

Reality-based television and police–citizen encounters

The intertextual construction and situated
meaning of mental illness-as-punishment

PHILLIP CHONG HO SHON AND BRUCE A. ARRIGO

Indiana State University, USA and University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

Abstract

Recent theoretical analyses concerning mental illness argue that persons labeled as such are punished first through discourse, subsequently legitimized, knowingly or not, through social effect. In this framework, punishment is an artifact of unconscious and symbolic forces whose structuration can be positionally, relationally and provisionally decoded through careful textual exegeses. Linked to several strains of postmodern inquiry, a number of application studies have examined the varied sociological and criminological contexts in which this phenomenon operates; including the reality construction undertaken by legal and psychiatric decision brokers and tribunals. However, one under-investigated dimension to this critical theory of punishment is found within popular media portrayals, including reality-based television programming. This study explores the intertextual construction and situated meaning of mental illness derived from the acclaimed television show, *COPS*. By appropriating the methodological tools of discourse analysis, this article describes the richly detailed, constitutive order lurking behind and through one excerpted police–citizen (P–C) encounter. At issue here is the dialogical function of fear and laughter, and the manner in which each uniquely functioned to transform the phenomenon of mental illness into the sign of punishment, expressed through harms of reduction and repression. Several social and justice policy implications stemming from this inquiry also are described.

Key Words

fear and laughter • mental illness • policing • postmodernism • reality television

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly attempts to understand the phenomenon of mental illness have undergone considerable historical (Grob, 1994), philosophical (Foucault, 1965), legal (Perlin, 2000), sociological (Scheff, 2000) and psychiatric (Szasz, 1994) exegeses. In their respective ways, critics lament the interpersonal and organizational contexts in which persons with mental disorders generally are cared for and treated by institutional authorities (Isaac and Armat, 1990; LaFond and Durham, 1992; Torey, 1997), often resulting in routine practices and social policies that punish psychiatric citizens for thinking, acting and being different (Caplan, 1995; Kitzie, 1972; Newnes et al., 1999).

Recently, this emphasis on punishment, especially as a basis by which to comprehend mental illness, has been subjected to sustained critical interrogation (Arrigo, 1993, 1996, 2002). Relying on the interpretive tools of constitutive thought (Giddens, 1984), psychoanalytic semiotics (Lacan, 1977), chaos theory (Porter and Gleick, 1990; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984) and deconstructive practice (Derrida, 1978) a more post-modern accounting has been rendered (Arrigo, 2002; Williams and Arrigo, 2002a). In the postmodern framework, the global power relations of various legal and medical institutions, and the disciplinary control they exercise over individuals, are made manifest through discourse; that is, what is spoken, written or otherwise communicated (Foucault, 1977, 1979). In short, this perspective endeavors 'to link clinicolegal practices (predicting dangerousness, executing the mentally ill) with unspoken desires (e.g. the metaphysics of presence, the social control thesis), revealing how ideology and circumscribed knowledge inform the behavior' of powerful tribunals and other decision brokers (Arrigo, 2002: xix).¹ In this framework, prospects for fostering psychiatric justice are situated within and originate through the speaking subject's unconscious. As such, definitions of mental illness, descriptions of psychiatric services and organizational practices affecting both are mobilized and activated in the psychic apparatus, assume expressive form and narrative coherence by way of a bounded discourse that privileges shared meaning over intrinsic being, and subsequently undergo a process of legitimacy enacted through various institutional policies, procedures and laws. As a result, dominant interpretations of reality (e.g. identity and difference) are reinforced, while multiple, discordant and fuller expressions of the same are dismissed (Arrigo, 2003; Arrigo and Williams, 1999; Williams and Arrigo, 2002b).

Interestingly, one unexamined facet of this postmodern theory of punishment is the role that the media assumes, especially in its articulated depiction of persons with psychiatric disorders disseminated through reality-based television programming. This deficiency is surprising, particularly given the many disparaging representations communicated through sundry entertainment and news programs (Gerbner, 1980; Matas et al., 1985; Signorielli, 1989; Steadman and Cocozza, 1978; Wahl, 1992). Underpinning these verbalized images is the notion that persons with psychiatric disorders alternatively are purveyors of violence (Glasson, 1996; Philo et al., 1994) or are harbingers of dark humor (Wahl, 1992, 1995). In either instance, expressions of difference are pathologized and the social inscription of stigma is both powerfully and insidiously conveyed through the graphic image and the spoken word. Indeed, this is a degradation ceremony (Garfinkel, 1956) in which the phenomenon of mental illness is transformed linguistically and symbolically into the sign of punishment (Arrigo, 1995) whose effects, through discourse embody, perpetuate and reify social oppression.

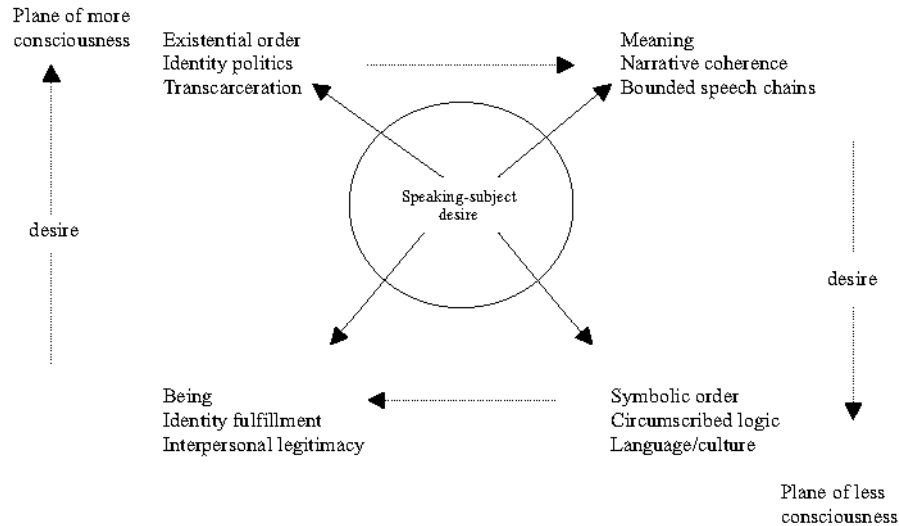
To examine these matters more closely, this article focuses on the intertextual construction and situated meaning of psychiatric disorder as developed from the popular reality-based television show, *COPS*. By examining the discursive and framing practices of the editors (Goffman, 1974), this article describes the richly nuanced dialogical function of fear and laughter – constitutive elements of the degradation ceremony – that structured one police–citizen (P–C) interaction.² As we argue, the intertextual construction and situated meaning of mental illness once deconstructed as such is a semiotic stand-in for punishment, unconsciously and pre-thematically conveyed through discourse (i.e. the grammars of fear and laughter).³ The interpersonal and institutional response to such linguistic reality construction is surveillance, social control and other disciplinary practices (e.g. confinement). As constitutive criminology explains (Henry and Milovanovic, 1996), these outcomes, mediated by discourse, are emblematic of harms of reduction and repression.

