screen: “The Enemy Within”. The eponymous, insidious enemy is suggestive of the home-grown terrorist label applied to young men of “Middle Eastern appearance” such as those initially suspected of the officer’s murder. It also refers to Malik, a Muslim detective. In contemporary
Australia, men fitting the Middle Eastern appearance description are widely regarded with suspicion, doubly so in police eyes (Al-Natour, 2017; Poynting, 2001). But, the killer is eventually revealed to be from within the police; it is the dead officer’s partner, John Duff (Leon Ford), who, under pressure and through accident, is responsible. Duff’s lies about the circumstances of the shooting result in the escalation of conflict between the police and the Muslim community, a young boy being runover, and another man dying, wrongly accused of the police killing. To his policing colleagues, however, Malik is an enemy within, insofar as he challenges elements of the police culture, including those that contributed to the unrest and injustice resulting from the investigation into the shooting.

The circumstances of the officer’s death and the police response are similar to the events depicted in *Wildside*. Here, too, an officer rather than the police-preferred suspects proves to be responsible, and the occupational culture motivates a vengeful and misguided response that results in harm to citizens, alienation of a community group, and the delegitimizing of the police. In *East West 101* the preferred suspects, later shown to be innocent, are members of the Muslim community rather than street kids. These suspects, too, are victims of police prejudice. In the scenes following the death of the officer, police are seen harassing “men of Middle Eastern appearance” in a deliberate campaign of retaliatory persecution disguised as a criminal investigation. This harassment is a critique of race relations in present-day Australia.

In 2001, shortly after the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, exploited the circumstances surrounding the rescue of a group of drowning refugees by the Norwegian freighter “Tampa”, demonising them as “illegals” and alleging they had thrown their children overboard and scuttled their boat to prevent it being towed from Australian waters (Marr & Wilkinson, 2003). Howard’s politicisation of
these events in the lead up to the Federal election contributed to the legitimation of suspicion and fear of asylum seekers and indifference to their plight. The Cronulla Riots that took place four years later, gave violent expression to those ill feelings, revealing the potential for retribution against Australian Muslims who “step out of line” (Roose, 2016, p. 47). In *East West 101*, this retribution is dished out by the police rather than the civilian residents of Sydney’s southern beachside suburbs. The police are reckless and ineffective in their discrimination. They stop and search men of Middle Eastern appearance, including community leaders and young boys, although they only fit the ethnic descriptor, not the physical elements of approximate age, height, weight and clothing that are broadcast through the police radio. The Major Crime Squad and the police radio dispatcher’s use of ethnic descriptors is consistent with NSW Police Force practice (El Khouri, 2012). The designation of appearance in such a generalised way is not only racist in its application, it is unreliable as an investigative tool. Malik and a local community leader, Sheik Al Alwani (Ali Sadiq), mock the fallacy:

Sheik Al Alwani: Of Middle Eastern appearance, whatever that means.

Zane Malik: Yeah, look at us, we could be twins.

In Australia, like many other western countries, September 11 and other terrorist events have revealed “social perceptions of the Arab Other” which find danger in “a homogenised category of those of Arabic-speaking background, Middle Eastern appearance or Muslim faith” (Poynting, Noble, Tabar, & Collins, 2004, p. 6). *East West 101* exposes the breadth and depth of these perceptions by portraying a police agency in which racist attitudes prevail, thus ascribing the same prejudiced views to the state and society it represents.

The character of Malik contests the heavy-handed methods the police are using, putting him in conflict with his fellow officer Ray Crowley (William McInnes), a racist, old-
school copper. Crowley wants to maintain the pressure on the community with the expectation they will identify the suspects. Malik contends that there will be no success in “antagonising the community”, a view Crowley and their commander, Inspector Patricia Wright (Susie Porter), regard dismissively as “pussy-footing around with some politically correct public relations exercise”. Crowley leads a group of detectives and uniformed police in harassing the Arabic speaking residents, gaining nothing in the process, while Malik and his Pacific Islander partner, Sonny Koa (Aaron Fa’aoso), speak with community leaders, and are rewarded with useful information.

The impatient questioning of an elderly Lebanese woman by Detective Helen Callas (Daniela Farinacci) when compared with the way in which Malik engages with the same woman, stands as an example of the two differing policing strategies and styles of police-citizen interaction. Callas speaks slowly and loudly to the woman, treating her lack of English as a personal failing. Callas rightly identifies the woman as the best positioned witness to the shooting, but she gives up on questioning her because they are unable to communicate with each other. Crowley jokes to Callas, “you should brush up on your Arabic”. When Malik questions the same woman later in the episode, he discovers she is indeed a first-hand witness to the shooting and her evidence can prove the innocence of the suspects preferred by the police. Unlike Callas or Crowley, Malik is able to speak to the woman in her own language, but it is evident that it is his patience and respect as much as his cultural awareness and bilingual capability that distinguishes his policing competence and encourages her to make a statement.

The rivalry between the two cop characters, Malik and Crowley, is not based solely on their differing approaches to policing methods incidental to finding the suspects; they also represent two different police cultures. Crowley’s contemptuous attitude toward the Muslim
community influences his policing decision-making which leads him to draw incorrect assumptions about the armed robbers. He regards “Arabs” as the enemy of the police. Like Deakin in *Wildside*, who focuses his attention on an Aboriginal man, Crowley fixates on the criminality of young men fitting the descriptor of Middle Eastern appearance. Also, like Deakin, he is the embodiment of the unreconstructed police culture of isolationism, suspicion, and group loyalty. He, too, sees himself as the champion for the dead officer and makes several pronouncements demonstrating his keenness to catch the men who killed his colleague. Each time he does so, Malik feels compelled to state that he also wants to catch the men responsible, but Crowley is suspicious of him and his policing credentials.

While Crowley contends that Malik is conflicted in his police work by his faith and culture, it is evident that Crowley and his colleagues are blinded by their occupational loyalties. They are also driven by their prejudices; they presume Muslim suspects are guilty of the police shooting because of past, unrelated minor offences, and they discredit a witness because of her “illegal immigration” status. When Malik challenges these assumptions after a young boy runs from the heavily armed Tactical Operations Unit (TOU) into the path of a car, Crowley takes the opportunity to express his views about the Arabic community, aligning Malik with them and questioning his commitment to policing: “What I’m saying is the TOU boys did their job. At least they’re clear about that”. He implies that Malik is unable to do his job because he is conflicted by his cultural identity.

To Crowley, Malik is the enemy within referred to in the episode’s title. He implies that his cultural heritage precludes him from being a police officer: “You’re either an Arab or you’re a cop”. He accuses Malik of favouring his community over the law, contending that the suspect’s family “are hoping their mate on the inside might get him off”. He is as contemptuous of Malik as he is of the culture with which Malik identifies: “We’re not
waiting round here while you workshop this with all your bloody Arab mates”. Even after an innocent young man is killed by the police and the truth about the shooting and Duff’s lies are exposed, Crowley maintains his contempt for Malik: “You’re a mad Arab, and I’m going to do you”. While he shares in Malik’s contempt of Duff’s policing incompetence and dishonesty which was the cause of all the harm in the episode, Crowley still maintains his hatred and suspicion of those who were wronged by him. Crowley’s allegiances are with the hegemonic police culture, not the community he should be serving. Crowley’s “mad Arab” statement is not limited to the circumstances of the episode’s story. As the emblematic agent of the dominant police culture, Crowley questions Malik’s right to police.

Malik’s policing credentials are also contested by members of the Islamic community. Their experiences of policing cause them to be suspicious of the police and hesitant in trusting Malik, whose cultural identity is seen as blurred by his profession. Ali (Fayssal Bazzi), one of the men suspected by Crowley of being involved in the robbery and the shooting, tells Malik, “Don’t think they respect you. At the end of the day, you’re one of us. When you turn your back, they’re gonna do it to you”. The other suspect, Talal (Firass Dirani), also comments on the prejudicial attitudes of the police and the broader community toward men of Middle Eastern appearance: “I didn’t fly a plane into the World Trade towers, but I may as well have, ‘cos I’m an Arab and ‘Arabs are terrorists. They’re not one of us’. They’ll never accept us no matter what we do”.

Additionally, Malik’s own ambition gives cause for the audience (and for Malik himself) to question his right to police. His motivation in joining the police was revenge. Malik demonstrates his commitment to the local community that he serves, although it places him at odds with his colleagues who oppose his investigative methods and, by undermining his efforts, alienate the local Islamic community. Despite this professional commitment, his
childhood experience haunts him and compels him to seek personal retribution rather than justice. In this way, he is like his fellow officers in their response to the police shooting. When his father is angered by the police harassment of his community as they search for the suspects, he asks Malik, “who is looking for the man who injured me”, to which Malik replies, “I am”. Similarly, when his mother, Mariam (Irini Pappas), says she prays that the man in the balaclava pays for his crime in the next life, Malik says he wants to make him pay in this life.

The words the young Malik practiced for his homework—ambition, identity, separate—are prophetic. His ambition for revenge is personal and professional, but it is a motivation driven from within. His identity and its separateness are expressions of his status as an outsider, an Arab in Australia and in the police force. These words are also descriptive of police occupational culture: the rank structure encourages ambition; the police identity is an expression of ideological state power; and the profession is separated from the rest of the community. More critically, police culture in East West 101 provides little room for legitimation of the institution to its public, leaving the onus on Malik.

Like the previous chapter, which focused on reality television programs, this chapter analysed police drama series in response to the research question: How are Australian police represented in cop shows? The answer in the context of the drama series is less clear than it is for reality television. The purpose of police-sponsored reality television programs is to communicate the preferred corporate message, the “responsibilization” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a) of behaviour, image management and legitimacy, whereas fictional cop shows serve predominantly to entertain. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they do so neutrally and without conveying symbolic meaning. The three police drama series, Blue Heelers, Wildside, and East West 101, present differing fictional depictions of Australian police. The stories, the
police characters and their relationships with each other, and with those they police, articulate contrasting versions of police occupational culture and professional and institutional legitimacy. In doing so, these drama series convey ideological as well as narrative meaning, communicating different versions of the “idea of police” (Klockars, 1985) in the Australian context.

*Blue Heelers* highlights some aspects of the dominant police culture and, in particular, as alluded to by the episode’s title, the place of women in the profession. Maggie Doyle experiences the masculine element of police culture at her new posting, but she ultimately shows her mettle and demonstrates she, too, has a right to police. Nevertheless, as a policewoman, her character is cast as a “gendered specialist” (Westmarland, 2001, p. 15), more suited to aiding victims, mostly women and children, than catching criminals. Her right to police is qualified and requires male approval.

*Blue Heelers* also depicts a legitimated constabulary. The legitimacy of the fictional police for the Mount Thomas community expresses an ideal for real police: “around here, policing is people”. In creating this benign image of the profession and the institution, *Blue Heelers* fills out the “half-formed picture” (Mawby, 2003, p. 231) of policing as a societal good, articulating “the values, beliefs— the ideology—of the culture” (Turner, 1986, p. 1). It also provides a temporal “index of the state of the nation” (Mawby, 2003, p. 218). Michael Arntfield (2011) contends that cop shows are “historical bookmarks” for real-world policing (p.76). Although *Blue Heelers* does not fixate on police technology in the way that specialist cop shows such as *Police Rescue* (1989–1996) and *Water Rats* (1996–2001) do, it acts as a Howard-era bookmark for the purported “relaxed and comfortable” Australia: culturally homogenous and isolated from any troubles that might lurk in the wider world (Noble, 2005).
In comparison, the type of policing portrayed in *Wildside* is not one that reflects favourably on the profession. The attitudes and behaviours of the detectives at Police Central show the worst of police culture: constant suspicion; isolationism coupled with solidarity; political and moral conservatism that divides the public into the rough and the respectable; sexist machismo; prejudice toward minorities; and a pragmatism that rejects innovation (Reiner, 2010; Waddington, 2012). Their criminalising of vulnerable communities, particularly homeless youths and Indigenous people, and the heavy-handed policing they apply against them, compromises the legitimacy of the police. As an example of the police deviance story (Reiner, 2010), the integrity of the institution is only saved by ex-cop Bill McCoy, an insider-turned-outsider who had left the police to escape the corruption rife throughout the organisation and returned as a dissenting voice (Piper, 2015). With the shameful revelations from the Wood Royal Commission fresh in the minds of the police, the public, and *Wildside*’s producers, Michael Jenkins and Ben Gannon, the program marks a time in which the police organisation lost the trust of those it policed. The decision of the NSW Police Force to sever ties with the program appears to be a resentful response to depictions of police that kept the corruption narrative in the minds of the viewing public.

