

"Young Brown Men Being Brutish": How Police Ten 7 Portrays Māori and Pasifika People as Violent and Criminal in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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In 2021, the New Zealand reality-TV show *Police Ten 7* was publicly criticized for feeding racial stereotypes by showing “young brown men being brutish”. While several overseas studies verify that reality-TV crime shows tend to portray non-white minorities as intrinsically criminal, such research is scarce in New Zealand. Our study sought to determine whether *Police Ten 7* represents Māori and Pasifika (i.e., “brown”) people fairly in light of official police statistics; and, particularly, if any distorted representation suggests that Māori and Pasifika people are more violent. We analysed 12 episodes of *Police Ten 7*, aired in late 2020, quantitatively and compared our data with official police statistics. We found that, on *Police Ten 7*, Māori and Pasifika people are underrepresented as police officers and overrepresented as suspects, and overrepresented in violent offence categories. Also, most of the TV airtime dedicated to suspects is spent on Māori and Pasifika. We argue that these distortions are intensified through contrasting juxtapositions with white suspects who are underrepresented both as suspects and violent offenders, and overrepresented as harmless drunks and bad drivers. We conclude that together these distortions and contrasting juxtapositions serve to promote the image of Māori and Pasifika as the violent criminal other.

Introduction

Mass media, including news and entertainment programmes, hold a significant influence over how the public perceives the criminal legal system and its key players (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Bull, 2017; Doyle, 1998; Gilchrist, 2010; Harding, 2006; McGovern & Lee, 2010; McGregor, 2017; Oliver, 2003; Simmons & Lecouteur, 2008; Van Dijk, 2016). Media consumption can not only influence peoples’ perceived reality but also shift their beliefs and attitudes and cause irrational fears (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Barnes et al., 2012; Doyle, 1998; McCreanor et al., 2014; Nairn et al., 2011; Van Dijk, 2016). Overall, New Zealand mainstream media tend to portray Māori as ‘a problem’ – as dangerous criminals, radicals, and activists; a threat to the country’s social fabric (Barnes et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2011; Matheson, 2007; McCreanor et al., 2014). Indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, and the United States are equally affected by such negative media portrayals (Dell & Kilty, 2013; Gilchrist, 2010; Harding, 2006; Jiwani & Young, 2006; McCausland, 2004; Simmons & Lecouteur, 2008).

First aired in 2002, the reality-TV programme *Police Ten 7* is one of the longest-running shows on New Zealand television. It was first hosted by retired Detective Inspector Graham Bell who was succeeded by Detective Sergeant Rob Lemoto in 2014 (McConnell, 2021). *Police Ten 7* uses two event formats – incidents (the reality-TV part of the show) and cases (wanted section). An incident is an event in which the camera follows New Zealand Police (NZP) on a real-life scene from start to finish. An incident typically ends with the incident’s resolution, i.e., the suspect is arrested, charged, fined, or warned. During the incident, the show’s narrator may make comments and offer explanations as to what is happening in the scene. A case, on the other hand, is a presentation of a ‘wanted offender’. A brief profile is shown and narrated. The profiles typically include a photo (mugshot) or facial composite (sketch) of the suspects, their name (if known), offence, age, height, build, indigeneity/ethnicity, and where they have contacts.¹ Their risk level is frequently mentioned by stating that the suspect is “considered dangerous” and a warning may be issued to viewers in upper case letters: “DO NOT APPROACH”. On the show, incidents and cases alternate. A final case is shown after the last incident of each episode, going into more detail about the case. This is followed by the host of the show, Rob Lemoto, discussing this last case with another detective or police officer. After that, Lemoto closes the show by asking the audience to provide any information they have concerning the case or any of the cases shown in the episode.

On 21 May 2021, Auckland Councillor and aspiring mayor, Efeso Collins (2021), himself of Samoan and Tokelauan descent, tweeted

Hey @TVNZ it's time u dropped Police Ten 7. A couple of days ago I was watching tv & your ad cut promoting the program showed young brown ppl. This stuff is low level chewing gum tv that feeds on racial stereotypes & it's time u acted as a responsible broadcaster & cut it.

A media frenzy ensued. Some defended the show claiming that it only revealed “cold, hard uncomfortable truth”, while others argued the show needed to “proportionalise the filming of brown people” that is Māori and Pasifika individuals (NZ Herald, 2021).

New Zealand police, systemic bias, and over-policing of Māori and Pasifika communities.

New Zealand Police act as gatekeepers of the criminal legal system as they decide who they speak to, who they investigate, and who they charge with an offence (Latu & Lucas, 2008; Linkhorn & Dawson, 2019). Their propensity

¹ Example images are available on the NZP website, e.g., <https://www.police.govt.nz/stolenwanted/ten7/2022/case-1-wanted-person-robert-dashwood>

to over-police Māori communities has been shown to contribute to disparate arrest, prosecution, and conviction rates (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Jackson, 1988; JustSpeak, 2020; Maxwell & Smith, 1998; Neusteter et al., 2019). Compared to non-Māori, Māori are more likely to be convicted, more likely to be incarcerated, and receive on average longer prison sentences for the same crimes (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Latu & Lucas, 2008; Webb, 2017). Accounting for around 16.5% of the general population, Māori make up 44% of total convictions across all offence categories (Stats NZ, 2021a) and over 50% of the prison population (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Linkhorn & Dawson, 2019; Webb, 2017). While Pasifika people are not generally overrepresented in the statistics of the criminal legal system in New Zealand, they are overrepresented in violent offending, much of which is associated with family violence (Ioane & Lambie, 2016; Malatest International, 2021).

Not only have Māori three times more contact with NZP, but also the quality of such encounters differs significantly compared to non-Māori. Māori individuals are, inter alia,

six times more likely than Pākehā [people of European descent] to have a gun pulled on them; nine times more likely to be tasered; 10 times more likely to have a dog set on them; and 11 times more likely to be pepper sprayed. (Walters, 2020).

Pasifika people are also over-represented in these policing statistics, as Collins (2019) explains:

Where Pākehā are more likely to have handcuffs, restraints, or empty hand force used on them, Māori and Pasifika are likely to experience more extreme tactics in the form of OC spray or tasers. Most worryingly, two-thirds of all people shot by police in the last 10 years have been Māori or Pasifika.

Further examples of the use of excessive force and racial stereotyping against Māori include the NZP Armed Response Team trials conducted in 2020, which targeted areas predominantly populated by Māori and Pasifika people, and NZP taking extralegal photographs of innocent Māori youth, which NZP stored in a national database used for current and future criminal investigations (Deckert et al., 2022; Norris & Tauri, 2021). Such recurrent negative encounters with NZP have, over time, led Māori to develop negative attitudes toward NZP (Tauri, 2019). As a result, Māori are less likely to aid NZP and seek help from them (Te Whaiti & Roguski, 1998). That bias exists among NZP officers was recently acknowledged by NZP Commissioner Andrew Coster (Forbes, 2020). However, he also demonstrated a preference for “the more palatable term ‘unconscious bias’” over the term ‘systemic racism’ (Walters, 2020). In March 2021, NZP commissioned an independent panel to undertake a large-scale research programme with the title

“Understanding Policing Delivery” to identify “whether, where, and to what extent, any bias exists at a system level in Police’s operating environment” (NZP, 2021a). The research is ongoing at the time of writing.