Accordingly, in the second section, the most salient elements of our critical theory of punishment are summarily described. In the third section, the phenomena of reality-based television and mass-mediated P–C encounters are reviewed. Both the second and third sections provide the specific context out of which the ensuing study unfolds. In the fourth section, our discourse analytic method of inquiry is delineated, and justification for our reliance on one excerpted exchange from a *COPS* episode is provided (Schiffrin, 1994). In the fifth section, the relevant *COPS* data, involving a P–C interaction with a psychiatrically disordered citizen, are presented and discussed. At issue here is the dialogical function of fear and laughter, and the extent to which they fueled a status degradation ceremony consistent with our proposed thesis. In the sixth section, several social and justice policy implications stemming from our analysis are provisionally explored.

OUTLINE OF A CRITICAL THEORY OF PUNISHMENT

Critical postmodern analysis regarding the phenomenon of punishment (and penology more generally) emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Bosworth, 1999; Howe, 1994; Milovanovic, 1988; Milovanovic and Henry, 1991; Thomas, 1988). One conceptual strain of inquiry germane to this project has been society's response to persons defined as psychiatrically disordered subjected to the habitual practice of being routed to and from civil and criminal confinement settings. This process has been termed transcarceration (Arrigo, 1997, 2001). Built on the rich, textual insights of psychoanalytic semiotics (Lacan, 1977), constitutive theory (Giddens, 1984; Henry and Milovanovic, 1996), deconstructionism (Derrida, 1978) and several principles derived from chaos theory (Porter and Gleick, 1990), the constitution of punishment for persons with psychiatric disorders is defined in the context of both linguistic and symbolic structuration. In this schema, the sense making vocabulary invoked by the speaking-subject is located in the repository of one's unconscious, awaiting mobilization and valorization (Arrigo, 2002; Arrigo et al., 2005). For purposes of our assessment, the salient features of this critical theory of punishment are delineated below.⁴

Figure 1 visually depicts and summarily represents the major components of a critical theory of punishment for persons labeled mentally ill. Positioned at the upper left and lower right hand portions are the planes of more and less consciousness. Consciousness



•Figure 1 A critical theory of punishment for the mentally ill, adapted from Arrigo (2002: 185)

refers to the level and type of awareness one experiences about a phenomenon, person or situation, as well as some combination of these (Freud, 1914). Jointly, these domains constitute the pivotal divide by and through which one's desire (Lacan, 1977) is spoken or unspoken, present or concealed, mobilized or repressed. The significance of desire stems from its capacity to represent a circumscribed knowledge informed by what one says (the role of discourse) and who one is (the role of identity). Thus, we understand that desire 'speaks the subject' or is a coded word for the 'speaking-subject'.

Depending on the social capital of the speaking-subject (e.g. as police officer, as disordered citizen, as television viewer) the frequency, duration and intensity of the person's desire is embodied in and consistent with clinicolegal speech. Clinicolegal speech is the accepted and normative argot of mental illness steeped in and governed by a grammar that privileges disciplinary systems (e.g. psychiatry and law, criminal justice) (Foucault, 1965, 1977) and their interdependent and overlapping operation (Arrigo, 1993). However, regardless of one's social standing, desire anchors how the other elements in the figure interactively function. Accordingly, the speaking-subject is the locus of all thought, discourse, agency and action.

There are two intersecting axes that pass through the speaking-subject. These axes include the plane of meaning and being, and the plane of the existential and the symbolic. The plane of meaning and being reflects the struggle the psychiatric citizen encounters when seeking identity fulfillment and interpersonal legitimacy through an established, though limiting, system of communication (i.e. clinicolegal discourse; P-C encounters). The plane of the existential and the symbolic specifies the dilemma disciplinary systems (and, by extension, their agents) confront when circulating and reproducing only certain meanings and particularized values, consistent with their own internal, self-referential and pre-thematic logic. This is the realm in which dominant

culture and language is valorized (the symbolic order) (Lacan, 1977), and assumes expressive form through tangible social effects (the existential order). Both of these axes interactively extend from the sphere of the unconscious to the sphere of the conscious.

The plane of meaning and being, as well as and the plane of the existential and the symbolic, pass through the speaking-subject. This occurs because both axes are mediated by the desiring subject. In addition, these two axes intersect and crossover at the point of the speaking-subject. This dynamic draws attention to the psychic and ideological forces that always and already encode reality for the person defined as psychiatrically ill. These forces include, but are not limited to, the influence of the media, as well as political, economic, religious and educational factors that (co)shape reality.

There are two horizontal arrows identified in Figure 1; the arrows represent movement. The arrow crossing from the upper left to the upper right conveys conscious activity. This is the behavior of disciplinary systems (Foucault, 1977) or steering mechanisms (Habermas, 1975), such as law enforcement, penology and psychiatry embodying values (e.g. paternalism, identity politics) and locating them in narratively coherent speech chains (e.g. the discourse of custody and confinement). The arrow crossing from the lower right to the lower left signifies unconscious activity. What the conscious movement affirms are certain phenomenal forms (e.g. psychological egoism, the social control thesis), situated in a conventional, taken-for-granted system of communication (the symbolic order) (Lacan, 1977). As both source and product of institutional decision-making, these phenomenal forms repress, reduce or otherwise silence the humanity of psychiatric citizens. Indeed, persons with mental illness are pathologized and homogenized, rendering as absent (i.e. denied) the difference that they would otherwise embody in speech and action. This is the manifestation of punishment assuming a discursive linguistic form. As we will demonstrate, the function of fear and laughter within P–C encounters semiotically confirms and amplifies this process.

However, notwithstanding their felt victimization, mental health consumers legitimize the language of disciplinary systems (the prevailing discourse about mental illness) through their engagement with transcarceration. They manufacture and are made by its logic. This engagement gives rise to the articulated values and customary meanings of paternalism, identity politics and the like (i.e. protect society from seemingly dangerous, disordered and diseased individuals). In this context, then, subjects contribute, knowingly or not, to the very marginalization and alienation they seek to renounce. Thus, the situated meaning of mental illness is transformed into the sign of punishment where the cycle of harm and the re-enactment of this status degradation ceremony repeat themselves much like a feedback loop, reoccurring over and over again.