Similarly, the police in *East West 101* are in conflict with their community. In the initial episode and throughout the series, police suspicion and prejudice are directed at those of “Middle Eastern appearance” in Sydney’s western suburbs. The negative elements of police culture are distilled in Crowley, who casts his Arab-Australian colleague, Malik, as the enemy within, and, in his response to the death of an officer, antagonises the local community such that the police lose the public’s support. The historical reminder offered by *East West 101* is the post-September 11 antipathy toward the Muslim community, compounded by local political opportunism and mob violence. This is a very real and continuing context for
depicting a toxic police culture and a de-legitimated institution, but more critically, it indexes the state of the nation in ways far less benign than *Blue Heelers*. *East West 101* points to the failure of Australian institutions, including government, the media, and the police, to ensure the equal treatment of all citizens and assert the legitimacy of multiculturalism as integral to Australia’s civic life and national identity.

In this chapter I analysed three Australian police drama series. In doing so I examined the stories and characters featured in these programs to interpret how police are represented through this genre of television program. This research builds on that of the previous chapter, in which I analysed three reality television programs, and provides insight into how Australian television constructs policing. In the following chapter, I move on from the textual analysis phase of this research and instead focus on audience reception. For this next phase of analysis, I examine how police themselves interpret the ways in which their profession is represented on television.
Chapter 7: Audience

In the preceding three chapters, my analysis of the Australian cop show has moved through the first two elements of the construction and communication of the television police image. In this chapter, the focus of analysis turns to the third element in what Kellner (1995) refers to as the production, distribution and reception of mass communication: the audience. The audience related research consists of an ethnographic study of television viewers, all of whom have a policing affiliation. This study seeks to answer the third research question of my thesis: How do Australian police interpret the representation of themselves on television?

Qualitative methods of the type used in this component of allow for the exploration of participants’ subjective views (Sarantakos, 2005) which, for this project, provide insight into how police interpret the representation of their profession in cop shows. As I stated in the introduction to this thesis, I conducted a survey in the early stages of my research to collect data on program familiarity and viewing preferences among retired and serving police officers and policing students. The survey was used for two other purposes: firstly, in the selection of programs for my textual analysis, which were the subject of Chapters 5 and 6; and secondly, to recruit interviewees for the audience component of the research. The data from the survey, including the respondents’ free-text comments, are not included in this analysis because, as I noted in Chapter 3, they are not rich enough to allow meaningful interpretation. The subsequent interviews provide a more effective method for studying policing audiences’ responses to cop shows.

At the start of each interview I explained the nature of my research so that all participants understood the purpose and methods and were therefore able to provide informed, verbal consent for their involvement. The explanation of the project included defining the scope of television programs under investigation, namely Australian cop shows,
which were explained as entertainment television programs that included police drama and observational documentary-style, or reality television programs that featured police. Although it was explained that the scope of the research excluded news and current affairs programs, some of the interviewees included comments about the media generally and the ways in which police activity was reported on television news programs. Similarly, although the interviewees were told that the focus was on Australian programs, many of them referred to foreign made programs, most commonly those produced in Britain and the United States. Some of the references to foreign programs were in the form of comparisons to Australian programs; others were offered without reference to this context and were focused specifically on non-Australian programs because of the interviewee’s viewing experience and preference.

It was also explained that the interviews constituted one component of the research project. The participants were told that the project also included analyses of several Australian cop shows to determine what these programs said about the police and policing within the national context. Because I had at this stage not planned the interviews with Liaison Officer and the Television Producer (see Chapter 4), the participants in these audience-related interviews were not aware of the production aspect of my research.

Guiding questions were used to start and maintain the focus of conversations with the aim of exploring the participants’ attitudes to Australian television representations of police. In this way, the participants were asked about television depictions of police officers and the activities they engaged in, what they inferred from these images, and whether they considered them as representing their profession and the institution of police favourably. Questions posed throughout the interviews were intended to prompt broad ranging conversations about the representation of police on television. They sought to explore the participants’ interpretations of television representations of police in the context of their professional self-
image, and what they thought the wider, public audience, who did not share in their vocation, might construe from these images. The questions were also focused on eliciting the participants’ views on the interplay of cultural, social and political aspects of the Australian experience with the idea of police and policing constructed through television.

Several of the interviewees made observations that were not related to the questions addressed to them, but many of these remarks and the discussions that followed were relevant to the general aims of the research project. The interviews therefore had some variations in how the discussion was guided and the directions in which they went; nevertheless, the general focus of inquiry was maintained throughout the research activity, and the participants engaged in conversations that were relevant to, and consistent with, the ideas being examined.

I have adopted a thematic approach informed by key theoretical concepts for analysing these interviews. From a practical consideration, this structure better incorporates all relevant responses regardless of the context in which they were offered, and therefore allows for a more fluid analysis. More importantly, it is better suited to the purpose than a linear approach that does not deviate from the order in which the questions were posed. It therefore allows for a critical examination of police attitudes to cop shows and the potential for new understandings of the construction of the police through television.

Twenty-five interviews, ranging in duration from 10 minutes to nearly an hour, yielded a lot of content which traversed a wide variety of topics. The key themes pertinent to my research that emerged from the interviewees’ responses and comments I identified as: the type of police seen on television, and what they articulate about gender, diversity, age and rank; the ways in which other audiences were thought to construct police and policing; the
articulation of national character in Australian cop shows; and whether the police are legitimated through their television representation. These themes correlate to the general line of questioning used in the interviews.

The nature of semi-structured interviews provided some challenges for attributing responses and discussion to one or more of those themes. The open questions often elicited responses that ranged across more than one of the themes. Additionally, although the interviewees were asked to consider reality television programs as well as drama series, some participants preferred to focus on one genre more than, or instead of, the other. Most participants did consider both genres throughout the course of their interviews, but there was a tendency among the cohort to draw predominantly on drama series in framing their responses. The different contexts that participants applied to the questions has meant that the responses and themes that emerged from them did not easily align to both genres. For these reasons, the themes relating predominantly to each genre are discussed separately, with those most clearly aligned to police drama series considered first.

Regardless of the challenges of aligning the themes with the key ideas expressed by the interviewees, these topics are suited to an analysis of police attitudes informed by those social-historical settings that John Thompson (1990) contends shape the reception of symbolic forms. Three of these settings—fields of interaction, institutional influences, and social structures—are applicable to the police organisation and its occupational culture, and to the role it plays in society. These settings provide the contexts for interviewees’ interpretations of the way their profession is depicted through cop shows. The fourth setting, which focuses on the technical media of transmission (Thompson, 1990, p. 283), relates to the participants’ familiarity with how these programs and genres communicate the police image.
The interviewees were first asked about their attitudes to cop shows. Regardless of whether they claimed to be regular viewers of this type of program, watched them only occasionally, or never at all, most of the participants responded negatively to television entertainment featuring police, especially drama series. Several participants reiterated their stance on cop shows throughout the interview. Three of the retirees said they did not watch any cop shows but disliked them anyway: Retiree 8 said he never watched them, but was insistent that he “hated” them, Retiree 9 found them “absurd”, and Retiree 2 “couldn’t be bothered” watching them. The basis for negative attitudes, whether expressed as disregard, scepticism or opposition, was mostly what they considered to be a lack of authenticity. I classified the way the participants adjudged authenticity in fictional cop shows in two ways: from their own professional perspective, and from a perspective they attributed to other viewers, an assumed public perspective.

Respondents adopting the police professional perspective of authenticity drew upon occupational self-reflective attitudes to comment on police images. Responses in this mode tended to concentrate on the police characters on television, and the actors who portrayed them, and what those characters and actors might communicate about real police officers. The assumed public perspective anticipated the viewpoints of a broader external audience. The focus of this perspective was on the performance of policing on television and what that might communicate about the police as an institution, and whether the legitimacy of the police is promoted or contested by portrayals of police work. The professional, self-reflective perspective on television police is therefore concerned with who the police are, while the assumed public perspective centres on what the police do.
Professional Perspectives on Television Police

The following discussion concentrates on the first of these perspectives, the self-reflective perspective, and analyses interviewees’ interpretations of who the police are on television. In doing so, it situates their perceptions and attitudes within the concept of police occupational culture. Although this concept has been subject to considerable scholarly attention since the 1960s (Reiner, 2017), beginning with the pioneering research of Banton (1964) and Skolnick (1966), in recent years the profession itself has been more conscious of its workplace culture and the influence it yields over attitudes and behaviours. In Australia, the Wood Royal Commission (Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service & Wood, 1997) gave the term police culture wider currency when it reported on the role it played in systemic corruption. For some of the serving and retired officers participating in this project, the Royal Commission’s linking of corrupt behaviour with police culture was their point of reference for this aspect of their profession (Police Officer 2, Police Officer 4, and Retiree 8). Students, too, were aware of the concept of police culture from their training (Student 4 and Student 6).

Robert Reiner’s (2010) characterisation of police culture includes machismo, sexism and racism. These elements, according to John Crank (2004), when coupled with and informed by a masculinity that is not just a “demographic characteristic” but a “cultural descriptor” (p. 229) of the occupation, carry the idea of the appropriateness of men for police work. Crank also notes that this idea articulates the inappropriateness of everyone else for this role (2004, p. 229). Police culture acts as a powerful internal regulatory mechanism that governs the actions and attitudes of its members: it polices the police, determining who can and cannot “do” policing, and prescribing how policing is done. In this sense, policing, like masculinity—a correspondingly powerful element of gender related attitudes and behaviours
(Connell, 2005) and itself a recognised feature of police culture (Chan, 1997, 1999; Westmarland, 2001, 2017)—is performative rather than something that simply exists (J. Butler, 1999). But, the self-regulatory function of police culture ensures that those who enter the profession are judged against the capabilities the culture ascribes positively to the hegemony of masculinity—as well as whiteness and youth—and negatively to any forms of otherness. The dominant cultural response to women in the policing profession was in evidence in Recruits (2009–2010) and Blue Heelers (1993–2006), as I observed previously.

The interviewees identified aspects of television cops that they regarded as either corresponding to or contradicting their own experience of the police workplace or, in the case of policing students, what they anticipated police work to be. In response to the question of who the police on television are, the interviewees’ responses were strongly informed by occupational self-reflection. Their attitudes reflected, and in many instances reinforced, aspects of police occupational culture. In this regard, the interviewees considered cop show characters and the actors portraying them against a measure of their right to police, rather than simply alluding to inaccuracies in police portrayals in the way that Laura Huey’s (2010) Canadian police interviewees articulated their feelings of “role strain” (p. 49). Instead of simple fault-finding with varying levels of justification or detail that Huey’s cohort favoured, most of the interviewees in this study expressed views influenced by a hegemonic police culture regarding the right to police. Variations from this stance reflected generational difference in the cohort. So, too, the characteristics on which the right to police were judged. These characteristics included ethnicity and age, but gender was the most frequently mentioned aspect of police television representation and was the major element of generational variation.
Men outnumber women in policing. Australia-wide it was approximately three to one a decade ago (Irving, 2009); in 2017, women still make up only a third of NSW police officers (NSW Police Force, 2018). These proportions are much closer to parity than it was a generation ago, a time when equal employment opportunity policies were beginning to bring about change in gender balance in most organisations (Prenzler, 2015). Nevertheless, men have continued to dominate policing, particularly in the higher ranks and among longer serving officers (Irving, 2009; NSW Police Force, 2016a). Inevitably, police culture is so tightly entwined with the culture of gender, that these two influences are, as Louise Westmarland (2001) observes, “mutually reinforcing” (p.136).

The student participants were more interested than the retired and serving officers in discussing the demographics of the police workforce as shown in cop shows. Their comments on this topic were mostly focused on gender, with several describing the television version of the police workplace as lacking in women:

You don’t really see too many women; they are there on the shows, but you don’t see as many [as the men]. It’s too male dominant. (Student 5, male)

They’re almost always white Australian males. (Student 7, male student)

Here, the respondents’ concerns about the underrepresentation of women in cop shows compared with what they considered to be the reality within police organisations, demonstrate an awareness of “drama trailing reality” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p. 515). Retiree 4, a 69-year-old male, was more generous in his assessment. He drew on his experience from an era in which women were fewer in number, both in the police station and on the television screen: “But, yes, the women are shown quite well in most of the shows. They’re not all blokes, like many years ago.” Student 6, a female, also had a different view from those of her male classmates although, like Retiree 4, she still demonstrated an awareness of a changed
demographic in policing. She recognised many “positive changes in the last 30 years” in policing and society more generally in attitudes to the role of women. But, she noted that there was some way to go in achieving equality for women and she saw the police institution as “still more of a boys’ club than they [the police organisation] want it to be”. The reality of this aspect of the police workforce was, in her opinion, less advanced than television sought to depict:

They try to portray us on the television like we’re already at the point where men and women are equal. I don’t know whether we’re quite there yet . . . . I think maybe television tries to portray that as the way it is because they [the police] want the public to see it that way but there’s still a lot of work to be done. (Student 6, female)

In the context of the Blue Heelers episode, A Woman’s Place, which shows Maggie taking her place in policing, Student 6’s comments align with Sean O’Sullivan’s proposition that the fictional representation trails the reality of policing, although, as I contend, Maggie’s right to police is actually limited to that of being a carer because of her gender. However, when applied to the episode of The Force: Behind the Line analysed in Chapter 5, Student 6’s comments expose the problematic exclusion and silencing of women officers. Here, the constructed real-life policing of reality television, trails the lived police experience.