That systemic racism and racial biases are addressed across all sectors of society, which are affected by them, is of vital importance due to their immediate effects on people’s health and well-being. Experiences of racial discrimination have, for example, been linked to elevated levels of hazardous alcohol use among Māori (Winter et al., 2019) and lower levels of physical and mental health (Harris et al., 2006). Moreover, Fleming and colleagues (2021) demonstrate that over-policing and racial profiling by police adversely affect people’s well-being and mental health. “Such encounters are linked to heightened depressive symptoms and higher rates of trauma, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress, particularly among young men” (Fleming et al., 2021, p. 2). Considering that suicide rates of Māori youth (15-24-year-olds) are already twice that of non-Māori (Ministry of Health, 2021), the link between racial discrimination and ill mental health is particularly concerning (Deckert et al., 2022).

Colonialism and its long-term effects

While biased over-policing contributes to the excessive use of the criminal legal system against Māori, it is not the only factor at play. Colonialism and its related legislation have had long-term effects that have compounded over time and continue to be reflected in various economic, educational, health, and social statistics (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016). Some key effects and causes include the intergenerational economic immiseration of Māori due to land theft (*Native Land Act 1865*), intergenerational intellectual deprivation due to legislation that suppressed Māori language and knowledge (*Native School Act 1867*, *Tobunga Suppression Act 1907*), and the intergenerational trauma caused by systematic child removal and subsequent physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse in a range of state institutions such as borstals, hospitals, and foster ‘care’ (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Jackson, 1988; Moon, 1993; Quince, 2010; Stanley, 2016; Webb, 2017). However, contemporary legislation, like the *Domestic Violence Act 1995*, has arguably also affected how Māori are dealt with in the criminal legal system (see Hook, 2009a, 2009b) and the disproportionate uplifting of Māori children from their families and subsequent abuse in state ‘care’ remains a highly debated social issue (see, e.g., Pennington, 2022). Moreover, present-day incarceration has been shown to have disparate criminogenic effects on Māori communities (Brown, 2010; Deckert, 2019).

Māori and Pasifika in New Zealand media

Māori have been portrayed as uncivilised, violent savages since the beginning of the European invasion of New Zealand, and such stereotypes continue to influence the representation of Māori today (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Bull,

2017; Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Linkhorn & Dawson, 2019; Moon, 1993; Nairn et al., 2006, 2012). Contemporary media stories about Māori are overwhelmingly negative, equate Māori disproportionately with crime, and portray South Auckland – a suburb densely populated by Māori and Pasifika people – negatively and as associated with crime (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Barnes et al., 2012; Coxhead, 2005; Gregory et al., 2011; McCreanor et al., 2014; Nairn et al., 2011). As Nairn and colleagues (2012) put it succinctly, “Māori news is bad news”. Similarly, Pasifika people, who started immigrating to Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1960s – largely to provide cheap labour – have faced racialized discrimination and continue to be portrayed in the domestic print media as “unmotivated, unhealthy and criminal others” (Loto et al., 2006, p. 100).

Police reality-TV shows and their impact on viewers

While police reality TV shows have helped provide insight into what police officers do as part of their job (Lawson & Lawson, 2016), they do not reflect the entire spectrum of police activity (Bieleski & Quince, 2021; Monk-Turner et al., 2007; Smolej, 2011). However, as overseas studies demonstrate, ethnic minorities tend to appear disproportionately as suspects in such programmes, leading to an exaggerated association of these populations with crime (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Loggins, 2009; Monk-Turner et al., 2007; Oliver, 1994, 2003; Prosis & Johnson, 2009). According to Oliver (1994, 2003) and Oliver and colleagues (2007), US shows of this kind overrepresent Black men who are portrayed in ways that make them appear more dangerous and guilty. Doyle (1998) argues that police reality TV influences consumers’ beliefs and attitudes causing long-term social and cultural shifts within society. Due to these shows’ perspective – with the camera following the police around – viewers are made to feel as if they ride along with police which may cause increased identification with and more sympathy for police than the individuals stopped by them (Doyle, 1998).

Reviewing Police Ten 7

In 2012, Podvoiski (2012) examined the contents of *Police Ten 7* for their Master of Arts thesis, which sought to verify whether the show reflected the realities of contemporary policing. Podvoiski (2012) found that *Police Ten 7* overrepresented Māori and Pasifika people in violent offences while underrepresenting Europeans and that the show overrepresented drug offences which made up 52% of the show events. However, *Police Ten 7* underwent a major overhaul in 2014. One of the most notable changes is that the show is now fronted by Rob Lemoto, who is an active police officer of Tongan descent from South Auckland (Bieleski & Quince, 2021; Shadwell, 2014).

After Efeso Collins’ tweet about *Police Ten 7* had caused a considerable media frenzy, TVNZ commissioned media consultant Karen Bielecki and Māori academic Khylee Quince to review the show with a particular focus on the fair portrayal of Māori and ethnic minorities. The two researchers interviewed the show host and other TVNZ representatives and “viewed a number of current and earlier Police Ten 7 episodes from the early 2000s to the present day” (Bielecki & Quince, 2021, p. 4). Further details about their data collection process and analysis are not provided. The reviewers found that

the show has frequently been tarnished by claims of uneven coverage, and particularly allegations of racism and discrimination. We are in no doubt that much of this criticism is levelled at the police generally, rather than at the show specifically. In other words, the low levels of trust and confidence that some communities have in the police, influence their attitude to the show, without pinpointing any particular practices or instances of discrimination in the programme itself. [...] Māori and Pasifika peoples feature frequently in the show. To some degree this is reflective of the reality of patterns of crime and offending in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where Māori and Pasifika peoples are significantly over-represented as both offenders and victims of crime. (p. 17)

In other words, the review found that “Māori and Pasifika in the show were in general fairly portrayed, but this was not to say that the show does not contribute to negative stereotypes of them” (One News, 2021). Bielecki and Quince (2021) made several recommendations including that the show should diversify its regional/geographic and demographic coverage as it currently focused on urban areas, traffic stops, and street patrols at nighttime.

Podvoiski (2012) examined *Police Ten 7* before the programme underwent a significant overhaul. Arguably, their research findings may, therefore, no longer be relevant. Moreover, the research design of the *Police Ten 7* review undertaken in 2021 was not laid out in detail (see Bielecki & Quince, 2021) making it difficult to replicate the study and verify its results. Hence, a major gap in the academic literature remains.

Research Questions

Taking as a point of departure Efeso Collins’ intuitive assessment that *Police Ten 7* stereotypes Māori and Pasifika people as brutish criminals, our study sought to determine whether the show represents Māori and Pasifika people fairly in light of official police statistics; and, particularly, if any distorted representations suggest that Māori and Pasifika are more violent. To answer this research question, we posed the following subset of questions to guide our data collection:

1. Are Māori, Pasifika, and European police officers and suspects over- or underrepresented on *Police Ten 7*?
2. Does *Police Ten 7* accurately represent the offence divisions for which NZP typically proceed against Māori, Pasifika, and European suspects?
3. How much TV airtime does *Police Ten 7* dedicate to Māori, Pasifika, and European suspects and how does it compare to these social groups' share in all NZP proceedings?