REALITY TELEVISION AND MASS-MEDIATED POLICE–CITIZEN ENCOUNTERS

According to the extant literature, two approaches typify how scholars view the role of reality-television programs in the construction and meaning of crime and justice phenomena. Cultivation analysts⁵ maintain that shows like *COPS* or *America's Most Wanted* offer little that is 'real' about reality-based television. Instead, these programs cultivate or shape how the audience perceives the real world portrayed in the program (Oliver and Armstrong, 1995; Slater and Elliot, 1982). In this model, one's exposure

to television is not without its effects: it swallows up viewers' perception of reality, significantly contributing to the way they think and act about the world they inhabit (Gerbner et al., 1980; Morgan and Signorielli, 1990; Potter, 1986; Signorielli, 1989, 1990; Signorielli and Morgan, 1996). Moreover, some cultivation analysts posit that reality programs about the police present a skewed view of law enforcement work where order maintenance and crime control are continuously emphasized and where the notion of a highly authoritarian officer is routinely depicted (Oliver, 1994, 1996).

The cultivation analyst approach to reality-based television fosters several noteworthy outcomes. Viewers are likely to believe that crime is rampant, are likely to report higher levels of victimization and are likely to push for tougher crime policy legislation (Dobash et al., 1998; Doyle, 1998). In short, cultivation analysts argue that reality-based programs dealing with crime and justice phenomena promote the bizarre and sensational while minimizing the typical and ordinary (Kooistra et al., 1998). In this assessment model of reality television, fear is manipulated leading viewers to principally adopt safety-drive action (Cavendar and Bond-Maupin, 1996; Entman, 1990, 1992, 1994; Gitlin, 1979).⁶ This is action that emerges from the joint effects of reality and television: 'factors that interact in the social construction of fear and possibly other meanings about crime' (Chiricos et al., 2000: 780). Thus, what is cultivated for the viewer is a world filled with violence and violent offenders, monitored and controlled by the police who function to keep the peace and to promote order.

A second approach to the role of reality-based television programming relevant to the construction and meaning of crime and justice phenomena is contained in the work of Neil Postman (1985). According to Postman, watching television requires scant cognitive processes, results in little gain from exposure to it and likely leads to nothing more than sheer amusement. Simply put, television's influence on the possibility of one's future action lacks any efficacy.

Unlike cultivation analysts who locate the 'evil' of reality-based television in the proliferation of audience fright that results in needlessly conservative crime and justice policy setting, Postman (1985) situates the 'evil' of reality-based television programming in the type of mind it manufactures. In his model, people who routinely watch crime and justice reality television seek constant amusement, and this desire for continuous entertainment fosters a sort of metaphorical death whose effect is a state of predicted inactivity and impotence. Indeed, for Postman (1985), one's ongoing exposure to reality-based television is an exercise in sustained delight where laughter in the face of harrowing life events signifies the psychological demise of the other. Thus, depictions of brutal murders, renderings of traumatized rape victims, portrayals of abused children, etc., all skillfully communicated through sounds and images, are swallowed up and digested by the viewer whose principal aim is the experience of visceral pleasure. Again, this is entertainment that produces inactivity but transforms the subject of amusement into an object of dark humor.

Interestingly, the respective positions taken by cultivation analysts and Neil Postman are compatible, particularly with respect to the shared role that fear and laughter assume in the linguistic and symbolic intertextual structuration of the reality-based television crime scene and/or its participants. For cultivation analysts, shows like *COPS* or *America's Most Wanted* depend on the spoken word and the vivid image (specifically, the grammar of fear) to transform viewer appreciation for the events and characters in

question (i.e. society understood to be violent and populated by dangerous offenders). For Postman, reality-based crime and justice television depends on the spoken word and the vivid image (specifically, the grammar of laughter) to sustain viewer amusement regarding the events and characters in question (i.e. participants transformed into objects of unequivocal entertainment). In the first instance, viewers are ‘frightened to death’ by the situated meaning and the intertextual construction of the reality-based television show, re-enacted through sustained exposure to it (Signorielli, 1990; Weaver and Wakshlag, 1986). As such, they stigmatize non-normative identities and pathologize expressions of difference, producing safety-driven action. In the second instance, viewers are ‘amused to death’ by the situated meaning and intertextual construction of the crime and justice reality program, re-enacted through repeated exposure to it (Postman, 1985). As such, they reduce the humanity of others into objects of humor, laughter and entertainment, built on a state of inactivity. However, as Garfinkel (1956: 423) noted, conditions such as these are akin to a denunciation ceremony whose success is achieved because, among other things, the person is reconstituted through the degradation experience: ‘what [the person] is now is what, “after all”, [the person] was all along . . . [T]he denounced person [is] ritually separated from a place in the legitimate social order . . . defined as standing at a place opposed to it. [The person] must be placed “outside”, [and] must be made “strange”’.

There are several ways in which the aforementioned ideas concerning reality-based television programming pertain to *COPS* and this article’s textual and postmodern assessment of mental illness as the sign of punishment. As the first of its kind to blend entertainment and reality, *COPS* purports to depict what policing is really like. On a more subliminal level, its reliance on the grammars of fear and laughter to depict routine police practices can dramatically reconstitute the identity of speaking-subjects, defiling them for their very status as disordered, homeless, poor or ‘other’. In this context, officers may unwittingly participate in a process that fosters the subject’s felt, though often unspoken, victimization. This level of P–C interaction, as conveyed through the medium of television, forms the basis of our inquiry.

COPS portrays law enforcement personnel responding to actual calls for service from the public (Fishman and Cavender, 1998). Its authentic flavor is achieved through the presence of an individual who uses a camera to shadow officers throughout their patrol shift. In a 30-minute episode, viewers are likely to observe two or three vignettes involving the police and the public (Doyle, 1998). Each P–C encounter can be classified into three distinct segments: (1) framing narrative; (2) interaction phase; and (3) debriefing narrative (Shon, 2003). These three segments are intertextually linked, synchronically and diachronically, and editorially manipulated to maximize and dramatize the story that is told.

In the first segment, a ‘host’ police officer ‘provides autobiographical information, so the viewer gets to know the [individual] personally. [Typically], the officer . . . talk[s] about why he – or occasionally she – joined the force, how long he/she has been a cop, and so on’ (Doyle, 1998: 100). In this respect, framing narratives introduce the audience to the story’s protagonist, while meta-pragmatically structuring the events to follow (Shon, 2003).