The discrepancy between the real world and the television depiction in regard to gender was mostly expressed as being a matter of numbers. There was, however, little consideration of the types of roles that women were assigned. Apart from Student 6, who, in countering the dominant argument of underrepresentation, saw that both aspects were not accurately “there yet”, it was only Police Officer 4, a female constable, who expressed any view about the depiction of women in policing as more than just a matter of the number of female officers on screen. Giving her workplace as an example, she contested the
comparative lack of women in senior roles in police drama and suggested that veracity on this issue was more important than just an accurate count of women officers:

Police Officer 4: I think rank is not always for women being portrayed as high-ranking police.

Interviewer: So that doesn’t always portray reality?

Police Officer 4: No, and it should. Yeah.

In stating her position on who has the right to police, and in what capacity, Police Officer 4 was exercising the prerogative of the insider. Contrary to the ways in which police culture has traditionally influenced attitudes toward women, including those held by many of the older, male officers who participated in this project, Police Officer 4 endorsed the validity of her female colleagues as professional officers and deserving of senior rank. She also recognised the comparative lack of women police in cop shows, and that they were infrequently characterised as “high ranking”. Importantly, she challenged the discrepancy between her lived experience and that of the television representation of women. This attitude can be attributed to Police Officer 4’s own experience as a woman in policing, but it can also be credited to advancements in equality in society more broadly, as well as changes in the make-up of the police workforce and attendant attitudes to gender roles.

Police Officer 4’s expectation of the representation of women in cop shows challenges the more traditional views that are characteristic of police culture. Her contention that the profession is more advanced in its commitment to equality than its representation indicates, is as much an endorsement of the organisation as it is a criticism of television. While many interviewees offered disparaging remarks about television portrayals, few also commended the organisation. In this regard, Police Officer 4’s comments are inconsistent with the occupation’s cynicism toward public relations management (Reiner, 2010).
Some interviewees also spoke about the actors performing in fictional police roles rather than the characters themselves. Those who did so referred to the casting of “young and attractive” actors. Police Officer 4 acknowledged that telegenic looks are important to viewers: “they’re targeting a particular audience so the people are quite glamorous, and they’re depicted as tall and thin and quite athletic”. One retiree also spoke about “good-looking actors” and contrasted them with his former colleagues:

I’ve never seen an ugly police woman on TV, but I’ve worked with quite a few, and men. It’s always the glamour: the bimbo female and the rock star male. You know darn well that in real life you’ve got your fat-arsed sergeants that have been in the job thirty years. (Retiree 3, male)

His disparaging comments about his colleagues’ physical appearance, particularly that of women officers, were meant to be humorous. This example of casual sexism is perhaps typical of the police culture among those of his generation. However, the absence of the kind of police officers on television that were recognisable to him is noteworthy, and again points to the idea of who is entitled to engage in the profession of policing and who is not. For Retiree 3, the prototypical desk sergeant has been replaced by the cop show’s more attractive version whose relative youth compromises the authority of his or her office.

In a similar vein, Retiree 8 expressed a fervent dislike of the depiction of police in the teenage soap opera *Home and Away* (1988–). This program featured a sergeant who Retiree 8 believed did not display the gravitas that he expected of the police, particularly for an officer of that rank:

Look, I don’t watch it, but when I was married, the kids would like to watch it. But what I see now is mainly the ads [for it] come on and they’ve got this young female sergeant; if she’s not 23 or 24, I’d eat my hat. It’s just BS. Particularly
that she’s a sergeant. It makes me sick, actually. I can’t watch it; it makes me cranky. (Retiree 8, male)

Retiree 8 acknowledged that *Home and Away* was not in scope for my research. Nevertheless, he was keen to express his opinions about the image of the police projected by the character he had identified. He attributed his concern to the popularity of this program among its targeted demographic and the influence it may have on prospective police and their expectations of the job:

> You get these young people who want to join and they base [their intentions] on things like these silly programs like bloody *Home and Away*. They want to get down there [to the Academy] and want to have their hair long and they want to do this, and the girls think they can have their blouses undone. That’s not the way it is. It’s [the Police Force is] a paramilitary organisation, it’s run that way, but it’s got to be because it’s got to have order. (Retiree 8, male)

Retiree 8’s regard for order was important to him and, in his view, to the profession. In commenting on “this young female sergeant”, Retiree 8 also articulated the notion of who is entitled to police. He regarded police officers, particularly women, who display behaviours that do not measure up to his moral standards as unsuited for police work and for occupying senior positions.

Student 9 also criticised this fictional officer in *Home and Away*, but unlike the older, male Retiree 8, she was concerned about the character’s ethical failings rather than her physical appearance: “always involved in conflict and things behind the scenes. I was watching two nights ago and that female cop everyone talks about, she did something to hold up an investigation, cover it up.” These differing grounds for criticism are indicative of a generational gulf in attitudes to police on television. The older, male and mostly retired participants who tended to be critical of women officers and their television presence, framed
their comments around physical appearance, contesting the right of young, female officers to a responsible role in law enforcement. The younger officers and policing students—men and women alike—endorsed gender equality in judging the right to police. Where they contested that right, they tended to do so based on behaviours rather than physical appearances. This distinction between the older and younger participants was also noticeable in the ways they saw cultural and ethnic diversity in cop shows.

The interviewees who commented on the representation of diversity in television depictions of the police profession were consistent in their criticism of the underrepresentation of cultural and ethnic minorities in cop shows. Student 9 observed of his favourite Australian drama series, Rush (2008–2011): “I’d say probably the majority are white, now that I think about it.” Student 7, as quoted above, conflated gender and ethnicity when describing television police as “white Australian males”. Of the serving officers, Police Officer 4 noted the absence of Indigenous characters among the police workforce in cop shows:

They could be more diverse in their roles, like more different ethnicities playing the police show … that it’s not just targeted to the mainstream English person or Australian. Like, it could be more mixed. And they don’t very often have Indigenous police which I think that should change if we’re trying to amend things to show that Indigenous police play an important role. (Police Officer 4, female senior constable)

In referring to making amends, Police Officer 4 was alluding to the poor treatment of Indigenous Australians by the police, initially as the dispossessed first people of a colonised land, subsequently as citizens, and eventually, as colleagues in law enforcement. She regarded the inclusion of Indigenous officers in television programs as an opportunity to validate their policing credentials.
Police Officer 6, a male with Eastern European ancestry, was aware of the lack of cultural diversity in fictional depictions of officers, but he did not see this as an inaccurate representation of the modern police force:

The faces that I do see [are] mainly Caucasian, males of Anglo-Saxon origin. Whether that accurately reflects the current state of the police force, I assume the majority would be, so I suppose the question is, does that bother me? No. If it does reflect the majority, that’s ok. (Police Officer 6, male senior constable)

Student 8, an Anglo-Australian male, also spoke of an absence of police characters from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, describing it as contrary to the modern reality.

Interviewer: The types of people you see in uniform [in cop shows] do you think that’s indicative of policing.

Student 8: In TV? No, I think it’s a bit broader than that. There’s a lot more diversity in the actual police than what’s shown on TV. Obviously, it depends on the agenda of the network that’s showing it.

Interviewer: What do you think the implications of that are, or are there any?

Student 8: Negative I would think. I think it would be very beneficial to show the diversity of the police and it might open up more people to the idea that it is a career they could pursue. I suppose it’s only sort of early days from the Royal Commission stuff and the idea that they need 6-foot men from the country. It’s a really diverse organisation and I don’t think really it gets shown.

Here was an acknowledgement by someone aspiring to be a police officer and become part of the occupational culture that there are people other than those fitting conservative constructions of police (“6-foot men”) who can now be allowed to do policing. It also shows that he understands that the image of the police is subject to the agenda of the media, and that
such agendas vary between networks. Student 8 was aware that there is considerable potential for the police to use the image-making power of television to generate positive ideas about the police for recruitment purposes. This understanding of the media’s influence and the varying projections applied by different sections of the television industry relates more to the concept of police legitimacy than police culture, in that it articulates an external view, rather than an internal understanding developed through experience. For Student 8, this expression of an external view was drawn from those whom he saw as police on television. Most expressions of concern about what were perceived as public interpretations, however, related to the work that television police are shown doing, rather than who they were.

The interviewees’ reflections on the question of who the police on television are also touched on age and rank. Some of the interviewees used the terms together to describe television police. Retiree 8, for example, did so in his disparaging reference to the young sergeant in *Home and Away*. However, most interviewees referring to the age of officers, invariably their youth, did so in recognition of televisual imperatives for fictional programs; they needed to be “young and attractive” (Student 10). In the context of reality television programs, the youthfulness of the officers was seen as a true reflection of operational taskings: “always a junior officer” (Student 7). Attitudes to the depiction of rank, particularly that of more senior officers, and especially as observed by the retired contingent, provide another example of police culture as a source of influence on assessing the right to police.

All law enforcement agencies maintain a hierarchy structured by rank such that the insignia of office are highly visible symbols of position, seniority, and power within police organisations and are valorised within the police culture. Among some of the older interviewees, there was an incongruity in the portrayal of police officers holding senior rank when the actors playing them were cast because of their youth. Retiree 8 described this as a
“devaluing” of seniority: “You see these kids walking around with inspector pips on their shoulders and you think, ‘How long have they been in the job?’” While he also bemoaned what he saw as the devaluing of rank in the NSW Police Force through the introduction of “stripes for everyone” to give the public “the perception that there’s experience”, his concern was directed more at television’s combination of age (youth) and gender (women) as compromising the importance of rank.

As well as being critical of fictional television police officers and the actors who portrayed them, many interviewees also found fault with the depiction of police work. Criticisms of this nature were in keeping with those identified by David Perlmutter (2000, p. 42) as relating to “level of action” in which there is “never a dull moment”. In particular, the interviewees commented on the frequency and intensity of action-oriented, exciting crime fighting:

… they try and glamorise it and that sort of thing. (Retiree 7, male)

… action-packed car chases and shoot-outs and stuff like that. (Student 8, male)

I think sometimes the shows glamorise it and it’s not as glamorous as it’s portrayed in television. (Police Officer 4, female senior constable)

Although these respondents were critical of what they saw as exaggerated depictions of police work, they understood that cop shows relied on dramatic and exciting images and they readily accepted that it was elements such as these that made the programs popular. As Retiree 4 and Retiree 7 observed, the reality of policing can never measure up to the excitement of television cop shows and their depictions of crime in ways far more dramatic than real life. From their insider perspectives, the serving and retired officers regarded themselves as better placed than lay viewers to contest fictional police work and its inconsistency with their own experience in the field. In doing so, they expressed concern that
these inaccuracies influenced public perceptions and citizens’ expectations of the police. Unlike their criticisms of television police officers, whose presence they generally regarded as an affront to their profession, their qualms over television policing activities were based on what they thought the public constructed about police work. This assumed public perspective relates to what television policing is:

Life is just so much removed from reality in some of these shows. It’s glamorised to the extent that some of it lacks a lot of believability, particularly for former serving or ex cops. (Retiree 7, male)

Some regarded the public as too susceptible to the belief that television fictional crime and policing programs provide an authentic depiction of their occupation. Retiree 4 offered his anecdotal evidence of the misinformed public:

Well, you pull someone up on the street for a traffic offence or whatever and the first thing they’ll say is, “You can’t do this.” And when I ask why they say, “Because on the TV they say you can’t do it. I watch it every week.” And I say, “Well, mate, that’s fiction, that’s not real.” So, you get challenged at various times about things they’ve seen on television that aren’t real. The old classic one, “I’m entitled to a phone call.” (Retiree 4, male)

Policing students were also concerned that the inaccuracies of fictional cop shows had a negative effect on the community in that they promoted unrealistic expectations. Student 8, a male policing student, when asked how television drama depicted police work, replied:

Quite inaccurately I would think. Sort of over-dramatised a bit. Sort of painting police in a bit over-glamorised and heroic sort of way that probably isn’t conducive [sic] to the way it actually is, and if anything, it probably doesn’t help people’s expectations of what police can or can’t do in real life situations. They might expect, you know, great big wonderful things, but realistically
we’re sort of limited, you know, in resources and law, and manpower. (Student 8, male)

Student 8’s presumption of his insider status, articulated through his premature use of the third person plural, was not shared by the experienced interviewees. Police Officer 4, a female senior constable spoke of the naiveté of policing students and probationers in their fetishizing of forensic science (Huey, 2010; Maurantonio, 2012) and their unrealistic expectations of crime solving or “closure” (Perlmutter, 2000, p. 46).