On the one hand, these questions are designed to determine whether the overall image of Māori and Pasifika suspects is distorted on the show both compared to policing realities and compared to how European suspects are portrayed. On the other hand, these questions seek to interrogate the particular portrayal of Māori and Pasifika suspects as “brutish”, which we, in alignment with the existing academic literature, interpret to mean violent.

Research Design

The study emerges at the intersection of cultivation and labelling theory. Cultivation theory explains how media consumption and audience perceptions influence thoughts and behaviour through the processes of resonance and mainstreaming. While resonance refers to consumers associating certain media content with their everyday experiences, mainstreaming refers to the bolstering of certain ideas by exposing viewers to repetitive media content (Morgan et al., 2014). For example, someone who has no personal contact with Māori individuals but sees Māori constantly portrayed as the criminal other in the media may believe that said stereotype is factual. That such media stereotyping may also affect the stereotyped is explained by labelling theory, according to which people who are labelled as criminals may internalise this label and perform acts that conform with it. Within the New Zealand context, the relevance of this theory is highlighted by Tunufa'i (2013) who demonstrates that mainstream media, which labelled young gang members as “wannabe gangsters”, prompted some of these young men to prove to the New Zealand public that they are real gangster and thus to perform criminal acts. Hence, labelling by mainstream media may have criminogenic effects.

To answer the research question, we analysed the content of 12 *Police Ten 7* episodes from the 2020 season, specifically episodes 27 through to 38 of season 27. On the one hand, the selection is based on the recency of the episodes and their accessibility. The episodes were aired on NZ television from late September through to late December 2020. On the other hand, the selection was made to be able to compare the gathered data with official annual police statistics. To that end, we assumed that the examined episodes used material filmed in the calendar year 2020. In this regard, it may be

worthwhile noting that New Zealand, due to its Covid-19 elimination strategy, was not affected by large-scale pandemic lockdowns in the same way as other countries were in 2020. New Zealand was in total lockdown for five weeks in March and April 2020 and the Auckland region was in a partial lockdown for two weeks in August 2020 (Unite Against Covid-19, 2022). Therefore, both criminal and policing activities experienced comparably little disruption in New Zealand in 2020.

All 12 episodes were viewed and coded by one of the authors (anonymized for review purposes) to ensure data consistency. Each episode was viewed multiple times and each time coded for a different variable: ethnicity/indigeneity of both police officers and suspects, the alleged offence for each suspect, and TV airtime spent on each suspect. Indigeneity/ethnicity was coded either according to information provided by the show or determined by a holistic assessment of the individual’s phenotype, name, culturally significant tattoos, accent etc. We used the coding categories European, Māori, and Pasifika, as well as a generic category ‘Polynesian’ when an individual could be identified as being both/either Māori and/or Pasifika. This code was also used when the show narrator stated, “our offender tonight is of Māori or Polynesian descent”. The coding of indigeneity/ethnicity in this way reflects viewer perceptions of the people portrayed on the show and is also reflective of Efeso Collins’ tweet who referred to “brown people” – meaning Māori or Pasifika people – who are identifiable by TV viewers as such. Individuals were coded as ‘unidentifiable’ when no identification could be made, for example, when there were no witnesses who could provide a suspect description. The Australia and New Zealand Standard Offence Categories (ANZSOC) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) were used to code for the offences of each suspect according to the TV narrator’s statements. The offence division for incidents was coded according to the offence named in the resolution of the event, not the offence mentioned at the beginning of the police investigation as the resolution better reflects the actual offence for which an individual would be proceeded against. The offence division for the cases was coded according to the offence mentioned on the suspect profile. Finally, the amount of TV airtime spent on each suspect was recorded using a stopwatch to determine how much time was overall spent on Māori, Pasifika, and European suspects.

Findings

A total of 51 incidents (reality-TV part of the show) and 43 cases (wanted section) were shown across the 12 episodes included in this study. As appropriate for each variable, data was either combined or separated by incidents and cases to allow for a more accurate comparison with official statistics.

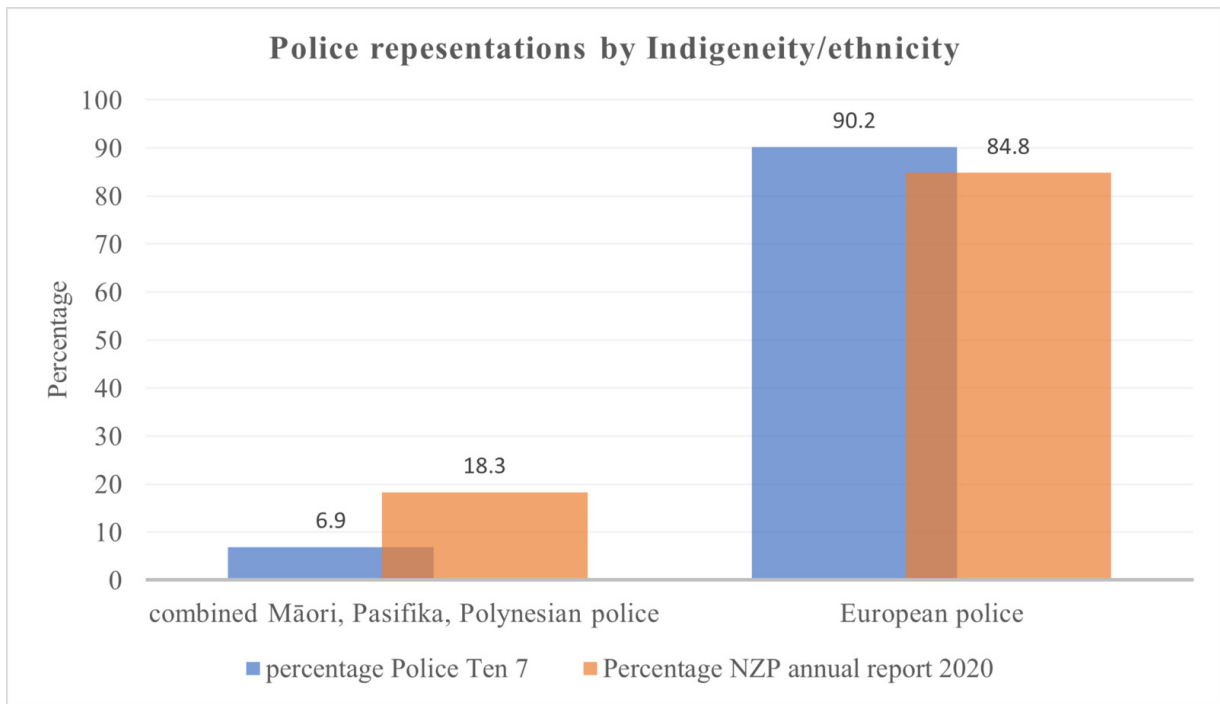


Figure 1. Officer Ethnicity (Incidents) Comparison: Police Ten 7 & NZ Police (2020)

Police officer indigeneity/ethnicity

The appearance of a total number of 102 NZP officers was recorded across the 12 episodes. Of these 102 NZP officers, 92 were identified as European (90.2%), four as Māori (3.9%), two as Pasifika (2.0%), and one as Polynesian (1%). The remaining 2.9% were identified as either Asian or Indian.