The second segment of a P–C exchange on *COPS* is termed the interaction phase. It reflects the contact made and the communication that unfolds between the police

and the public. This segment is consistent with what prior police researchers have termed the 'interaction phase'. These are P-C encounters generally lasting a few minutes, involving three or more verbal exchanges among officers and citizens (Mastrofski et al., 1995).

The debriefing narrative is the third segment of a vignette on *COPS*. In a typical debriefing narrative, officers explain, step by step, what actions they took and why they took them with respect to the crime or justice issue in dispute. Generally speaking, debriefing narratives are not replete with bureaucratic argot; instead, they are filled with figurative and metaphoric expressions, humor and other creative uses of language (Shon, 2003).

METHOD AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE SELECTION OF DATA

In this article, the intertextual construction and situated meaning of one particular P-C encounter on *COPS* involving a person identified as mentally ill was systematically examined. A total of 20 P-C encounters from *COPS* were recorded for another project and, out of that 20, one involved contact with and communication between the police and a woman identified as psychiatrically disordered.⁷ Although the existing literature reports that interactions between the police and persons with mental illness are more infrequent than those encounters involving non-mentally ill citizens (Bittner, 1967; Teplin, 1984, 1985; Teplin and Pruett, 1992), arrest rates for the psychiatrically disordered appear to be considerably higher than for their non-mentally ill counterparts (Teplin, 2000).⁸ Moreover, when law enforcement personnel do come in contact with persons identified as psychiatrically disordered, the decision to arrest is a contextually mediated strategy chosen as a function of a police officer's discretion, the culpability of the relevant parties, the availability of existing resources, and the effect of deinstitutionalization (Meehan, 1995; Patch and Arrigo, 1999; Schellenburg et al., 1992; Teplin and Pruett, 1992).

To illustrate the linguistic and ideological function of the chosen vignette, we situate the P-C encounter into three distinct segments: the framing narrative, the interaction phase and the debriefing narrative. Each of these segments is transcribed verbatim and subjected to a close textual reading, mindful of our previously outlined and critically animated postmodern theory of punishment. In particular, the ensuing analysis is directly related to carefully explicating the logic, order and ideology embedded in the discourse of a single case as employed by a police officer and a psychiatric citizen (see Garfinkel, 1967; Schegloff, 1987).⁹ Consequently, the commentary that follows is not meant to be generalizable in a statistical sense. Instead, the constitutive order of police encounters with persons identified as mentally ill is unpacked. To date, this phenomenon has only been implicitly explored in prior works (Manning, 1988, 1998). In addition, by systematically de-coding the excerpted text, the function of fear and laughter is exposed for what each respectively signified in this one P-C encounter. Along these lines, the implicit values, hidden messages and concealed assumptions lodged in the narrative are made explicit and deconstructed (Gee, 1999; Wood, 2000), and then linked to the status denunciation ceremony lurking within the P-C interaction.

Readers may pose a warrantable objection that could be raised when using excerpts from a *COPS* episode for empirical data. In short, is not this reality-based program

edited for television? Thus, is not the selected data already exposed to some research contamination? Admittedly, *COPS* is editorially reviewed, cut and sliced at the editor's discretion. As such, it is not open to immediate scrutiny. Hence, this study is similar to other works in that the source of the information originates from a common medium (television), but the editing process and the product's immediate unavailability differentiates this data from other television programs.¹⁰

However, the problem of editing; that is, showing reduced and partial versions of events in their entirety, and then using that edited product for data, is not as troublesome or relevant as it first appears. This is especially the case for a language-oriented project such as this, and can be illustrated with reference to a previous study. Maynard and Manzo (1993: 171) used a videotaped recording of an actual jury deliberation which lasted about two and a half hours to study how juries 'define and use the concept' of justice. That same jury deliberation was subsequently reduced and edited for a one-hour television program (i.e. *Frontline*).

In particular, Maynard and Manzo (1993) were interested in how jurors used the notion of justice as a 'situated' and 'practical' phenomenon to socially organize their perceptions about the defendant in their deliberations. Thus, rather than using justice as an abstract and theoretical category, they sought to examine how this concept embodied and emerged in the concrete and fine grained details of the jurors' talk. While the temporal sequencing of jurors' explanations was altered in the edited *Frontline* version, the two accounts (i.e. the videotape and the television program) fundamentally remained the same. In other words, the 'internal order' of the *Frontline* version could not be affected by editing, without destroying its internal coherence altogether.

What the Maynard and Manzo (1993) study indicates is that language is technically, socially and locally organized. It is rule driven and orderly, and its orderliness is found in structures within the talk itself – independent of the occasion for the talk – and (re)produced during sequential moments of talk-in-interaction by the people who are situated in an occasion for the talk (Sacks, 1984; Sacks et al., 1974). Just as significantly, talk is a social action; that is, talk is the 'primordial' site of sociality in which people's identities, relationships and realities are collaboratively brought to order (Baker, 1998; Maynard, 1988; Schegloff, 1999; Spencer, 1987). Thus, turning to excerpts from a *COPS* vignette as a justifiable source of data acknowledges that the interactions between the police and citizens are multi-layered, as well as embedded across several time periods, contexts, speakers and listeners (Goffman, 1974, 1981). Indeed, the communicative structure of *COPS* is not a simple dyadic exchange between speakers (presumably active) and hearers (presumably passive); rather, the encounter is contextually co-shaped by different recipient designs and participant structures, in relation to various utterances, the performer, and the audience (Goodwin, 1986).¹¹

PRESENTING AND DISCUSSING THE DATA

In the *COPS* episode selected, the encounter between a woman (W) identified as mentally ill and a police officer (PO) can be divided into three distinct segments: framing narrative, interaction phase and debriefing narrative. As the program begins, the host officer introduces viewers to what police work is like for him. This portion of the vignette not only announces the episode and the P–C encounter, but implicitly

provides the viewing audience with a particular set of assumptions about the nature of law enforcement work and what is to follow in the interaction phase. In addition, the segment personalizes the host officer's role in the P-C exchange. Given these comments, the framing narrative offers a dimension of assessment before the actual story takes place (Goffman, 1974; Shon, 2003; Tannen, 1993).

Segment 1: framing narrative

It can be dangerous at times there's a lot of times when an incident will start out dangerous, but I mean you get it under control then you, you know, pretty much have a good time with it, but like I said, it's funny at times () there's some things that people do that's kind of off the wall I mean you sit back after and you think 'man' you know, heh heh, it's crazy but no uh uh it's a good time it's a good time . . . We got a sergeant says that uh vehicle that's been blowing through red lights; he's in an unmarked vehicle and he needs a marked vehicle to respond.