Police Officer 4: Sometimes when it comes to [forensic evidence] they [students] think things can happen that can’t.

Interviewer: So, there are unrealistic expectations as part of the students’ views of police because of their lack of experience like it is with the public?

Police Officer 4: I suppose they’ve been exposed to, saturated with, American television and all crime gets practically resolved.

Retiree 8, too, ascribed unrealistic constructions of police work to policing students’ career motivations: “I suppose with prospective police, they would be running off TV more. … It’s a shock for them when they get on the street to find out it’s nothing like that.” Like Retiree 8, most of the retired officers expressed indignation at the fictional portrayals of police, some proclaiming themselves to be speaking on behalf of their colleagues in criticising these programs:

The guys I worked with, the older experienced blokes, they’d laugh at that, they’d just shake their heads and say, “This is bloody stupid.” (Retiree 5, male)

I don’t know any police that I associate with, and I’ve worked with lots, who are glued to Australian police programs. The same reason: it’s bullshit. We might
talk about it, say at bowls, “Did you see that bloody crap the other night? It was bullshit.” I’ve never heard a cop say, “Gee, that was good. That was a bloody good show”. I’m sure there are some good points in some of those shows, but overall, it’s not truly a reflection of what happens. (Retiree 4, male)

Life is just so much removed from reality in some of these shows. It’s glamorised to the extent that some of it lacks a lot of believability particularly for former serving or ex cops. (Retiree 7, male)

Not all the interviewees regarded the inaccuracies they had observed as a source of resentment or as damaging to the public’s understanding of, or support for, the police. Many of them acknowledged that television drama served solely entertainment rather than informational or educational purposes and should only be seen in this light. Retiree 9, a male in his 70s, for example, regarded the products of the television industry and the operations of the police as readily distinguishable. He claimed that for the police to be portrayed in a way acceptable to audiences, their work needed to be fashioned such as to meet television’s requirement to provide its viewers with excitement:

Look, it’s entertainment. It really doesn’t reflect truly what actually happens at the coalface because it would be too boring most of the time, I would say. So, they have to dramatize it quite a bit to make people want to watch it. (Retiree 9, male)

Others, including Retiree 4 and Student 4 shared this view:

A lot of the work is very mundane, boring administration type work, whereas a lot of the TV has more drama which obviously has to be done because they need to satisfy the audience, to get them to watch the show in the first place. (Retiree 4, male)

In terms of television drama, again it’s all entertainment based, so it’s not a very factual depiction of police. It’s not designed to be boring, for people to be
knowledgeable (sic), it’s designed to get audiences and ratings. (Student 4, male)

These examples show an acceptance of the need for television to create a distorted image of police and policing to make it attractive to audiences. Not all interviewees making these types of observations did so in a neutral way. Like Alan Arcuri’s (1977) participants, Police Officer 2 based her rejection of police drama on it not having the essence of policing with which she was familiar as a practitioner: “It just doesn’t feel like the reality of what actually happens” [her emphasis]. Here she identifies with her insider understanding of real policing in order to describe the television version as false. This is more than just a statement of fact about the inaccuracies of what happens in cops shows, or how the television image “looks”. In discrediting the image and stressing what she feels when she sees it, she expresses ownership of the reality of police work that cannot be made by other viewers: it is a criticism in the “being there” (Perlmutter, 2000, p. 50) category.

Despite the prevailing view that television drama gave a more exciting version of the real thing to interest its audience, it was not wholly condemned. Indeed, several interviewees readily acknowledged they were regular or sometime viewers. They enjoyed the escapism of police drama as simultaneously offering familiarity and fantasy. Police Officer 1 outlined the enjoyment he took from the excitement of police television drama and held no concerns that the fictional action-oriented policing did not resemble the mundane work which he knew as forming the greater part of his own work experience:

People won’t sit there and watch [the boring aspects of paperwork etc], they want to see shit happen. I think it’s the same for us [police]. Me, personally, I like to switch off, so if it’s a good show, yeah, sit back and watch a bit of fun on the show. They need to dramatize it a little bit. … I remember a show, Police Rescue. It was good because it didn’t show the crap side of things, it didn’t
show the paperwork side of things, it just got into the action side of stuff, which is maybe not like that every day of the week. (Police Officer 1, male detective sergeant)

Being entertained by cop shows did not extend to being consciously affected by them. All of the police interviewees rejected the notion that they or their colleagues were in any way influenced by television police in the performance of their duties. Responses to my recounting of previous research (Cummins et al., 2014; Maurantonio, 2012) in which policing participants acknowledged their own and their colleagues mimicking of television police, were generally dismissive. But, in the same way that they attributed a greater susceptibility among policing students to accept fiction as reality, many of the retired police and some of the serving officers contended that prospective new members might model their professional role on television characters, despite the students themselves rejecting this notion. Reasons given for not adopting a television-influenced persona were couched in practical terms rather than aesthetics: “You’re there to do a job, not be a TV star” (Student 10, male).

**Reality Television Policing**

Most interviewees referred to police drama series in their initial responses, as I stated previously. Some continued to default to this genre throughout their interview and required some prompting to consider reality television series as well. Fewer interviewees focused predominantly on reality television or gave little or no consideration to drama programs. Nevertheless, reality television was a recognised genre and programs in this category, when mentioned, received more praise than the drama series titles. The interviewees more readily named specific reality television programs, whereas titles of police drama programs, unless they were either very appealing or highly irksome, were not often stated. They tended to regard these programs positively; some, predominantly the students, uncritically accepted them as ‘true’ police work.
So, shows, reality TV shows that I’ve seen—*Beach Cops* is one I’ve seen recently—they generally put cops in a good light. They generally show police with a decent knowledge of powers and what they can and can’t do. Generally, that’s what I see. (Student 1, male)

Similarly, Student 2 contrasted the “dramatized” and “romantic side” of fictional police with the real police she saw on *RBT*:

I think the [depiction of] real roles of police on television is good because it shows the public what police have to deal with on a day to day basis. And also, the professionalism, particularly of the NSW Police in shows like *RBT* and others like that. (Student 2, female)

Some serving and retired officers shared this view:

Well, personally, I watch the like of *RBT* and, when it’s on, *The Force* and *Territory Cops* and those sorts of things. I find the reality side of things actually close to the type of things we actually do see more so, and the reality of it rather than what the drama programs show. (Police Officer 3, male constable)

As a participant in an episode of *RBT*, Police Officer 1 said he “thought that [policing] was portrayed very well” in such programs: “They follow you around, so that’s a real TV experience for the public.” This construction of televised police work being true to life on the basis that the police are real and their performances are unscripted was reiterated by several participants. Student 9 referred to the negative or “counter-message” conveyed through the “drama and conflict” of fictional cop shows, and commended reality television for showing “a fairly positive view of them, because they give [the police] side of the story.” Retiree 6 was also critical of police drama and what it portrayed to its audience as police work, while sharing the view of reality television programs as actual police work:
Well, the true-life ones, like the *Gold Coast Police* and the one they just had on about the Northern Beaches, they’re [the police are] real so they do the job right. But if it’s a [fictional] show that’s just depicting that sort of thing, they get it out of context a bit. (Retiree 6, male)

It was enough for these interviewees that the police appearing on these programs were real officers for them to claim they did “the job right”. Which events were retained, and which were edited out, were not relevant to their measure of authenticity for reality television programs. In the same way, Student 7 accepted police reality television programs as being real because, unlike police drama, they were unscripted and featured serving officers rather than actors: “the way they’re filmed, they just put a film crew with a highway patrol or at an RBT station or whatever, so yeah, I accept it as real”. Nevertheless, Student 7 also recognised that these programs were edited so as to construct a highly active image of policing that countered the mundane nature of most police duties:

So, the way they edit it makes it sound like, if you watch *RBT* it looks like every second car is being caught, but in real life you might do a hundred cars and only catch a handful of people. … I think it shows the exciting bits. So, *RBT* really only shows the ones that they catch over [the limit], and *Highway Patrol* only catches the ones that are doing something wrong at the time. It doesn’t show the boring in-between bits. (Student 7, male)

Despite his recognition of a compromised reality giving effect to a more exciting image of police work, Student 7 was happy to watch such programs for that very reason: “But, I find them entertaining.”

This edited nature of reality television referred to by Student 7 was seen by some interviewees to construct police in ways that were unrealistic. Retiree 4 described them as “contrived: they’re set up obviously.” The source of Police Officer 2’s criticisms, the
privileging of action over the mundane elements of real police work, echo that shared widely by the interviewees in regard to police drama:

I think they’re showing these ones now where they’re following them around and, sure, they’re following them around so you’re seeing what’s happening, but they really pick and choose between showing you all this excitement and action and what’s really going on. I think probably they are seeing a little bit about it but they’re only showing them probably 10 percent of what a police officer’s role is: the paperwork, the taking statements, the victim, the computer stuff. So, there’s a lot of other stuff that’s obviously involved. (Police Officer 2, female detective sergeant)

Distortion was also seen in the police-citizen interactions on reality television programs:

In the [reality] shows, they might go to a crime scene and they might talk to a witness or something like that, but it’s not realistic, it doesn’t portray the way you really deal with it, how they handle it. In the reality police shows in Australia—or anywhere—you don’t really see how they’re interacting one on one. You might see them doing random breath testing or a vehicle stop or something like that, you see little bits and pieces, but you don’t see it is realistically portrayed in reality programs. (Police Officer 3, male constable)

Regardless of whether reality television provided “the real thing” as Police Officer 1 described it, and the value that some police attached to that quality, the involvement of police agencies in the production of these programs was noted by some of the interviewees. Of RBT, in which he had once been a participant, Police Officer 1 observed: “There’s police following police [who are] following media to make sure things are done correctly, and then it’s reviewed and if it’s going to look bad for the cops they’re not going to show it.” Retiree 2 described police reality television programs as nothing more than light entertainment on par with cooking programs, just as “scripted and rehearsed, it’s just done in a different way”. He also described the joint producers of such programs, non-operational police and the TV
industry, as shallow. He contended their lack of police experience made them incapable of presenting the complexity of police work when creating television cops shows. However, he did not view the police agency partner as the key driver in this joint enterprise. Rather, it was television ratings, not police promotional purposes that determined the nature of this genre. Student 8 held a similar view, but one tempered with the expectation that police agencies at least do not want to create a “bad look” from a highly visible genre they have some control over:

I would say that it’s more so to show the exciting side of it. It would be more so for ratings and viewers’ pleasure, but I think within reason the police would have some kind of say on what is shown and what isn’t. They’d be pretty clear on that from the beginning I would assume. (Student 8, male)

Not all criticisms of reality television were aimed at distortions favouring excitement. Retiree 8, for example, regarded police on reality television as bland and devoid of the true nature of the dirty work that is involved in policing. It was, he said, “very clinical”. Likewise, elements of police work shown in reality television programs that were seen as providing an accurate depiction of police, were not always celebrated for doing so. Police Officer 2, a female sergeant, spoke of her discomfort in seeing police interactions with the public that did not reflect well on the institution:

Police Officer 2: I think when you see these [police] and I think, “Oh my god, they’re talking to people like that.”

Interviewer: So, it’s a good reflection?

Police Officer 2: It’s a true reflection [her emphasis]. I’m not talking about the drama stuff; I’m talking about those in reality shows. It is what happens. (…) I find [in] those RBT shows,
sometimes [the officers] do come across as being a bit rude.