In comparison, according to the NZP (2020) annual report, 84.8% of NZP employees² are European, 12.0% are Māori, 6.6% are Pasifika, 5.7% are Asian, and 1.0% belong to other ethnic groups.

Suspect indigeneity/ethnicity

Across the 12 episodes, we counted a total number of 112 suspects with 59 suspects in the incidents section and 53 suspects in the cases section. Of these 112 suspects, 43 were coded as Māori (incidents N=20, cases N=23), 10 as Pasifika (incidents N=6, cases N=4), 10 as Polynesian (incidents N=5, cases N=5), 26 as European (incidents N=23, cases N=3), and 23 as unidentifiable (incidents N=5, cases N=18). Removing the unidentifiable suspects from the total leaves a total of 89 suspects (incidents N=54, cases N=35) whose indigeneity/ethnicity is identifiable by TV viewers. Official police statistics of

² The NZP annual reports do not record the indigeneity/ethnicity for frontline police officers separately but only for all NZP employees.

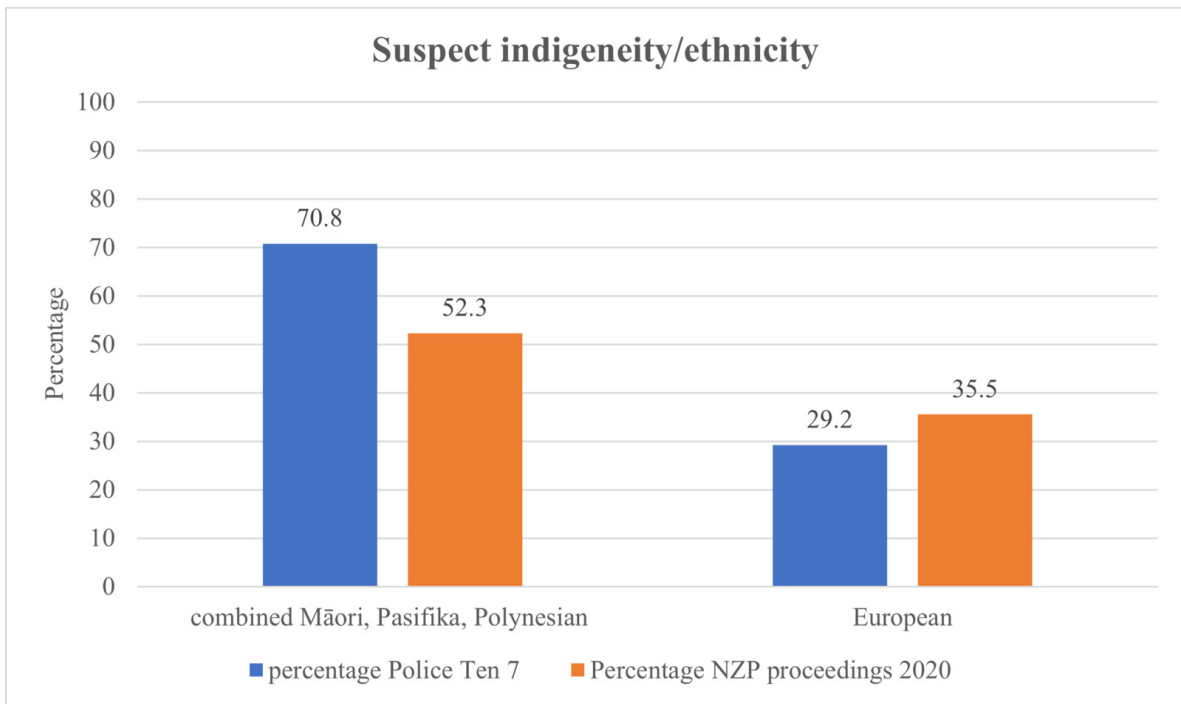


Figure 2. Comparison of suspect indigeneity/ethnicity on Police Ten 7 (incidents and cases N=89) with NZP (2021) all proceedings January to December 2020

all police proceedings³ recorded for all offence divisions between 1 January and 31 December 2020 (NZP, 2021b) identified 44.0% of police suspects as Māori, 8.3% as Pasifika, and 35.5% as European.

[Figure 2](#) contrasts all 89 *Police Ten 7* incidents and cases in which the suspect’s indigeneity/ethnicity was identifiable with the suspect indigeneity/ethnicity recorded in the official police proceeding statistics. Māori, Pasifika, and Polynesian suspects are united in one group, reflecting the category of – as Efeso Collins said – “brown people” identifiable as such by TV viewers.

Considering that the cases section of *Police Ten 7*, may not only include police suspects but also already convicted and/or sentenced individuals who are evading custody, [Figure 2](#) may to some extent be affected by data comparability issues if the individuals of such cases were not apprehended by police in the calendar year 2020. Hence, [Figure 3](#) compares only the incidents section of *Police Ten 7*.

Looking at only the incidents section of *Police Ten 7*, Māori/Pasifika suspects remain overrepresented making up 57.4% of all individuals shown. However, Europeans are, at 42.6%, also overrepresented in this part of the show.

3 This includes court action, formal warning, informal warning, non-court action, family conferene, and not proceeded with