Thus far, the viewers know that police work for the host officer starts out being dangerous, usually involving 'off the wall characters', but once he gets it 'under control', he will 'have a good time with it'. The next segment shows what the host officer does in his interaction with the citizen. After the host officer receives his assignment from the dispatcher ('We got a sergeant says that uh vehicle that's been blowing through red lights; he's in an unmarked vehicle and he needs a marked vehicle to respond'), the officer engages in a high-speed pursuit of the car in question. After he brings the pursuit to an end and engages the female citizen suspect, viewers witness the following exchange:

Segment 2: interaction phase

<i>Text Line</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Text</i>
20	PO:	What chu in a hurry for?
21	W:	Nothing.
22	PO:	Wha chu almost hit me like that for?
23	W:	I didn't.
24	PO:	You didn't see me coming up there with my blue lights on?
25	W:	I was avoidin ya; I was avoidin ya.
26	PO:	Why didn't you stop? You been drinkin?
27	W:	Nope.
28	PO:	What's that I smell on your breath?
29	W:	Nothing.
30	PO:	There's no alcohol or . . .
31	W:	Snickah's bah
32	PO:	Snickers bar?

[about 70 lines omitted where the host officer puts the woman in handcuffs and discusses the encounter with other officers]

<i>Text Line</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Text</i>
100	PO:	Okay I got a question for you.
101		Why did you blow through all them red lights?
102	W:	Wouldn't you run through red lights if ten thousand sons
103		a' bitches and fifteen thousand parts are trying to make
104		a new car outta you?
105	PO:	(long pause) aah okay.
106	W:	Well that's the truth.
107	PO:	That's the truth, huh?
108	W:	Yea.
109	PO:	So someone's trying to harm you, you said.
110	W:	Yea.

Segment 3: debriefing narrative

As the woman identified as mentally ill is arrested and is placed into the patrol wagon, she yells and screams at the officer. Then, viewers experience the final closing words of the P–C encounter:

<i>Text Line</i>	<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Text</i>
339	PO:	She's got a lot of anger in her, ha ha ha heh heh heh (with laughter
340		as the 'last word').

Mental illness and the discourses of fear and laughter

Taking into consideration the guiding function of the framing narrative (segment 1), viewers can anticipate a 'dangerous' encounter that the host cop will experience; however, we are not immediately told what the nature of this encounter will be. Furthermore, we are led to believe that after the officer 'gets it under control', he will 'have a good time with it'. What the host officer means by 'having a good time with it' also is not yet made clear, but it is connoted in the words 'funny', 'off the wall' and 'crazy'. There is already a semantic link between 'funny' and 'having a good time', and the framing narrative suggests that the funniness of the vignette may be tied to the craziness and off the wall character of the people he will soon meet. The 'danger' implied in segment 1 is concretized near the end of the segment when the officer receives a call about a car that is 'blowing through red lights'. The next sequence of events shows the officer engaged in a high-speed chase of the fleeing vehicle. After a brief pursuit, the host cop manages to pull the speeding vehicle over with the help of additional units. As the officer places the woman driver in custody ('get it under control') in the initial moments of the encounter, they exchange words as transcribed in segment 2.

At this point, some preliminary and global observations are warranted. There is nothing in the form of the conversational interaction that would lead the officer or the viewers at home to believe that the woman is mentally ill. For example, she shows no obvious signs of a thought or mood disorder, no paranoid symptoms are present, and no readily identifiable bizarre speech patterns are apparent. In fact, the interaction proceeds in a very orderly fashion: in line 20, the officer asks a question, which the

woman answers in the next turn; the officer accuses the woman of an offensive act (l. 22), and she denies it in the immediate turn (l. 23). In other words, all of the woman's answers conform to the rules of *conditional relevance*: 'given the first, the second is expectable: upon its occurrence it can be seen to be a second item to the first; upon its absence it can be seen to be officially absent – all this provided by the occurrence of the first item' (Schegloff, 1968: 1083). In the P–C exchange, there are no observable conversational 'disfluencies', false starts, or long inter-turn delays that are suggestive of paradigmatic 'crazy talk' (Holstein, 1993: 94–6). Furthermore, the two speakers negotiate a fundamental social activity (i.e. taking turns) in an orderly manner, at transition relevant places (Sacks et al., 1974). Simply put, there is order – structural, social, conversational – in the talk and in the interaction (see Holstein, 1988).

If the P–C exchange hints at 'crazy' and 'off the wall' things that are to come, they are contained in the content of W's responses (e.g. snickers bar). When the officer asks the woman why she blew through the red lights, she answers that 'ten thousand sons a' bitches' (people/strangers) and 'fifteen thousand parts' (objects) 'are trying to make a new car outta [her]' (harm/kill her). It is here that the officer's comments about the 'crazy' and 'off the wall' character of various people and police work are given a material face. The woman shows some classic signs of mental illness, including paranoid ideation and bizarre speech patterns. However, the woman's unusual response is not independently and solitarily produced; rather, it is mutually and collaboratively constituted through the interaction with the officer.

In the initial opening moments of the talk (ll. 20–32), the officer attempts to elicit an extended turn from the woman across four distinct turns. When the officer asks the woman in line 20 why she is in a hurry, the motorist replies with a curt negation; when he asks her why she attempted to hit him (l. 22), a serious legal infraction, she promptly denies such an accusation (l. 23: 'I didn't'). In line 26, the officer finally asks, at least in form, the 'what happened' question, designed to elicit an account ('Why didn't you stop?'), but follows it up with another question that is not topically relevant (l. 26: 'You been drinkin?'). On the surface, the PO wants to know why W was speeding, but provides no structural space for her response. He utters the interrogatives in a perfunctory manner, in a way that betrays the grammatical function of the question.