Police Officer 2’s interpretation of these police-citizen interactions as true reflections of poor practice contrasts with the many complaints about inaccurate depictions of police expressed in the interviews. In this case, an accurate image is criticised because it casts police in a bad light, yet, for most of the interviewees, inaccuracies were criticised despite the expectation that such misrepresentations cast the police in a more favourable light than reality, and in many cases were seen as contributing to the legitimacy of the police institution. In another anomaly, one participant saw value in not showing police operations too accurately:

I don’t think that all parts of policing should be televised or shown to the public, because then everyone would know about the policies and procedures that police use. Crooks would be looking at the different ways that police do things, and so you have to be constantly changing to keep one step ahead of those types of people. (Student 3, female)

Student 3’s concern that too much is revealed of police work in television appears to be a lone voice among the complaints that real and realistic procedures are absent from cop shows. However, Police Officer 2, a female detective provided some support and rationale for this position, although in the specific context of covert policing. An experienced undercover officer, Police Officer 2 said she could understand that the public had romanticised views about detectives: “The roles are not really explained, and there’s a reason behind that: methodologies and other things we don’t want to get out.”

**Legitimacy and National Identity**

Although the interviewees had concerns about inaccurate depictions of police and policing in cop shows, they generally regarded the television representations and the industry itself as legitimating their profession and the institution of policing. This sense of police
legitimacy was at odds with expressions of injured pride by some of the retired officers in regard to the stature and symbols of their profession, as seen in Retiree 8’s comments on the appearance of the female sergeant in *Home and Away*. The perception of television’s legitimation of police also contradicted the more widely felt concerns about what was perceived as a distortion of the public’s understanding of police work, which was inferred by some as more exciting than the real thing, and by others as more sanitised. Police Officer 6, a senior constable, for example, said he disliked the sensational “glorifying” depictions of police in drama “but, I think it does legitimise the work, definitely.” Police Officer 5, a sergeant, held a similar view, although his point of contention was in the depiction of corruption, rather than the sensational acts that Police Officer 6 found fault with:

I think generally the idea behind it is that police are good and policing is mostly done well, and that the police are there for the good of the community and the right reasons. That’s generally. Obviously, there are some shows that will go down and as part of that particular episode, they’ll explore the darker side of policing, but generally speaking they’re supportive of policing. (Police Officer 5, male sergeant)

It was not surprising that most interviewees referred to reality television programs, rather than drama series, when talking about the legitimation of police through television:

… overall the programs, those factional [sic] ones, are very supportive of police more often than not … (Retiree 1, male)

… on the whole, police are portrayed positively. Those booze bus [programs], I think they are very good, and I think they give a good reflection. (Retiree 9, male)

They were aware that these programs were made in partnership with police agencies and therefore carried a police-endorsed message. Indeed, several interviewees showed they
interpreted reality television programs as instruments of police agencies and recognised the “logics of police media associations” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 40). Student 8, believed that joint productions were exercises in public relations aimed at legitimating police institutions: “Yeah, absolutely. I don’t think the police force would allow it if they didn’t think that there’d be some sort of positive benefit from it.”

Student 7 reflected on the capacity for reality television cop shows to inform viewers about good driving, and to promote the police-as-citizen narrative that supported this educational imperative and endorsed a community-oriented style of policing: “I think *Highway Patrol* tries to show the human side of police, doing the *vox pops* in between interactions with the community and that sort of thing and sort of explaining their opinion of someone’s behaviour.” Although accepted as fictional and therefore understood as “stories rather than truth”, drama series, too, were regarded by some as portraying police in a good light:

They’re a pillar of society. That comes through in the fictional episodes. They’re a necessity. It seems that the whole community supports them, in the shows I’ve watched anyway. (Student 3, male)

… in drama TV shows they’re generally portrayed as having high ethics, good standards. … I guess with the idea of police, not just in Australia, is to serve and protect, uphold the law, so yeah, I guess that is the main theme of those characters in those shows. (Student 4, male)

There were, however, some challenges to the proposition that television representations of policing legitimated the police. Retiree 5 stated that he thought television carried “a hidden message that the police are all no hopers, yobboys and uneducated and all this kind of business.” When this statement is compared to how he described his initial experience of the police-community relationship as “more amicable, a happier relationship
with the police and the public in those days”, it speaks to a de-legitimating effect of television. Similarly, Police Officer 2, who regarded reality television programs as valid and effective showcases for police work, argued that the sensational and inaccurate fictional portrayals could never be an endorsement of real policing: “I think with the drama stuff, definitely not.” His reason was that the imagined world of fiction could not provide a credible endorsement of what it was depicting inaccurately.

Although police reality television programs were considered to be supportive of the police, other non-fictional forms of television—news and current affairs programs—were criticised for what some saw as an anti-police stance. Student 10, for example, expressed concern that “probably the media show a particular situation in a poor position”, going on to describe the selective inclusion of images of heavy-handedness in police responses: “From the cops’ point of view we think, well that’s unfair.” Similarly, Student 2 described “the news media” as presenting a “counter narrative” that damaged reputations rather than supported law enforcement. These mistrustful attitudes toward news reporting programs are characteristic of the police workplace culture (Reiner, 2010).

Not all participants regarded reality television as serving the interests of the profession. Retiree 1 contended that fictional television programs tended to “reflect society’s view and expectations of the police”. Reality television programs in his view, were “more politically correct” a term he used to refer to a sanitised version of policing, fit for viewing and projecting an ideal that educated the public about policing in ways that suited the image management purposes of the organisation: “So I think it shows that nowadays [reality television programs] probably reflect the expectations of the public and probably more so how the police do operate, frontline policing” (Retiree 1).
Police Officer 2 also thought that reality television failed to endorse police officers despite its image management objectives. She said she often “cringed” when watching police reality television programs, describing the way officers engaged with the public as “not a good image”. Student 4 singled out Recruits for failing to legitimate policing: “I don’t think that it gave a very good impression or view of police. I only watched a few episodes of it before I stopped, but I think the participants they chose were maybe not suitable for policing.” Retiree 3 supported the aim of reality television programs as a way to “reinforce some form of law”, but, saw that some of the messages they projected were at odds with that purpose: “When someone gets off, the perpetrator is portrayed as the hero who beat the police. That should never ever happen.”

Overall, despite their contesting the authenticity of Australian cop shows, the participants regarded most programs as legitimating the profession and the institution of policing. For many, the notion of police legitimacy was itself a product of the local setting and the people appearing in the Australian cop shows they spoke about. This is consistent with Margaret Rogers’ (2008) claims that the television police genre “is influenced by issues of historical moment, national attributes, and cultural context” (p. 78). The program most frequently referred to in association with this intertwining of national character and policing style was Blue Heelers. Its familiarity to almost all the research participants was not surprising given its longevity and popularity with the wider public.

As I noted in Chapter 6, Blue Heelers features an ensemble cast of police and other townsfolk in a country community. A number of interviewees saw this program as the embodiment of Australian policing and, if not the essential expression of the national character, heavily imbued with a local sensibility. The interviewees who referred to national characteristics on display in Blue Heelers, spoke of camaraderie, mateship, team, and
community. All four are positive words; they endorse the image of Australian police as projected by *Blue Heelers* and have meaning relative to two aspects of policing. In this context, the words camaraderie, mateship and team are almost interchangeable. They relate to the internal, or back stage (Perlmutter, 2000, p. 49), world of the police and suggest the positive aspects of the occupational culture. Evoking the exaggerated romanticism Russel Ward (1958) attributes to these cultural values, the interviewees overlooked the complexity of culture in both the national and policing contexts. None referred to the exclusivity of masculinity and whiteness connoted by mateship, and none identified the potential for misconduct and corruption when camaraderie mutates into misguided loyalties and isolationism, a risk widely recognised by policing scholars (Cockcroft, 2013; Crank, 2004; Loftus, 2009; Reiner, 2010; Waddington, 2008) and commissions of inquiry (Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct & Fitzgerald, 1989; Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service & Wood, 1997; Western Australia Corruption and Crime Commission & Kennedy, 2004).

In contrast to the references to camaraderie, mateship and team in the interviews, the identification of community as a characteristic unique to Australian policing addresses the external, or front of stage work on which police legitimacy is contingent. This is the “traditional domain” of policing focused on “trust and interactions between police and community” (Noppe, Verhage, & Damme, 2017, p. 475). Student 3 recognised the legitimating effect of community engagement as depicted in *Blue Heelers*. In words reminiscent of Louis Althusser’s (1971) inclusion of police within the repressive apparatuses of the state, Student 3 interpreted *Blue Heelers* as a vehicle for conveying an altogether different message about policing in Australia:
It seems that a police organisation is built into a town. It’s not an overarching kind of state weapon, so people enjoy watching the shows. I couldn’t imagine a police show doing well in India, for instance, where people are very fearful of the police. [There], they don’t seem to be part of the community. (Student 3, male)

Those interviewees who drew on reality television programs to construct a uniquely Australian style of policing, also relied on widely accepted, if not always accurate, notions of national identity. These programs were seen as demonstrating the Australian propensity for laconic humour and a relaxed approach to life.

Maybe our Aussie humour. I’m thinking about the RBT type shows where you can see that. I remember there was the show at the Academy about the students. Yeah, The Recruits. There was that kid who, I can’t remember his name, but he was a Middle Eastern boy or something and he went out to Green Valley afterwards and he worked with my husband there and he was like, “Oh my god, I’m going to die for this job!” He was so excited; he was like that on the street. What do we do that’s Australian? I think it sometimes their demeanour, they’re very casual and laid back, sitting in the truck and having a bit of a joke, a bit of dig. I can’t really explain it, but I can see it. (Police Officer 2, female detective sergeant)

The policing student referred to by Police Officer 2, Cec, was framed as a “character” in Recruits. As I observed in Chapter 5, Cec said he wanted to become a police officer because he wanted to “fight crime.” He was identified in the program by his ethnicity, and his lack of physical fitness was presented as a major obstacle to making it through the training program. In this way, his discipline (Foucault, 1977) was questioned. Police Officer 2 also referred to Cec’s ethnicity, distinguishing his over-enthusiastic excitement for the job from the more casual, “Australian way”. Her comments could not be interpreted as disparaging of Cec, yet they show that the media framing of Cec’s ethnicity is replicated in his work place.
Student 6, an English woman who migrated to Australia in her mid-twenties, offered a less benign interpretation of an Australian national character that police reality television programs evoked. She described the police shown in *Gold Coast Cops* as “bogans” and the general public they policed were “more inclined to alcohol and drugs because of the area they’re in”. Student 4 also referred to Australia’s drinking culture when asked about how cop shows convey the national character. Unlike Student 6, his comments related to the policed rather than those who do the policing:

Student 4: I guess when you look at shows like RBT for example. You’d think that anyone watching that show would see Australians as a bunch of drunks. If you were to come here and watch this show without having … you know, you’ve got a whole television show dedicated to showing people getting picked up for drunk driving and what-not. That’s part of the Australian culture in a way.

Interviewer: What about on the policing side?

Student 4: I haven’t really thought about it in that sense.

Many of the interviewees drew on aspects of cop shows produced in other countries to articulate what Australian cop shows were not. In fact, this oppositional comparison was more widely used than direct reference to Australian programs. For example, when I observed that some researchers had identified cop shows as the genre most able to suggest a national flavour, Retiree 7 spoke about guns and violence as characteristics of life in the United States that were ‘replicated’ in American cop shows. He suggested that Australian society’s contrasting attitude to gun ownership, reflected in tighter laws, was a major point of difference in their respective cop shows. He regarded this as “reflective of the culture we live in, whereas in the United States, even in their shows, they have civilians carrying firearms”. For Retiree 7, Australian television drama needed to depict society and how it is policed in
ways that were ‘less violent than the United States’ in order to be plausible. In this observation, Retiree 7 articulated television’s legitimating of police in the context of the domains Jannie Noppe, Antionette Verhage and Anjuli Van Damme (2017, p. 475) define as “policing styles” and “use of force”. Australian cop shows that were regarded by the interviewees as legitimating the police did so by operating in the domains of trust and citizen interaction, and by depicting policing styles that were not dependent on the use of force.

The English-born Student 6, who had migrated to Australia five years prior to commencing her training, was less familiar with local cop shows, although she said she thought they would have more in common with programs emanating from the UK than those from the US. The latter, she said, focused on “drugs and guns”, and its overall effect she characterised as being “too Hollywood”; always trying to be “much bigger, much greater, much better”. She regarded police and community interaction, beyond the depiction of police fighting criminals, as a missing ingredient for the American programs and one which contributed to defining UK and Australian programs and the societies they reflected: “whereas, shows like The Bill and maybe local Australian shows, they’re focusing on the interactions, the community, the social inclusion [and] if there is any of it.” For Student 6, the Australian national character connoted by fictional cop shows resembles more closely that of her native UK, one that privileges the community over the individual.