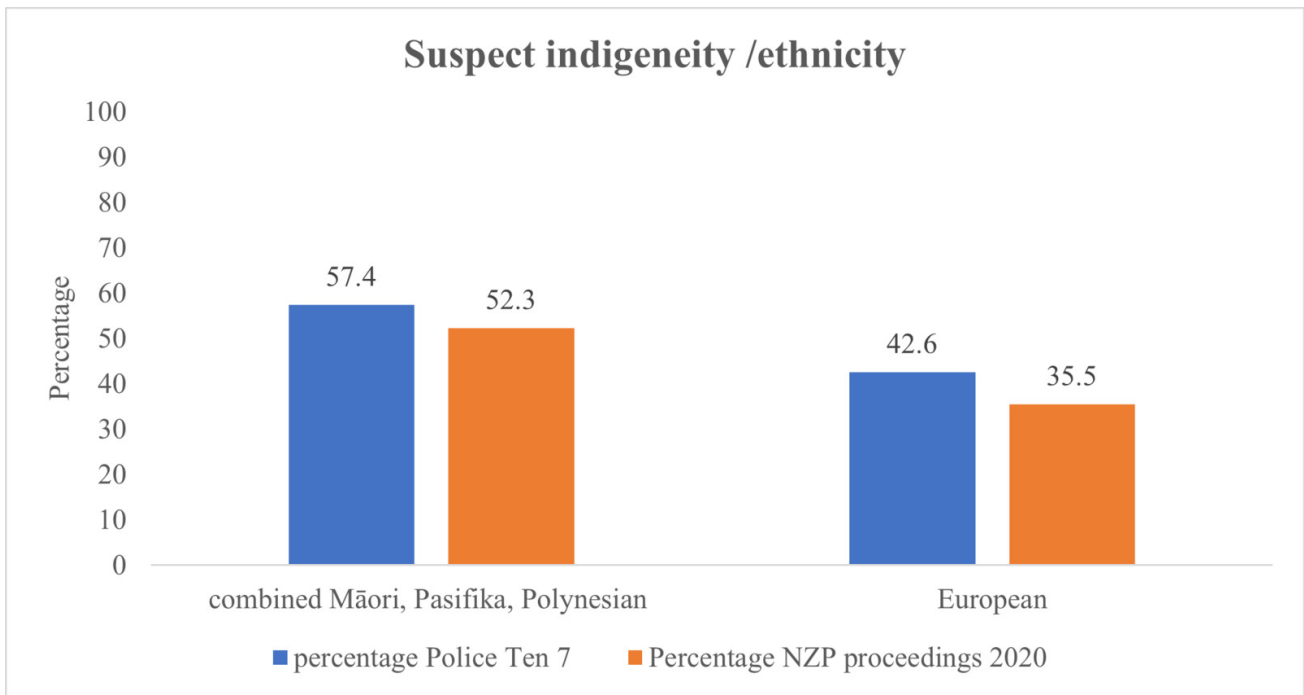


Figure 3. Comparison suspect indigeneity/ethnicity on Police Ten 7 (incidents only N=54) with NZP (2021) all proceedings January to December 2020

Offence divisions by suspect indigeneity/ethnicity

For 70 of the 112 total presented incidents and cases an offence division could be determined. For 14 of these 70 events, the indigeneity/ethnicity of the suspect could not be determined, leaving a total of 56 cases in which an offence division could be determined, and the suspect could be identified as either Māori (N=33), Pasifika (N=6), Polynesian (N=5), or European (N=12). Two offence divisions – miscellaneous offences (division 16) and prohibited and regulated weapons and explosives offences (division 11) – were omitted in the following figures as no incidents or cases on *Police Ten 7* related to them.

[Figure 4](#) demonstrates that Māori and Pasifika suspects are significantly overrepresented on *Police Ten 7* in a range of serious and violent offence categories such as homicide, sexual assault, dangerous and negligent acts endangering persons, as well as in the offence categories concerning fraud and property damage. On the other hand, Māori and Pasifika suspects on *Police Ten 7* remain significantly underrepresented in traffic offences and offences against justice procedures.

[Figure 5](#) demonstrates that European suspects are overrepresented on *Police Ten 7* in the three offence divisions unlawful entry/burglary/break-and-enter, public order offences, and traffic offences. A comparison of [Figures 4](#) and [5](#) demonstrates that *Police Ten 7* represent Māori and Pasifika suspects across

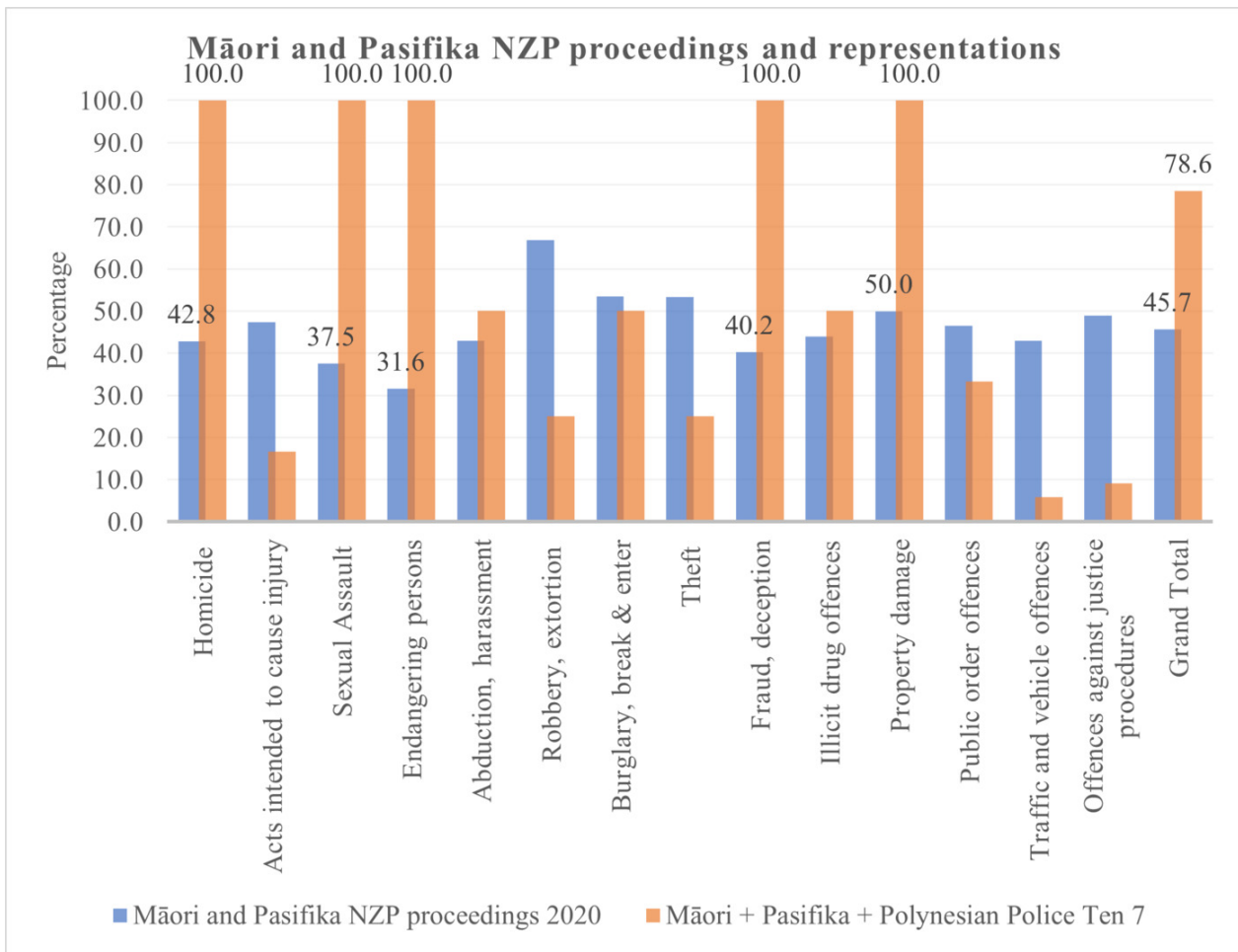


Figure 4. Combined Māori and Pasifika as a percentage of total NZP proceedings for the calendar year 2020 and combined Māori, Pasifika, and Polynesian alleged offences on Police Ten 7 (incidents and cases) as a percentage of the total.

a wider array of offence divisions than European suspects who, notably, did not appear on the show in any of the offence divisions related to violent and sexual offending.