We offer a conjecture here as to why the officer frames his questions in syntactically clipped forms, and interrogates the motorist in a hasty manner. Lines 20–32 take place as the officer terminates the pursuit, pulls the motorist out of the car and places her in handcuffs. Contrast this highly intense state with what happens after the motorist has been placed into custody and after the officer has had a chance to calm down (70 omitted lines). When the host officer re-interrogates the motorist, and seeks to elicit a story from her, he prefaces his true question (l. 101: 'Why did you blow through all them red lights?') with a pre-question (l. 100: 'I got a question for you') (see Schegloff, 1980). Moreover, he does not compound it with another query; he simply asks and waits. Only when the motorist is given the grammatical and structural room to tell her account does she offer what appears to be a peculiar response that, in content, is consistent with speech indicative of psychiatric illness. However, as this particular excerpt illustrates, even bizarre answers are not the independent communicative products of one speaker whose unbalanced psychological state is reflected in the talk. Instead, such responses are jointly and interactively produced through the mutuality of participants

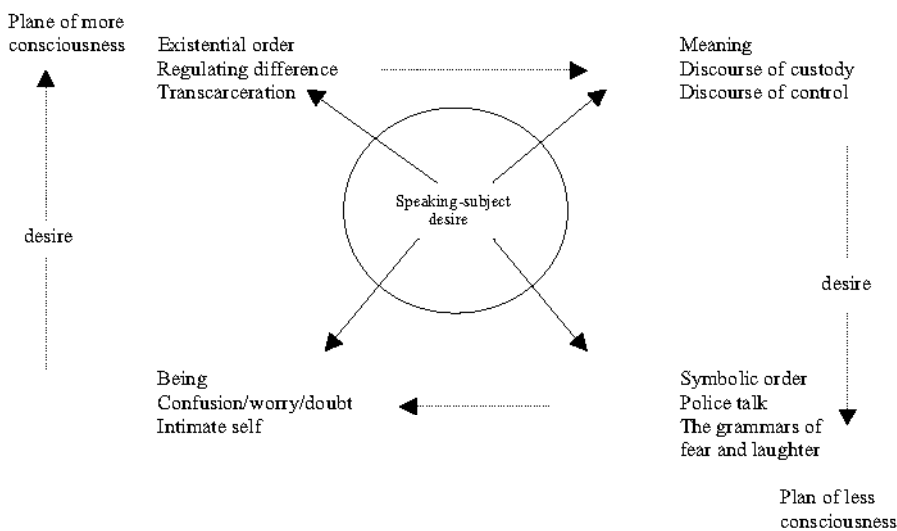
who co-author the structuration of the narrative and its concomitant effects (Arrigo, 2001; Henry and Milovanovic, 1996; Holstein, 1988).

As the officer arrests the woman and loads her into the wagon, she starts yelling and screaming at the policeman. This explicit image initiates the debriefing narrative. In the final segment, as the episode ends, the officer’s closing remarks are as follows: ‘she’s got a lot of anger in her, ha ha ha heh heh heh’. Laughter functions as the last word. In segment 3, the officer summarizes the entire encounter succinctly; that is, in a contextually and situationally relevant way. Both the violent scene (articulated as anger) and the officer’s laughter serve not only as a topic summary for the interaction phase, but as an indexical reference for the two other segments in the vignette as well (see Drew and Holt, 1988, 1998). Indeed, the grammars of fear and laughter, lurking in and through the episode, are brought together for final symbolic effect.

Mental illness as the sign of punishment: a postmodern inquiry

The analysis of the *COPS* vignette as developed in this article demonstrates the dialogically pivotal role that fear and laughter assumed in one P–C encounter. These grammars intertextually structured the exchange. However, what is not yet clear is the extent to which they advanced a status degradation ceremony, consistent with our proposed thesis. In short, given the analysis thus far, it remains to be seen whether (and to what extent) the *COPS* episode functioned to transform mental illness into the sign of punishment. Addressing this matter unpacks the situated meaning of the vignette in question. Accordingly, in order to explore this process, the previously outlined postmodern template (second section) is used for theoretical guidance and general amplification.

Figure 2 visually portrays the P–C encounter, consistent with the tenets of our critical theory of punishment. Located in the center is the speaking-subject. For our purposes, this is the woman identified as mentally ill. Her desire was mobilized and activated



•Figure 2 Mental illness-as-punishment in a police–citizen encounter

through the intertextually constructed interactions with the police officer; exchanges that provided her with a circumscribed context out of which to speak (the role of discourse) and to be (role of identity).

Two intersecting axes pass through the speaking-subject. One of these is the plane of meaning and being. This axis identifies the dilemma a person with mental illness confronts when attempting to convey a sense of self that will be validated by another, despite the linguistic (and social) limits imposed by an established system of communication. The established system of communication at issue here is police–citizen discourse. During the P–C exchange, the woman responds to the officer’s questions in ways not conventionally equated with psychiatric health or wellness. For example, in response to the question: ‘Why did you blow through all of them red lights?’, the woman answers: ‘Wouldn’t you run through red lights if ten thousand sons a’ bitches and fifteen thousand parts [were] trying to make a new car outta you?’ At the unconscious level (the realm of being), the woman ostensibly struggles with her sense of fear, agitation, confusion, worry, doubt, etc. However, at the conscious level (the realm of meaning) these deeply felt sentiments get articulated as likely personal harm or injury. Customary P–C discourse does not generally make it possible for a person to convey an intimate or fragile sense of identity and, if and when it does, this identity must be communicated in ways that support the sense-making parameters of the discourse in use (Shon, 2000). In short, in order to be heard, the speaking-subject must produce a coherent narrative bounded by a specialized system of communication that privileges shared meaning over intrinsic being (Arrigo, 2002).

The second axis is the plane of the existential and the symbolic. It specifies the predicament institutions (e.g. the system of mental health, the system of criminal justice) and their agents (e.g. psychiatrists, police officers) experience when producing or circulating only system-maintaining speech, along with their corresponding values and circumscribed logic. In the *COPS* episode, the policeman’s exchanges with the woman demonstrate this dilemma. At the unconscious level, ‘police talk’ (Manning, 1988) structures how officers interact with citizen-suspects. For law enforcement personnel, this grammar is psychically encoded within the culture and organization of policing (Manning, 1998) and, correspondingly, is activated through what is taken to be an acceptable, predictable and normative P–C encounter (Shon, 2003). At the conscious level, the existential effect of police talk is the regulation of difference (Arrigo, 2002; Shon, 2000). Difference here refers to what is interpreted as a non-normative articulation of identity, including speech that conveys likely personal harm or injury in a situation that does not appear to warrant such (bizarre) discourse (the plane of meaning over the plane being). This is what is meant by particularized values and a specialized logic that encodes reality in and through the P–C exchange.

The existential and symbolic axis and the meaning and being axis pass through the center of the diagram (i.e. the speaking-subject). What this signifies is that the woman labeled mentally ill mediates the operation of these two planes. Moreover, both axes intersect and crossover at the point of the speaking-subject, given the explicit images and spoken words communicated by the *COPS* episode. This dynamic draws attention to the ideological effects of the media (reality-based television) to ‘speak’ the subject or, given how the subject mediates her own reality, to co-shape the identity and humanity of the person in question.