The Bill (1984–2010) was cited by many of the interviewees, particularly among the retirees, for its exemplary interpretation of the police station and its dynamics. The focus on ordinary characters with whom the interviewees identified, and plots involving the mundane nature of much police work, gave the program what many of the participants regarded as authenticity. That the police in The Bill also engaged with the public in ways that were consistent with community policing was seen to legitimate the police to its audiences: “it
enhanced the role of police in the eyes of the public” (Retiree 7). While those who referred to *The Bill* did not contend that it could be generalised to policing beyond its London setting, they saw certain elements that were transferable to their Australian experience. Like *Blue Heelers*, *The Bill* featured aspects of police practice that were viewed as “authentic” (Student 6) and “genuine” (Retiree 9). The station dynamics, portrayed as imperfect and given as much attention as the law enforcement activities of the police, were among the elements many interviewees associated positively with *The Bill*.

*The Bill* has always been fairly [focused on] police internal dramas and [they] became a large part of the program, which did make it a good show to watch back in the early days. It had a lot of internal drama, and a lot of what happens, which did have a lot to do with the characteristics of my experience in the cops. Not everyone’s going to get on every day of the week and that is reflected—deeply, in my opinion. (Police Officer 1, male detective sergeant)

Retiree 8 likewise referred to *The Bill* as a series that depicted station life accurately such that he and other police officers of his generation would find acceptable. There was, though, no Australian equivalent: “as far as daily [working] life, I don’t think there’s a TV show like *The Bill*”. Retiree 9 held a similar view, describing *The Bill* as:

… a magnificent show, the most accurate portrayal of policing as I knew it … I wasn’t really into Australian police shows and I will cite *The Bill* as the gold standard and the most likely to give an accurate representation, even though it was English … I just loved that show because it represented flawed characters, complex characters. I remember one episode where half the team were down with flu and the boss suspected them and goes around and knocks on their doors and wakes one of them up and he was terribly sick with flu. Fairly mundane sort of thing, but it was a reality. (Retiree 9, male)

In contrast, Retiree 5 referred to the class system he detected in English programs as being counter to a more egalitarian approach in Australia:
In television, the program that really annoys me when we watch it is that *Midsomer Murders*, the English program. The way that the public speaks to those two coppers, strike me pink, it annoys me. I’d like to think that it doesn’t happen in England like that, but it wouldn’t have happened like that here [in Australia] in my time. (Retiree 5, male)

Retiree 5’s memory—and expectation—of respect for the police is worth examining. In his experience, the Australian public treat the police respectfully, but this is not, nor cannot be true of all members of the community. Importantly, those holding less favourable attitudes are not exclusively those committing unlawful acts. Many individuals and groups are likely to harbour distrust or fear of the police because of past treatment by agencies of the state. The police, being highly visible in the community and possessed of coercive powers, are readily identifiable as part of the apparatus of oppression. For some people, then, it is their marginalisation rather than criminality that motivates their withholding of respect. In contrast, the lack of respect for police identified in *Midsomer Murders* by Retiree 5 is that of superiority. The upper middle-class citizenry cast in this British program show their disrespect for the police and, in doing so, their expectation that the apparatus of the state works for, rather than against, people of their standing. In recognising this inversion of a relationship of power he was familiar with, Retiree 5 saw this as anathema to the way policing works in Australia and hinted at adopting corrective measures were he to have encountered it: “It wouldn’t have happened like that here in my time”.

Several other interviewees identified Australian police as different from their counterparts in other countries. Police Officer 5 recognised these national differences in the real police as well as the way they were depicted on television:
Police Officer 5: Obviously if you’ve got an American show, it’s more supportive of a particular style of policing, as opposed to an Australian show or even a UK show.

Interviewer: So, the style of policing that would be shown on Australian shows, how would you describe that?

Police Officer 5: I would describe it as being similar to that in the UK, in that it’s more about people and interacting with people, as opposed to the more US shows which is all about action and excitement.

While he conceded his statement was “a bit of a generalisation”, Police Officer 5 had nevertheless constructed his views about police and their representation in cops shows on the basis of his perception of American and UK society and the ways in which police respond within those countries. Police Officer 6 offered a similar view:

Police Officer 6: I think in Australian shows, there’s kind of a mixture between the two; there’s a degree of action and investigative practices as well, which is to me a pretty good approach I suppose.

Interviewer: Beyond the police, and encompassing society more broadly?

Police Officer 6: Australia? Yeah, if I think it’s a mixture between the two, between action and investigations, then culturally it would be the same thing, obviously a mixture of people of action and thinkers.

Student 8 also described Australian cop shows as amalgams of UK and US programs, possessing elements of both. He based this claim on the styles of program, attributing to the British programs a focus on procedure and to American programs excitement and action:
I think Australia sits somewhere in the middle, I think, because we’re so closely related to both the US and the UK, they’ve sort of drawn from both aspects. Like, occasionally they draw from the high intensity sort of action-packed style of the US, but then as well as that, the investigative side and the mystery from the UK. (Student 8, male)

Nevertheless, like Student 1, Student 8 recognised that Australian cop shows projected national characteristics in depicting police-citizen interactions. These characteristics were in contrast with the American style and, in his view, had implications for police legitimacy:

I get the feeling that Australian TV, it’s different to the US. I mean shows like *COPS* it’s all very us-versus-them, whereas in Australia in shows like *RBT* and *Highway Patrol*, it’s less that and it does show a bit more interaction between the police and the community like in the idea that the police are a part of the community themselves, whereas [in] the US it seems that there’s the police and there’s the community and they’re [the police] in charge, they’re above them [the public]. And you can see that in the interactions they have too, there’s an obvious element to that, just the way they interact with people. In Australian shows, they show police joking around, you know, they’re quite laid back in some instances, even with intoxicated drivers, once they’ve got them in the car on the way back to the stations, they’re quite happy to have a chat. (Student 8, male)

He agreed with the suggestion that these programs showed the Australian model of police as more egalitarian and one consisting of “citizens in uniform” (Waddington, 1999, p. 299).

One officer offered a unique perspective on the representation of Australia in locally made cop shows by drawing on the “the Bush” and its geography of distance and landscape of difference as a metaphor for police work. Reminiscent of Ward’s (1958) *Australian Legend*, Police Officer 1, a male sergeant serving in a regional location, referred to the scenery featured in *Territory Cops* and *Kalgoorlie Cops* as emblematic of Australian cop
shows. Both titles feature policing in two remote areas of the country. For Police Officer 1, they connote much about police work through the vastness of the outback setting and the distances from capital cities and regional centres. The isolation is, he says, also characteristic of the role of the police officer: “it does show a good portion of the vastness of Australia and how you can be alone, just one bloke doing the job which can be nasty waiting for hours to get back-up.” This officer situates the police at the frontier, isolated from colleagues and the safety and support that they provide in more familiar settings. This metaphor for the Australian experience as being one of isolation from European society, perhaps a cliché, is replicated in this construction of police. They, like the country itself, are infused in the legend of the Bush, an idea that, despite its illusory truth, does service to Rogers’ (2008) attribution of “historical moment, national attributes, and cultural context” (p.78) to cop shows.

Television Policing Decoded

Stuart Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model advances three positions from which audiences construct meanings of a “televisual discourse” (p. 136): the preferred, or dominant-hegemonic position, within which lies a sub-position that Hall refers to as the professional code; the negotiated position; and the oppositional position. The dominant-hegemonic position adopts the preferred meaning that is encoded in production. Although there is scope in this position for independent readings, ultimately the viewer “operates inside the dominant position” (Hall, 1980, p. 136). To decode the cop show from the preferred position is to read such insights into police practice and policing authority as they were intended. Whether that intention is to offer policing as an attractive career, to provide a deterrent to offending, or to promote a community-oriented police force, the message is understood as it is intended. The interviewees’ often critical responses to many aspects of the cop show are not strongly indicative of decoding from a dominant position. The professional code imposes an
additional layer to the message to which the television industry—“the profession” to which Hall refers—“applies criteria and transformational operations of its own, especially those of a technico-practical nature” (p. 136). The professional code can be seen in the production techniques and practices of the cop show that encourage the viewer to decode the edited and enhanced images of police officers as indicative of the real world of policing. But, such coding—or “metacoding”—is never neutral in that it “operates within the ‘hegemony’ of the dominant code” (Hall, 1980, p. 136). It extends beyond the routine, mechanistic craft of the television production team, who deploy their technico-practical skills to create a coherent and entertaining narrative from the many hours of recorded footage. This coding also consists of the symbols and messages that communicate ideological positions, which, as I observed in the previous two chapters, cop shows ultimately project as a form of institutional legitimation. In contrast to the more critical ways in which they saw themselves portrayed, the police-affiliated participants in my research saw the public as operating within the dominant code. To these police insiders, the public outsiders read and accept the totality of the cop show’s image and meaning.

Hall’s (1980) exposition of the encoding/decoding model is at its most abstruse when explaining the “complex matter” (p. 136) of the professional code, not least because it is a position that he locates at the encoding level rather than at that of reception (Steiner, 2016). This is a shortcoming for a model of communication that seeks to explain how audiences make meaning from mass mediated objects. It is evident, though, that the police-affiliated participants in my research do decode aspects of the televisual discourse of the cop show from their own professional position, aware of the television professional code and its technico-practical elements of production and, in regard to the policing domain, conscious of the symbols and structures of ideological meaning. Their decoding, or meaning making, of
the cop show is informed by the same social, cultural and political settings as those in which the encoders—the producers—participate.

The second position in Hall’s (1980) model, the negotiated position, decodes and constructs meaning through a combination of adaptive and oppositional readings. Viewers adopting a negotiated position “acknowledge the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions” (1980, p. 137) in the broad, or abstract sense but adopt a wider range of readings. In response to the cop show, a negotiated position may accept the legitimacy of the police connoted in the text but treat the events and individuals appearing on the screen with a more critical eye. This position was also regularly adopted by the interviewees in this research. They acknowledged the “legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions” (Hall, 1980, p. 137), but questioned some of the on-screen policing activities and personnel, adopting an ambivalent attitude toward the “half-formed” (Hurd, 1981) image of television’s interpretation of their experienced reality.

The third position, an oppositional stance, was less regularly adopted by the interviewees. The oppositional decoder readily connects the ideological connotative meaning with the literal denotative text and, in doing so, contests it entirely. Decoding in opposition to the encoded text “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework” (Hall, 1980, p. 138). Viewing the cop show from an oppositional position is to read policing and its representation on television as the work of a delegitimated, oppressive arm of the state exercising social, cultural and political control in the interests of the elite. Not surprisingly, while some of the interviewees were critical, even dismissive, of the cop show, few of them decoded elements of these programs from an oppositional position. Some interviewees were keen to talk about the oppositional attitudes they adopted when viewing news and current affairs reporting on the basis that programs of this type were oppositional in their encoding of their profession; that is, they saw
them as ideologically anti-police. In contrast to their own interpretations, the interviewees saw the potential for oppositional decoding by outsiders, in that they regarded some of the depictions of policing as providing the content from which the public could perceive police as incompetent or corrupt. For the most part, however, the participants attributed to the general viewer a dominant position that accepted the sometimes distorted and glorified technico-practical aspects of police work as authentic and adopted the ideological messaging that legitimates the institution.

My purpose in conducting this series of audience-related interviews was to seek an answer, or answers, to the third research question: How do Australian police interpret the representation of themselves on cop shows? In response, I observed that the participants ascribed the right of television characters and actors to stand in for real police in much the same way as their organisational culture has traditionally determined who has the right to police. Those more embedded in the culture contested the role of women, while aspirants to the profession were more likely to promote a more diverse work force in regard to gender and ethnicity. The policing students and younger officers not only question television version’s under-representation of women and diversity, but credit police agencies with a more advanced attitude to workplace equity than their on-screen counterparts. As well as making their own professional judgements, the interviewees presumed that outsiders derived their understanding of police from television, but without the benefit of policing experience and the cynical disposition of those in the job. Despite concerns about inaccurate depictions on television, cop shows were seen as objects of police legitimacy. However, reality television programs, which were recognised as products of police agencies, were not always regarded as more authentic to policing practice or more legitimating of the police institution as drama series featuring police. The participants showed a wide acceptance of the notion that
Australian cop shows project something of the national identity, and this too was considered as a site of police legitimation based on constructions of Australia as highly egalitarian: the land of the “fair go”. Nevertheless, local flavour was more often expressed as a form of divergence from foreign, predominantly UK and US, representations, rather than being a definable identity itself.