Total airtime by suspect indigeneity/ethnicity

The total TV airtime spent on suspects in both incidents and cases across the 12 episodes was recorded at 160 minutes and 53 seconds. Of this total suspect airtime, 37.7% was spent on Māori suspects, 10.6% on Pasifika suspects, 13.2% on Polynesian suspects, and 38.2% on European suspects.

Figure 6 illustrates that 61.8% of the total TV airtime spent on suspects was dedicated to “brown people”, while 38.2% was spent on European suspects. Since no official statistics exist that evidence how much time NZP officers spend with suspects of different demographics, we can only compare our data with the portion each social group makes up in NZP proceedings. Of all NZP proceedings in 2020, 45.7% were taken against Māori and Pasifika suspects (see Figure 4) and 33.5% against European suspects (see Figure 5). That means that Māori and Pasifika suspects are significantly overrepresented

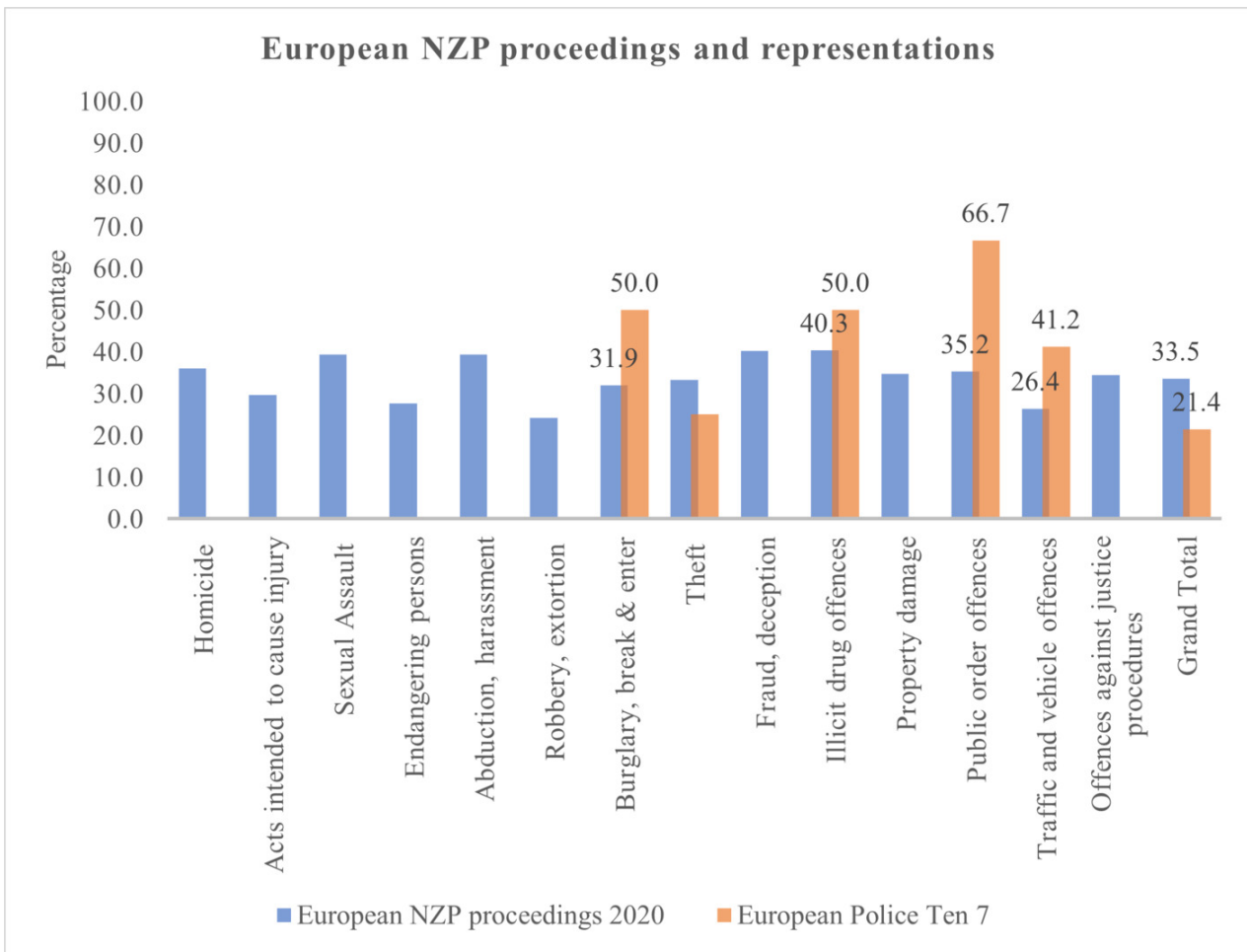


Figure 5. European as a percentage of total NZP proceedings for the calendar year 2020 and European alleged offences on *Police Ten 7* (incidents and cases) as a percentage of the total

when comparing the total TV airtime that *Police Ten 7* spends on Māori and Pasifika suspects with these social groups’ share in actual NZP police proceedings (16.1 percentage points difference), while Europeans are only slightly overrepresented (4.7 percentage points difference).

Discussion

This study set out to determine whether *Police Ten 7* represents Māori and Pasifika people fairly in light of official police statistics; and if any distorted representation suggests that Māori and Pasifika are more violent. In the following, we discuss the effects the underrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika people as police officers and the overrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika suspects may have on viewers of *Police Ten 7*. Furthermore, we consider how the overrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika suspects is exacerbated both by their overrepresentation in violent offence categories and the disproportionate TV airtime spent on Māori and Pasifika suspects. We argue that these distortions are further intensified through the contrasting juxtaposition with European suspects who *Police Ten 7* underrepresents overall and in violent offence categories but overrepresents in burglaries, public order offences, and traffic offences.