The preceding observations provide the necessary backdrop for interpreting the situated meaning of the grammar of fear and laughter in the P–C encounter and the extent to which the intertextual construction of mental illness functioned as a semiotic stand-in for punishment. Returning to Figure 2, the arrow crossing from the upper left (the existential plane) to the upper right (the plane of meaning) conveys conscious activity. Conscious activity refers to the visual and linguistic representations contained in and disseminated by the *COPS* episode, carefully choreographed by the framing narrative, the interaction phase and the debriefing narrative. Since this is a reality-based television program about policing, the disciplinary system of law enforcement structures the dialogue. As such, the story that unfolds is built around the value of police talk situated within a narratively coherent, though circumscribed, speech chain (e.g. the discourse of control, order maintenance, custody). The vignette explicitly conveys this thematic and bounded logic throughout the exchange.

The arrow crossing from the lower right (the realm of the symbolic) to the lower left (the realm of being) communicates unconscious activity. What the conscious movement affirms are certain phenomenal forms that reside in a taken-for-granted and mostly unconscious system of communication (i.e. the language and culture of policing). In the vignette under consideration, these phenomenal forms are the respective grammars of fear and laughter that speak the identity and agency of the motorist defined as mentally ill. Indeed, the jargon of fear and laughter semiotically operates to disassemble and reassemble her reality, consistent with the control of difference (the realm of the existential), as established deep within the psychic organization of police work (the realm of the symbolic). Lost in this scripted, media-manufactured process is the possibility for alternative renderings of the speaking-subject. As the intertextual construction of the episode makes evident, situations (and people) can ‘be dangerous’ and ‘crazy’, the woman says things that are ‘off the wall’ and funny, the officer has a ‘good time’, notwithstanding all the ‘anger’ harbored by the subject, and laughs to affirm how amusing the woman and the situation are. No other interpretations are visually depicted or verbally conveyed. This, then, *is* the manifestation of punishment assuming discursive linguistic forms.

Indeed, as both source and product of law enforcement decision-making in the *COPS* episode, fear and laughter reconstitute the humanity of the woman identified as mentally ill. Fear functions to repress the woman’s humanity and laughter functions to reduce it. As constitutive criminology asserts, a harm (or crime) of repression occurs ‘when people experience a limit, or restriction, preventing them from achieving a desired position of standing’ (Lanier and Henry, 1998: 283). The person is denied the ability to be more or other than the definition assigned to the individual by others. A harm (or crime) of reduction occurs ‘when offended parties experience a loss of some quality relative to their present standing’ (Lanier and Henry, 1998: 283). The person is thwarted in his or her efforts to be who the person is because of the actions of others. Both harms of repression and reduction are ‘the expression of some agency’s energy to make a difference on others and it is the exclusion of those others who in the instant are rendered powerless to maintain their humanity. . . . [These] crimes, then, are the power to deny others their ability to make a difference’ (Henry and Milovanovic, 1996: 116). The effect of such harms is to punish people not simply for who they are (i.e. mentally ill) or for how they function in the world (i.e. running through red lights) but for the desire

they embody when expressing their non-conforming way of knowing and sense of being (Arrigo, 2002).

Fear (the anger that the woman expressed; the danger that the woman represented) defined and repressed her identity, as graphically depicted and linguistically conveyed, in the *COPS* vignette. As the intertextual construction of the episode reveals, her discourse and action were interpreted as the ruminations of a potentially violent person needing to be controlled. Thus, the standing denied to her was that of a citizen (a more complete person) beyond or in addition to her verbalized hostility. Laughter (the amusement that the woman engendered for the officer and, thus, for the audience) defined and reduced the woman's identity, as explicitly portrayed and verbally manifested, in the *COPS* episode. As the intertextual construction of the episode discloses, her discourse (e.g. describing impending injury) and action (e.g. driving through red lights) were interpreted as humorous and amusing machinations. Rather than searching around and through the spoken words (the plane of meaning) to locate the woman's worry, doubt, confusion, trouble (the plane of being), the officer relegates the woman to that of a laughable object. Thus, the loss she suffers goes to the fullness of her humanity and the richness of her personhood.

Jointly, the grammars of fear and laughter as stylishly conveyed through the spoken word and the explicit image and as smartly crafted in the selected reality-based television episode of *COPS*, reveal how mental illness is transformed into the sign of punishment. The difference that the woman articulates is rendered an absence; the understanding that she seeks is pathologized; the identity that she embodies is homogenized. The phenomenal forms of fear and laughter, so integral to the media manufactured deconstruction and reconstruction of the speaking-subject, make possible a status degradation ceremony.

However, as co-architect of this event, the woman's anger, in part conveyed through screams and yells directed at the officer, initiates the debriefing narrative. At this point, having been subjected to harms of repression and reduction and still in search of identity fulfillment and interpersonal legitimacy, the motorist affirms the power of police talk (the circumscribed discourse through which the P-C encounter unfolds) to embody her desire. Indeed, confronted with a loss in social standing in relation to the officer, the unspoken but felt reconstitution of her identity (as criminal), and the psychic longing for something more, she expresses her victimization hostilely, angrily. However, in doing so, she unconsciously contributes to the discourse of policing (its values and its logic) to define her reality, to 'speak' the subject. After all, her words and actions, when interpreted through the bounded language and delimited culture of policing (symbolic order) can only be indicators of difference that must be regulated. As such, the woman must be contained, corralled and/or corrected. Accordingly, she is handcuffed and hauled away in the patrol wagon. In this scenario, given how the woman has been labeled, it is likely that police custody will give way to civil commitment, followed by eventual release, and back again to some confinement setting, *ad infinitum*, reaffirming the experience of transcarceration (Arrigo, 1997, 2001).

We see, then, the completion of a cycle that linguistically and symbolically establishes a circumscribed reality and marginalizing identity for a woman with some unspecified psychiatric disorder as depicted in one episode of the acclaimed reality-based television show, *COPS*. The situated meaning of mental illness becomes a semiotic

stand-in for punishment where harms of repression (fear) and reduction (laughter), as intertextually communicated, support and make possible the status renunciation ceremony. The social inscription of stigma is attached. The woman's identity is ritually reconstituted. She is made to stand outside of and opposed to the social order. She now is recognized for the violent and laughable (i.e. strange) figure that she was all along.