This chapter focused on the reception of television programs featuring policing by an audience group affiliated with the police profession. Its purpose was to address the third research question of my thesis: How do Australian police interpret the representation of themselves on television? In the following chapter I synthesise this audience study with my research on cop show production from Chapter 4 and my textual analysis of the three reality television series in Chapter 5 and the three police drama series in Chapter 6 to answer the fourth research question: What do Australian cop shows communicate about policing and national identity?
Chapter 8: Synthesis: Cop Shows and the Idea(ology) of Police

The preceding four chapters detail my analyses of the three domains of the Australian cop show: production and its contexts; selected texts in the form of reality television series and police dramas; and their reception. These analyses, completed individually but not in isolation from each other, form a series of critical studies on key aspects of the representation of police through television. The individual components of this research, consisting of social-historical study and semi-structured interviews applied to the production and audience aspects, and discursive analysis applied to the texts, contribute more to academic inquiry into the representation of police on television as distinct dimensions of a complex interpretive process than as three discrete stages of a sequential method (Thompson, 1990, pp. 280–281).

The final phase of the multi-perspective approach I apply in this thesis abstracts from each of these phases in a process of interpretation and, because interpretation is already at play in the analysis of each aspect, re-interpretation. Although I have concentrated my analysis of each phase in their respective chapters, I have woven some observations from each phase into that of the others to draw comparisons or contrasts. In this chapter I adopt a more deliberate approach to this synthesis. In doing so, I address the fourth research question: What do Australian cop shows communicate about policing and national identity?

I find from my research that Australian cop shows construct “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1990, p. 292), although it is evident from my research that it is through meaning in the service of legitimacy that the power of the Australian police institution and its officers can be accepted by those they police. The cop shows I analysed legitimate the police and, in so doing, legitimate the power of the institution which is exercised and symbolised by its officers. Australia’s self-proclaimed egalitarian society, mythologised in the idea of the land of the “fair go”, provides the frame through which a
legitimated police force is constructed, and locally made cop shows operate within that frame. Reality television cop shows are designed by policing agencies and their television industry partners to communicate this ideological message, to promote responsible behaviour by the policed, and to manage the corporate image. Drama series, too, although not the police-endorsed objects of mass communication they once were, construct a predominantly positive idea of police.

In the programs I analysed, there were aspects of policing that were in conflict with the preferred message that police agencies seek to promote, but the institution itself was not delegitimated by the actions of the officers at fault. In Blue Heelers, despite the sexist attitudes of some of the male officers, the Mount Thomas police are worthy characters who serve their community, thus demonstrating the societal good of policing. In Wildside and East West 101, the transgressions are more serious. In both programs, police power is shown as corrupted in the characters of Deakin and Crowley and their respective teams. Their prejudices and persecutory behaviour act as a “demonstration-effect … for the problems and potentials of the nation” (Bayley, 1985, p. 200). The demonstration-effect of Wildside articulates endemic police corruption exposed by Justice Wood’s investigations (Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service & Wood, 1997), in East West 101 it is the post-September 11 othering of those of Middle Eastern appearance. In a narrative that is guided by the entertainment imperatives of television as well as those of ideological purpose, the police institution, if not the bad apples within, is redeemed through the presence and actions of McCoy and Malik. Ultimately, viewers read these texts and their resolutions as endorsements of policing, insiders doing so with some scepticism of the technical and cultural verisimilitude, while attributing to outsiders a less critical reading.
Reality television has become an increasingly favoured business opportunity for police agencies and the television industry. Programs of this genre are a police-controlled product, and they are created and transmitted as the preferred organisational and institutional message. This strategy was described by the Liaison Officer I interviewed for Chapter 4 as educating the public, the purpose of which was consistent with the objectives Lee and McGovern (2013a) attribute to police-media ventures: inculcating responsibility, managing the professional and corporate image, and legitimating the institution. Programs of this type have increased in number and popularity over the past decade, making it a familiar form of television entertainment for Australian audiences, and ensuring they are effective tools with which to educate the public. It is in the messaging, in the capacity of these programs to “promote key corporate objectives” (NSW Police Force, 2016b, p. 9), that reality television provides service to the police. In what has become a “productive” (Lee & McGovern, 2013a, p. 110) relationship between the two institutions, the television industry also benefits from programs of this type. Requiring modest financial investment and providing substantial returns for producers and broadcasters, reality television programs deliver value for money. The police, too, receive a significant financial benefit. As the Liaison Officer and the Television Producer stated, the police agency has less need to bear the cost of advertising campaigns when programmed content expresses their message more effectively. Moreover, the reality television genre cannot offer challenging versions of policing in the way that some fictional programs, including Wildside and East West 101, have done. The popularity of reality television programs demonstrates that the police-produced image of the institution and its members may have more reach than that of their fictional counterparts, positioning the corporately endorsed, uncritically presented version as the dominant mode through which policing is constructed by viewers.
On some measures, however, these programs may be less effective in generating the benefits expected by police sponsors. My research identified some “kinks in the chain of communication” (Hall, 1980, p. 135) that show a television version of the police force that is inconsistent with aspects of the intended messaging of the organisation. The police officers seen in the two operationally-based reality television programs, *The Force* and *RBT* are not reflective of the diverse and inclusive workforce that the organisation currently is and aspires to improve upon, nor in the way it promotes itself as an employer of choice (NSW Police Force, 2017). The police and television industry producers attributed this effect to pragmatism and the need for authenticity. They spoke about the need to observe rather than construct policing activities and to work with whoever is available. By featuring two women and two men as the key characters, the internally focused *Recruits* is deliberate in its treatment of diversity. However, it shows their acculturation into the police organisation in contrasting ways based on their gender and ethnicity, thus creating a narrative that is at odds with the corporate agenda.

The on-screen behaviour of some officers, as perceived by several of the interviewees, was also in contrast with the preferred image of the producers. Reality television cop shows are edited to satisfy the requirements of their sponsoring police agency. As the Liaison Officer observed of the programs managed by the Film and Television Unit, corporate communication needs to “minimise the potential to bring the NSW Police Force or any police personnel into ridicule or disrepute”. Nevertheless, aspects of policing that were included in some of these police sponsored programs were viewed by police officers and policing students as detrimental to the police image. Student 4 thought the students in *Recruits* gave a bad impression, Police Officer 2 “cringed” at the rudeness displayed by her on-screen colleagues, Student 6 regarded some as unprofessional in their dealings with the public and
lax in their attitudes to the job, and Retiree 5 was concerned that the police he saw on
television “made all cops look like no-hopers”. These comments related to isolated incidents
that were subject to individual interpretation, but such blemishes on the police image will
continue to influence police officers’ attitudes to corporate communication strategies and
may affect police-citizen interactions.

Police drama series also construct law enforcement agencies and their officers in ways
that differ from the reality of the workforce. Police agencies do not regulate programs of this
type in the same way that they control reality television. Rather than being symptomatic of
police involvement in their production, problematic images that fictional cop shows might
communicate are products of the television industry, and are informed by the social, cultural
and political positions of the wider community. Sexism and discrimination against women,
for example, are recognised attributes of police culture (Westmarland, 2001), albeit
increasingly less so. However, the treatment of gender in fictional television programs,
including those that feature policing, is also influenced by social structures that are not
unique to the profession. The medium itself articulates and perpetuates the gendering of
professional roles, putting Maggie in her place in Blue Heelers and assigning the senior
female officers in Wildside and East West 101 to passive spectator status.

The retired and serving police officers and the policing students whom I interviewed
identified elements of reality television programs that were counter to the intended message.
Many of them thought that the police on television, through their behaviour and attitudes,
compromised the legitimacy of police. Some of the interviewees found fault with their
colleagues’ police-citizen interactions, regarding such performances as detrimental to the
public image of the profession. This critical focus on the community-oriented expectations of
policing points to an awareness of the strategies underpinning police sponsored television
programs among current and future practitioners. They interpreted displays of “attitude”, or disrespectful treatment of citizens by their on-screen colleagues, as being counterproductive to the intended public relations messages and the legitimation of the institution. The retirees, more entrenched in the police culture of cynicism and distrust of management, were highly critical of the community-oriented, image management purposes of police reality television. Retiree 1 called it “politically correct” messaging, contrived for pleasing the public and political masters. That the younger cohort were more critical of poor on-screen behaviours and editing for action-oriented effects, shows that police culture is not “monolithic” (Reiner, 2010, p. 132), its influence over individual attitudes seeming to diminish as the profession’s white, male homogeneity declines. However, there is no certainty that the students will retain this more progressive attitude to better police-citizen encounters when they, too, are more deeply enculturated within the organisation—a question that only a longitudinal study could answer.

The interviewees were also mindful of the distortion of the police image created by the “technical media of inscription and transmission” (Thompson, 1990, p. 283), or the “technico-practical” elements of media professional encoding (Hall, 1980, p. 136). These rules and conventions of television production that are used to create and receive meanings (Fiske, 2011, p. 81) are not the secrets of its creators, unknown to viewers. Student 7’s reference to the editing process as reducing television policing to just “the exciting bits” is indicative of the participants’ understanding of how television works. Moreover, their interpretations of cop show police in regard to gender, age and ethnicity, and to the nature of the work performed in these programs, demonstrate that they also understood how television works to create meaning about police and policing.
Limitations

There are several limitations to my research that relate to the ways I have applied the methodology and the circumstances under which I did so. The tripartite, or threefold, approach provided a valid framework in that it incorporated production, text and audience in exploring the meaning of the cop show in Australia. But, I did not conduct the three research activities in the order in which they are generally understood as elements in a communication process. This was in part due to my initial intention to focus on cop shows and the police-audience response prior to determining the greater validity posed by expanding the scope of study to include the involvement of police organisations in the production of television programs. The field work for this element, reported on in Chapter 4, was delayed while additional approval was considered by the Faculty of Arts Ethics Committee and the NSW Police Force. For the sake of expediency, the research relating to production, logically the first stage of communication, was conducted last. Nevertheless, my scheduling does not diminish the value of any of the participants’ responses and comments, nor does it invalidate my analysis. However, I may have identified other “kinks in the chain” (Hall, 1980) had I been able to pursue issues raised in the production stage interviews with the participants in the audience stage of my research.

The research activities addressing the production aspect of the cop show consisted of only two interviews both of which related to reality television programs. Although the small number of participants would be difficult to add to, there being only a small number of eligible police officers and television industry professionals, a more critical limitation of the study is that it did not include perspectives from the television drama industry. Interviews with writers and producers of fictional cop shows, like those undertaken by Colbran (2014) and Lam (2014), could have provided valuable insight into the conception, creation and
intended meaning of cop shows that are not objects of police public relations. Because the NSW Police Force no longer takes an active role in assisting production houses that make drama series, producers have no obligations to the NSW Police Force and may be less constrained in depicting police in ways that are critical of the organisation. An understanding of the production and transmission of police images under such circumstances would have been beneficial to my research and may have guided the direction of the subsequent stages.

The focus on first episodes and opening title credits of the selected programs was a valid approach for the formal analysis stage. Drawing on Jonathan Bignell’s (2009) method, I explored the ways the selected programs established settings, story, and characters, as well as foregrounding the tone and message of the series. My analysis of these elements informed my response to the research questions I had posed for this thesis. Nevertheless, the concentration on first episodes removed the opportunity to determine whether the selected cop shows evolved in their treatment of the aspects I highlighted. For example, subsequent episodes of the reality television series may have shown a more representative number of women undertaking operational duties.

My employment with the NSW Police Force provided some advantages for recruiting interviewees for the audience component. Nevertheless, diversity within the participant population was not great. The research would have benefited from the inclusion of women retirees and greater representation of ethnic and cultural diversity among the cohort. Gender and ethnicity, and the influence of occupational culture in determining the right to police are key themes of my analysis. Including more participants with self-reflective views on these themes would have increased the potential for alternative perspectives of the cop show. Avenues for recruitment of police affiliated participants are limited and, as I discovered, officers and retirees willing to engage with researchers are not plentiful.
I have situated my research in the Australian context, engaging with local producers, programs, and viewers. There are pragmatic reasons for imposing this limitation, not least my own nationality and consequent familiarity with Australian programs, but also the convenience of location and access to police participants. Beyond the practicalities of my own circumstances, the Australian focus of this research addresses a deficiency in police and media studies identified in the literature review. The Australian perspective needs to be examined because, as Margaret Rogers (2008, p. 78) contends, the influence of “historical moment, national attributes and cultural context” inevitably come to bear on the construction of police in each country. There is, however, a risk in limiting the scope of study to Australia. Locally made cop shows have been strongly supplemented and, at times, overshadowed by imported programs particularly from Britain and America. Historically, Australian viewers, including the participants in my research, have not had a uniquely local experience of the cop show from which to construct a singularly local understanding of Australian police, making it difficult to regard Roger’s contention as absolute.