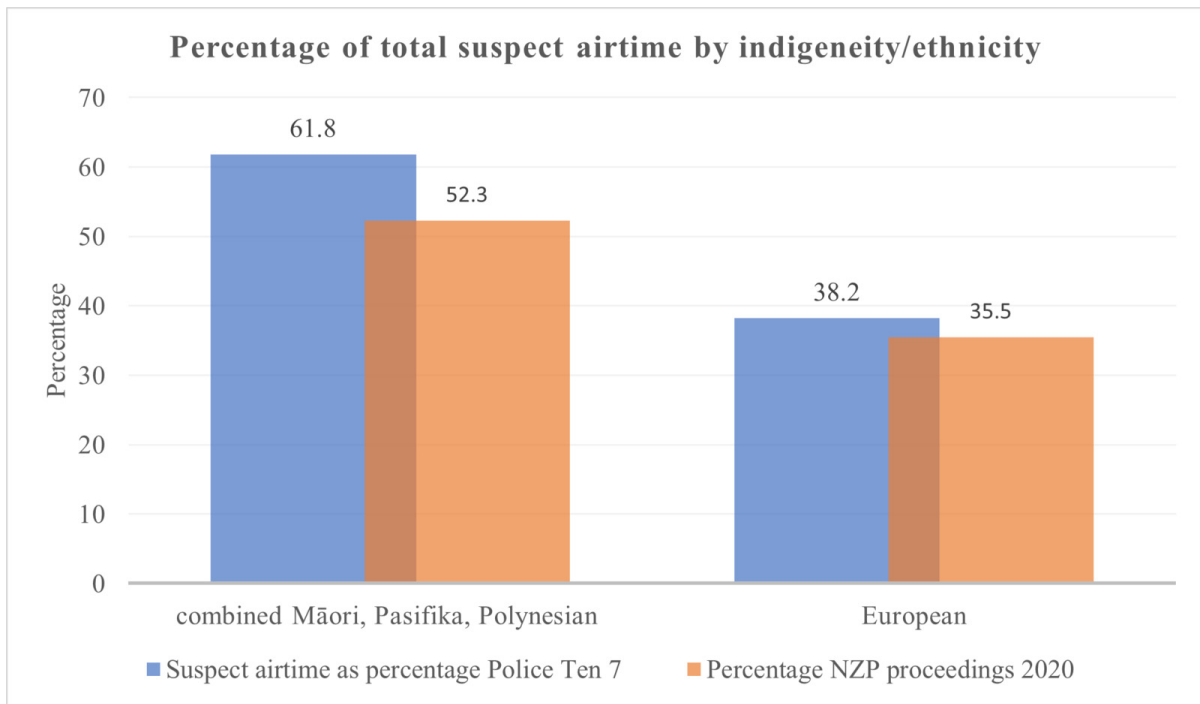


Figure 6. Suspect airtime by indigeneity/ethnicity as a percentage of the total (incidents and cases) compared to NZP proceedings 2020.

Māori and Pasifika underrepresented as police officers and overrepresented as suspects

The first key finding concerned the indigeneity/ethnicity of police officers represented on *Police Ten 7*. With over 90%, European officers make up the vast majority of officers on the show, while both Māori and Pasifika officers represent less than 3% each or less than 6% in total. NZP (2020) acknowledge that Māori (12.0%) and Pasifika (6.6%) are underrepresented in the NZP force compared to their representation in the general population (16.5% and 9.0% respectively). Our findings show that Māori and Pasifika are, in addition, significantly underrepresented on *Police Ten 7* compared to their actual representation in the NZP force. While one in nine NZP employees is Māori, only one in 25 police officers on *Police Ten 7* is Māori. While one in 20 NZP employees is Pasifika, only one in 50 officers on *Police Ten 7* is Pasifika.

NZP (2020) have set workforce targets aiming to increase the number of Māori and Pasifika constabulary staff for it to be representative of Māori and Pasifika in the general population. Hence, significant resources are spent on targeted campaigns and recruitment strategies to increase the diversity of NZP, yet numbers have, hitherto, only increased by approximately one percentage point per annum (Kaipara, 2021; Kidd, 2012; Satherley, 2018). The Māori population is as of June 2021 estimated to sit at 17.1% of the general population (Stats NZ, 2021b) and the Pasifika population is projected to grow significantly over the next two decades (Stats NZ, 2022). That means that the growth of both these subpopulations is currently outpacing NZP recruitment successes. In line with cultivation theory (Morgan et al., 2014),

Police Ten 7 viewers are less likely to associate Māori and Pasifika with the NZP force, which serves only to undermine the recruitment efforts of NZP. Although NZP have a significant say in what material is getting aired on the programme, little effort appears to be made to use the show to attract more Māori or Pasifika recruits by representing at least a proportionate number of Māori and Pasifika officers. While having a show host of Samoan and Tokelauan descent may be a step in the right direction to promote Māori and Pasifika as police officers, we argue that *Police Ten 7* viewers may see Rob Lemoto – who is dressed in a suit, not a police uniform – more as a show host than a police officer and that viewers are more likely to associate “real police officers” with the officers shown in the incidents section of the show. Further research may need to be undertaken to ascertain viewer perceptions.

While 52.3% of police suspects in 2020 were either Māori or Pasifika, both groups combined made up 70.8% of *Police Ten 7* suspects, thus significantly overrepresenting Māori and Pasifika suspects. While Europeans made up 35.5% of police suspects in 2020, this group was underrepresented on *Police Ten 7* with 29.2% of suspects identified as European.

Looking at only the incidents section of *Police Ten 7*, Māori/Pasifika suspects remain overrepresented making up 57.4% of all individuals shown. However, in this segment of the TV show, Europeans were also overrepresented with 42.6% of all incident suspects. If Bielecki and Quince (2021) looked, for their review, only at the incidents section of the show counting only the number of suspects by indigeneity/ethnicity, it may explain why they concluded that Māori and Pasifika individuals were fairly portrayed by *Police Ten 7*.

However, we argue that the overall impression left by the show includes both incidents and cases. Arguably, the warning labels “considered dangerous” and “DO NOT APPROACH” that are frequently issued in the cases section of the show, far outweigh the entertainment factor conveyed by the incidents section. While the incidents are resolved through arrest or warning and can thus be considered “closed” by viewers, the suspects in the cases section appear to be “at large”. From their mugshots, suspects stare directly at viewers and the warning labels in upper case letters make the wanted suspects seem arguably more real and more likely to pose a potential threat to viewers’ lives. Since Māori make up the bulk of suspects wanted by NZP in the *Police Ten 7* cases section (43%), Māori may, therefore, be perceived as more of a threat by viewers of the show than Pasifika and European suspects who make up a much smaller number of suspects in the *Police Ten 7* cases section (8% and 6% respectively). Further research may need to ascertain whether viewer perceptions of the suspects portrayed in the incidents section differ from viewer perceptions of suspects portrayed in the cases section.

We argue that an overall distorted picture of Māori and Pasifika emerges when over 90% of police officers on *Police Ten 7* are European and over 70% of police suspects are – as Efeso Collins (2021) said – “brown people”. In

particular, the underrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika police officers on *Police Ten 7* perpetuates the stereotype of a white police force to Māori and Pasifika viewers, who do not see themselves represented and, therefore, as not belonging to the institution (Monk-Turner et al., 2007; Oliver, 1994; Podvoiski, 2012). Meanwhile, the overrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika as suspects reinforces ideas of Māori and Pasifika people as intrinsically criminal (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Barnes et al., 2012; Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Gregory et al., 2011; Loto et al., 2006; Matheson, 2007; Maxwell & Smith, 1998; McCreanor et al., 2014; Neusteter et al., 2019; Podvoiski, 2012). Labelling theory suggests that these kinds of misrepresentations may have criminogenic effects on Māori and Pasifika viewers who consider *Police Ten 7* an authoritative programme and may internalise these labels. These viewers are more likely to see themselves as potential offenders than police officers and may act upon such internalisations.

The distorted portrayal of offences associated with Māori, Pasifika, and European suspects

Official statistics show that Māori, Pasifika, and Europeans all offend across the entire range of the 16 offence divisions (Stats NZ, 2021a). Two ANZSOC offence divisions – Prohibited and regulated weapons and explosives offences (Division 11) and Miscellaneous offences (Division 16) – were not represented on *Police Ten 7*. However, the show represents Māori and Pasifika suspects across 14 of the 16 ANZSOC offence divisions, while European suspects are only represented across five of the 16 categories.

Moreover, Māori/Pasifika suspects on the show are – in comparison to NZP proceedings in the calendar year 2020 – significantly overrepresented in five ANZSOC offence divisions: homicide and related offences (Division 1); sexual assault and related offences (Division 3); dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons (Division 4); fraud, deception, and related offences (Division 9), and property damage and environmental pollution (Division 12). This overrepresentation leaves *Police Ten 7* viewers with the impression that Māori and Pasifika offend in these divisions at twice or three times the rate of their actual offending. On the other hand, *Police Ten 7* significantly underrepresents Māori and Pasifika suspects in the offence divisions traffic and vehicle regulatory offences (Division 14) and offences against government procedures, government security and government operations (Division 15). In comparison, European suspects were significantly overrepresented in three offence divisions: unlawful entry with intent/burglary/break-and-enter (Division 7); public order offences (Division 13); and traffic and vehicle regulatory offences (Division 14). It is particularly noteworthy, that European suspects on the show were not represented in *any* of the offence categories that pertain to violent acts against people, although NZP proceedings demonstrate that European and Māori/Pasifika suspects show comparable

offending rates in the two offence categories of dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons (Division 4); and abduction, harassment and other offences against the person (Division 5).

Overall, we found that *Police Ten 7* severely distorts the offence categories with which Māori, Pasifika and European suspects are typically associated. Māori and Pasifika suspects are not only associated with a wider variety of offences and more often associated with violent offences than European suspects but are also overrepresented in violent offence categories compared to actual offending rates. Supported by cultivation theory, we argue that the distorted representations convey and reinforce to *Police Ten 7* viewers the idea that Māori and Pasifika are more violent or “brutish” (Radio New Zealand, 2021) than NZP proceedings suggest. Also, in overrepresenting Māori and Pasifika suspects in violent offence categories, particularly potential police recruits among the viewership may believe that these are the offences they will be arresting Māori and Pasifika individuals for in the future.

It is also worth mentioning that the show host Rob Lemoto and other police officers invited onto the show typically refrain from berating and demeaning suspects. However, an exception seems to be made in sexual assault cases, which triggered statements such as “This man is a menace to society” and “Sexual assaults of this nature are abhorrent and must be stopped”. Since Māori and Pasifika suspects are the only ones associated with sexual offending on *Police Ten 7*, these demeaning statements are particularly directed at “brown people” even though this offence division is the only one in which Europeans (39.4%) outnumber Māori and Pasifika (37.5%) according to recorded NZP proceedings in 2020.

In sum, *Police Ten 7* inaccurately portrays Māori and Pasifika suspects with regard to typical offending. As Efeso Collins (2021) stated, our findings confirm that *Police Ten 7* “feeds on racial stereotypes” of “brown people” as violent. Moreover, European suspects are – in contrasting juxtaposition – represented as less violent than NZP proceedings suggest and are overrepresented in public order and traffic offences. In line with cultivation theory, we argue that the latter conveys to viewers the idea that white offenders are, by and large, harmless drunks and bad drivers, suggesting that any potential harm they may cause is at least unintended and, therefore, to at least some extent excusable. We argue that the contrasting juxtaposition with “harmless” European suspects compounds the already distorted portrayal of Māori and Pasifika people on *Police Ten 7* in a way that makes them seem even more violent. As Goya-Martínez (2011) demonstrates contrasting juxtapositions affect viewers. An “event is judged differently when evaluated in isolation than when evaluated” (p. 23) in contrast to another event. “Evaluations are not absolute but relative to the specific context in which they take place” (p. 24).

Exacerbation through total TV airtime dedicated to Māori and Pasifika suspects

Bieleski and Quince (2021) argue that the disproportionate airtime *Police Ten 7* spends on Māori suspects is a reflection of official arrest, conviction, and incarceration statistics, in which Māori are significantly overrepresented. However, our findings suggest that *Police Ten 7* significantly overrepresents Māori and Pasifika suspects in its total suspect airtime compared to official statistics. To reiterate, of the total *Police Ten 7* airtime dedicated to suspects, 61.8% was spent on Māori and Pasifika suspects and 38.2% on European suspects. This compares to Māori and Pasifika suspects making up 45.7% of NZP proceedings in 2020 and Europeans making up 33.5%. We argue that the disproportionate airtime spent on Māori and Pasifika suspects further entrenches the idea that criminal offenders in New Zealand are largely Māori and Pasifika and perpetuate constructions of Māori and Pasifika as the violent and criminal other. Much like the disproportionate airtime dedicated to crime news compared to other news leaves New Zealand TV audiences with the distorted impression that crime is a much more frequent occurrence in people’s lives than it is in reality (McGregor & Comrie, 1995), the disproportionate airtime *Police Ten 7* dedicates to Māori and Pasifika suspects leaves viewers with the impression that Māori and Pasifika offend more often than official statistics suggest.

Conclusion

Our study set out to examine the claim made by Auckland Councillor Efeso Collins that *Police Ten 7* portrays brown men as brutish criminals and feeds on racial stereotypes (Radio New Zealand, 2021). More specifically, we sought to determine whether *Police Ten 7* represents Māori and Pasifika people fairly in light of official police statistics; and if any distorted representation suggests that Māori and Pasifika are more violent than NZP proceedings suggest. Our findings confirm that *Police Ten 7* misrepresents Māori and Pasifika people in light of official policing statistics and represents them as more violent both in comparison to actual offending rates and in comparison to European suspects on the show. Our findings not only confirm what the international research literature has repeatedly unearthed – that reality-TV crime and police shows tend to focus on racialized minorities and portray non-white people as the ‘bad guys’ (Barnes et al., 2012; Bull, 2017; Cotter et al., 2008; Doyle, 1998; Eschholz et al., 2002; McCreanor et al., 2014; Monk-Turner et al., 2007; Oliver, 1994; Podvoiski, 2012; Stephenson, 2021) – they also challenge the outcome of the recent *Police Ten 7* review commissioned by TVNZ (see Bieleski & Quince, 2021). In contrast to the latter, we find that viewers of *Police Ten 7* are bombarded with skewed negative images of Māori and Pasifika people perpetuating already existing stereotypes of Māori and Pasifika as the violent criminal other.

Since the NZP actively partake in the decision-making and editing process of *Police Ten 7*, they thus contribute to this cop-centric show maintaining a biased narrative of Māori and Pasifika. While Police Commissioner Andrew Coster stated that the media focuses on extreme ends of issues where there is no middle ground as it “doesn’t sell or make great TV” (Radio New Zealand, 2021), NZP supports this media trend via *Police Ten 7*. We suggest that *Police Ten 7* may, therefore, further the level of distrust that Māori and Pasifika peoples have in NZP (Heyer, 2019; Te Whaiti & Roguski, 1998). In February 2023, after completion of this study, TVNZ announced that the *Police Ten 7* will be discontinued (RNZ, 2023).



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