**Future Research**

My thesis adds to what is still a small body of research, globally and locally, that explores the ways in which television constructs police and policing through cop shows. There is much scope for further exploration of this topic, a claim I make based on the evidence of continuity and change in the domains of policing, mass communication and academic inquiry.

Police will continue to act as pervasive teachers about civic values (Bayley, 1985) and cop shows as powerful signifiers in our understanding of the political role of policing (Reiner, 2010). The NSW Police Force has persisted in its strategic partnership with the local television industry. New series of *RBT* and *The Force: Behind the Line* were commissioned
when I interviewed Officer in mid-2017. This strongly suggests that these programs, and others of this type, will serve the purposes of the police media relationship into the future. At the same time, bringing a more critical eye while lending its institutional gravitas to the genre, the ABC’s venture into the public safety observational documentary genre, *Keeping Australia Safe* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2017), which featured policing as well as other agencies of control, revealed “what it takes to protect our national security and personal security and at what cost (to the budget and to who we are)”. As terrorism and cybercrime demand more of law enforcement agencies, their response to these threats provide scope for new reality television programs in which policing might be shown as a more militarised or technologically specialised state activity. What such programs might then communicate about policing offers significant potential for further research.

The politicisation of immigration, asylum seekers arriving by boat, and the intake and settlement refugees, warrants close analysis of reality television programs that feature enforcement agencies involved in such activities. *Keeping Australia Safe* was not developed into a series, but the Liaison Officer I interviewed for Chapter 4 stated that there was interest in making more programs of this type. The longevity of *Border Security: Australia’s Front Line* (2004–) demonstrates that there is a market for programs that feature control agencies other than the police, including those that enforce immigration laws. Reality programs focusing on this domain of control could be examined using the approach I have adopted in this thesis to further explore television constructions of national identity.

The police drama series also presents as a critical topic for future research. It continues to feature on Australian television, but it is not a static genre. The recent trend in American, British and European broadcasting markets for producing *quality television* cop shows has been slow to replicate in Australia. Programs characterised as quality television
display a cultivated, literary aesthetic that is not seen in conventional productions, and they are aimed at and appeal to educated and wealthy viewers (Bignell, 2012, p.179). The costs required to script, cast, and direct programs of this type are substantial for the comparatively smaller local industry, and the declining Australian market (Turner, 2017) can only provide a low return on such investment. However, the recent series *Mystery Road* (ABC, 2018) and *Dead Lucky* (SBS, 2018) stand as evidence that some sections of the industry are interested in presenting different perspectives through programs of this type. These titles reposition ethnicity in policing by casting an Indigenous detective (*Mystery Road*) and an officer with Chinese heritage (*Dead Lucky*) as lead characters. In doing so, they articulate contemporary and inclusive narratives of “historical moment, national attributes and cultural context” (Rogers, 2008, p. 78). As cop shows, they extend the right to police to those who have too often been excluded, thus offering a different idea of police. *Mystery Road* also bears some of the aesthetic hallmarks of quality television. A spin off from an award-winning film of the same name, it showcases the talent of its director, writers and actors and, through its camera work, the unique scenery of inland Australian as cinematic, rather than television images.

Advances in digital technology continue to change the television industry, its partners, and consumers through disruption of the broadcast model of mass communication. Television is now “part of the broader screen and device ecology” that incorporates “online viewing platforms, streaming services, time-shift viewing and mobile devices” (Bennett, Gayo and Rowe, 2018, p. 129). The Internet has changed the ways in which audio-visual content is produced and received, and mobile devices provide a means to consume mass media content in settings other than the domestic lounge room and in the company of others. This departure from the shared experience of television viewing changes the settings in which content, including cop shows, is interpreted. In response to these developments, the cop show,
whether in established formats and offering conventional police characters and stories, or breaking new ground in technology, style, or the ideological construction of policing, requires ongoing study. Further research on this topic will help scholars and television audiences understand and interpret what is being taught and learned about police in contemporary Australia.

The police response to cop shows also offers potential for further study. The opinions voiced by the interviewees in my research not only conveyed their views on cop shows, they also revealed much about the workplace culture of their profession. It was evident that elements of the traditional police culture had a stronger influence on the attitudes of the retired interviewees than was the case for the policing students. A longitudinal study exploring changing attitudes to the image of police on television would provide great insight into professional acculturation. It would also assist police organisations engaging in reality television production to develop an awareness of officers’ responses to these programs. This would help to limit the type of counterproductive messaging identified by some of the officers in this study.

Regardless of which research methods are employed, how the analysis is conducted, and how the findings are applied, the academic study of the cop show is an important endeavour. The police agency is an institution of the state endowed with instrumental and symbolic power, and its officers are authorised to exercise coercive force over their fellow citizens. The community needs to maintain watch over these organisations and their members to ensure that policing is applied lawfully, equitably, and effectively. Because the cop show is the object of mass communication that conveys the idea of police to most people, it too warrants the attention of the community. As citizens and scholars, we need to persist in asking what these programs say about who should be allowed to police us and how we are
policing. So long as the cop show continues to exist, we need to analyse and critique the
“stories we tell ourselves about authority, power and social conflict” (Fishman, 1999, p. 268).
Like all stories, television programs featuring police are created out of, and situated in the
real and the imagined spheres of our cultural and national identity. If we are to understand
what we tell ourselves about authority, power and social conflict, we need to apply the focus
of such research to Australian policing institutions, the cop shows that feature them, and the
local viewers of these programs.
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Appendix 1: Approvals

Dear Antony,

The Faculty of Arts has approved your research proposal and we confirm the approved thesis title to be:

Kinds of Blue: The Representation of Australian Police and Policing in Television Drama and Reality TV

Please accept our congratulations on the success of your work to date.

If you have any changes to be made to your thesis title in the future please contact the Research Office, email research@csu.edu.au or phone 02 6933 2578.

Kind regards
Delyse

Research Office
Charles Sturt University
Locked Bag 588
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678 AUSTRALIA
P/F: 02 6933 2578
E: research@csu.edu.au
www.csu.edu.au
22 May 2015

Mr Antony Stephenson
1450 Gurruwah Road
Parkesbourne NSW 2580

Dear Tony,

Thank you for your application to the Faculty of Arts Human Ethics Committee.

The Arts Faculty Human Ethics Committee has approved your proposal *“Kinds of blue: the representation of Australian police and policing in television drama and reality TV”* for a twelve month period from 22 May 2015.

The protocol number issued with respect to this project is 100/2015/84. Please be sure to quote this number when responding to any request made by the Committee.

Please note the following conditions of approval:

- Prior to commencing your research please update all references to the committee with the following: The Executive Officer  
  Faculty of Arts Human Ethics Committee  
  Charles Sturt University  
  Boorooma Street  
  Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678  
  Tel: 02 6933 4799
- all Consent Forms and Information Sheets are to be printed on CSU letterhead. Students should liaise with their Supervisor to arrange to have these documents printed;
- you must notify the Committee immediately in writing should your research differ in any way from that proposed. Forms are available at [www.csu.edu.au/research/forms/ehrcc_anrep.doc](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/forms/ehrcc_anrep.doc);
- you must notify the Committee immediately if any serious and or unexpected adverse events or outcomes occur associated with your research, that might affect the participants and therefore ethical acceptability of the project;
- amendments to the research design must be reviewed and approved by the Faculty Human Ethics Committee or if no longer minimal risk research referred to the University Human Research Ethics Committee before commencement. Forms are available at the website above;
- if an extension of the approval period is required, a request must be submitted to the Faculty Human Ethics Committee or if no longer minimal risk research referred to the University Human Research Ethics Committee. Forms are available at the website above;
- you are required to complete a Progress Report form, which can be downloaded as above, by 22 May 2016 if your research has not been completed by that date.

www.csu.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Numbers for Charles Sturt University are 00009F (NSW), C19470 (VIC) and 11002B (ACT). ABN: 69 676 768 051
you are required to submit a final report, the form is available from the website above.

You are reminded that an approval letter from the FHEC constitutes ethical approval only.

If your research involves the use of radiation, biological materials or chemicals separate approval is required from the appropriate University Committee.

Please don't hesitate to contact Dr Andrew McGrath, telephone 633 84591 or email artsfhec@csu.edu.au if you have any enquiries about this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Andrew McGrath
Chairperson
Telephone 63384591
Email artsfhec@csu.edu.au
Faculty of Arts Human Ethics Committee

CC: A/Prof. Chika Anyanwu
Mr Antony Stephenson  
School of Communication and Creative Industries  

Dear Antony,  

The Faculty of Arts and Education Ethics Committee has reviewed your report requesting an extension for your research project *Kinds of Blue: The representation of Australian police and policing in television drama and reality TV protocol number 190/2015/04*, and is pleased to approve this variation.

You are required to complete a Progress Report form, which can be downloaded from the [Faculty Ethics website](http://example.com), and return it on completion of your research or by 22 November 2017 if your research has not been completed by this date.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any enquiries about this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Fran Press  
telephone 02 6338 4287  
email FOAE-FHEC@csu.edu.au  
Arts and Education Faculty Human Ethics Committee
Mr. Antony Stephenson  
Manager, Library & Information Services  
NSW Police Academy  

10/9/15

Dear Mr. Stephenson

RE: Kinds of blue: the representation of Australian police and policing in television drama and reality TV.

I have consulted with the Director of Public Affairs and the Commander: NSWPF Academy and I am pleased to advise that your application to undertake research involving the NSW Police Force in relation to the above project has been approved.

As you are a staff member, it will not be necessary for you to enter into a formal research agreement. However, it is expected that you will provide, at the end of your research project, a copy of the completed Research Report for lodgement in the JK Avery Library through the chain of command. The copy should include an executive summary and any recommendations that you feel should be brought to the attention of the NSW Police Force. Note that the NSW Police Force will consider any recommendations, but is under no obligation to implement them.

Good luck with your proposed research. If I can assist in any way please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Chris Devery  
Manager, Research Coordination Unit

As advised recently, this variation is approved.

RESEARCH COORDINATION UNIT  
MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMMAND  
NSW POLICE ACADEMY  
5 McDermott Drive, Cootamundra 2590  
Telephone 02 4828 3350  Fax 02 4828 3371  
Closing (speech impaired)  
TTY 02 4828 3379  
Appendix 2: Interview schedules and questions.

Production interviews schedule

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<td>9/05/2017</td>
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<td>Police Executive Offices Sydney</td>
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<td>51-60</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Eastern European</td>
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</table>

The TV/Police relationship

What is involved for the NSWPF/your company in the production of police television drama and reality TV/observational documentary programs?

What do the police do to assist the production company?

How would you describe the way police and television production companies work together? Has it evolved over time?

What do the police/your company and the television industry want to achieve from the relationship?

What are the points of difference and convergence between police and TV production companies in what they want to achieve and the way(s) they go about it?

Do you see cop shows as supporting the police? In an instrumental sense – ie helping them in their work? In an ideological sense – ie endorsing the institution of police? Does it go beyond just informing the viewers?

What are the challenges/opportunities that the police workplace culture brings in developing and creating cop shows?

Texts

What are the stories the NSWPF/your company like to tell about police and policing?

Are they the same as the police/production company’s preferences?

Is this the case for both fiction and RTV or are they different?

Who are the police you like to have on screen? Are there demographic preferences? (Gender, ethnicity, age).

Type of police – community liaison officers and general duties v highway patrol, and other specialists?

Are they the same preferences [as the partner]?

Is this the case for fiction and RTV or are they different?

What are the preferred modes of policing for television (public order/active and exciting v community oriented)? Are these preferences shared by the [the partner]? Is this the case for fiction and RTV or are they different? Have these aspects changed over time?

How do you see changes in the television industry and affecting cop shows in Australia?

Technological – online and anytime world as a challenge to the TV series genre?

Prestige television – does this type of program in the cop show genre have potential?

Audiences

Who are the target audience for cop shows? Are they also the target audience for [the partner]?

Is this the case for fiction and RTV or are they different?

Are police themselves considered as an audience?

How do you anticipate police respond to police on TV? RTV v Drama.

Is this a consideration of producers, or of police agencies?

Police as performers

Do police act-up/for the camera? In what ways? Is this controlled or allowed?

Are they influenced by RTV police and fictional police characters?

Is there media training for the talent in RTV?

Are they briefed and what is the briefing?

Are they told what to say (scripting) and how they should say it and how they look?
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<td>Student</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>NSW Police Academy</td>
<td>41-50</td>
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Audience interviews prompting questions

What do you as a serving/retired/aspiring police officer think about cop shows?
Who are the police on Australian cop shows?
Do cop shows legitimate the police?
Are there television police who you identify with?