SOCIAL AND JUSTICE POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In a reality program such as *COPS*, viewers have an opportunity to ride along and vicariously participate in the vicissitudes of routine patrol work (e.g. traffic stops, responding to calls for assistance) in the comfort of their homes through the presence of a camera. Interestingly, however, the technologically driven and mass-mediated nature of P–C encounters on *COPS* allows for the dialogic reconfiguration of participation frameworks, and serves as the locus of editorial and intertextual authority (see Bauman and Briggs, 1990; Shon, 2003). In other words, technology permits the traversal of different temporal moments and their synthesis into a synchronic and diachronic media product in the name of realistic entertainment under the auspices of editorial discretion.

Still, as a form of entertainment, *COPS* is different from other fictional and non-fictional television programs and genres. Viewers do not passively consume the graphic images, the spoken words, and the ideology embedded in the show. Instead, they actively participate in the interaction as invisible spectators: the host officer directs his (or her) talk at the camera, addressing the viewing audience at home as 'ratified' participants in the interaction (Goffman, 1981). Moreover, officers explain and justify the reasons for their actions to the public in debriefing narratives, at times changing the register of talk to accommodate the audience (Shon, 2003). Simply put, although the viewing public is invisible and elsewhere, they dialogically influence the structural contours of the show (Bahktin, 1981).

The uniqueness of a reality-based television program such as *COPS* is worthy of critical inquiry precisely because it resists categorical boundaries and blurs the distinction between reality and entertainment. It combines the drama of fiction with the authenticity of hyper-real presence, while melding the bite of non-fiction into a highly compressed 30-minute episode. As a result, reality television not only allows viewers to form and shape attitudes and beliefs about certain people (e.g. the mentally ill, minorities, women), it does so through their dialogic participation; that is, personal experience (Lopez, 1991). Thus, through multi-modal mediums such as *COPS* or *America's Most Wanted*, far greater influence on the viewer may be exerted than standardized fiction/non-fiction programs including documentaries (Wahl, 1995).

One noteworthy and, regrettably, likely result of repeated exposure to the type of images and words found in the data of our study is that viewers will be led to form harsher beliefs and attitudes toward persons with psychiatric disorders (Wahl and Lefkowitz, 1989). Scholars consistently have shown that the mass media serve as important sources of information about the mentally ill (Mayer and Barry, 1992; Wahl, 1992, 1995). Moreover, there is a consensus in the literature that the sorts of beliefs harbored by the public, given negative depictions of psychiatric disorder, foster debilitating stigmatization and perpetuate damaging stereotypes (Byrne, 1999; Hanningan, 1999;

Philo et al., 1994). As some critics have observed, this outcome is attributable to the fact that adverse media representations incline viewers to accept at face value the transmitted message (Philo, 1997; Wahl and Lefkowitz, 1989), limiting or eroding the horizon of meanings that might otherwise be embraced and endorsed by the public.

In this article, the medium of reality-based television was subjected to close textual (and postmodern) exegeses. In particular, we carefully examined one discursive interaction between a police officer and a woman identified as mentally ill. Consequently, this study showed how representations of persons with psychiatric disorders on *COPS* are not that different from those found in other media formats or outlets. In short, these citizens are consistently portrayed as (1) dangerous and violent and, as such, signify the embodiment of fear and (2) comical and amusing and, as such, personify objects of laughter (Wahl, 1995). However, unlike other media-based inquiries, this study demonstrated how fear and laughter intertextually structured the interaction such that a status degradation ceremony was constitutively produced. Moreover, as a semiotic stand-in for the sign of punishment, the use of fear (as a harm of repression) and laughter (as a harm of reduction) powerfully and insidiously reconstituted the situated meaning of the woman's identity. The desire she embodied was pathologized; the difference she signified was vanquished.

Public consumption of such explicit images and charged words raises many troubling policy questions about society's understanding of law and social control, especially as communicated through reality-based television programs such as *COPS*. For example, discourse-in-action, mobilized at the level of unconscious, suggests that the psychic configuration of police talk always and already lacks the capacity to endorse the status of mentally ill citizens in ways that validate and legitimize difference. As such, their unique approaches to knowing and their intimate senses of being simply cannot be expressed or recognized through the bounded narrative of police argot.

Moreover, to the extent that the above dilemma obtains, mental health consumers are that much more removed from the practical experience of citizen justice. This is especially the case given the routine and ongoing administration of policing. In short, if the only street-level decision-making forum available to persons with psychiatric illness in which to articulate their reality is saturated in a language (i.e. police talk) that controls and represses (the grammar of fear) and denies and reduces (the grammar of laughter) their humanity, then such persons are first linguistically (and then socially) *imprisoned* within this circumscribed and scripted logic.

Finally, as the viewing audience dialogically contributes to and, by extension, actively sustains such media-crafted constructions, they help reify the very ideological structures of social oppression (television's version of law and social control) that persons with psychiatric disorders seek to renounce. As a consequence, hegemony, assuming a discursive linguistic form, invidiously prevails; dominant interpretations of reality (e.g. identity and difference) perniciously are reinforced.

We contend that these weighty concerns, as very tentatively enumerated above, warrant further and more systematic investigation. In particular, the role of researchers and activists are noted. Indeed, given how the status degradation ceremony covertly unfolds and given how the phenomenon of mental illness unconsciously is transformed into the sign of punishment, the P-C encounter is a site of considerable intellectual and practical scrutiny. In the final analysis, if social change and justice policy are to be

meaningfully advanced with respect to reality-based television, policing, and psychiatric disorder, then the conceptual insights of postmodern inquiry and the methodological tools of discourse analysis represent one protean direction by which to effect these much needed and mostly under-examined ends.

Notes

- 1 Foucault's reliance on discourse, especially as a methodology by which to reveal power relations and imbalances, reflects the transformation in punitive sensibilities (among others), from the body to the soul as the locus of control (Arrigo et al., 2005). However, his rendering, while instructive, is incomplete. The routine reproduction of such linguistic domination requires a different level of analysis. Accordingly, our assessment of discourse is concretized by investigating the actual way that agents of institutional power (e.g. psychiatrists, police officers) talk to the ostensible objects of control (e.g. the mentally ill, criminal suspects) and the way that those subjects respond in turn.
- 2 Preliminarily we note that officers routinely use humor as a coping mechanism for minimizing the stress they experience during patrol work (e.g. Herbert, 1996; Manning, 1998). Moreover, we recognize that the criminalization of the mentally ill hypothesis, especially in relation to policing, typically is linked to misconceptions about dangerousness regarding persons with psychiatric disorders (Patch and Arrigo, 1999; Teplin, 1985; Teplin and Pruett, 1992). However, what is not so apparent in the literature is how both laughter and fear also serve other unconscious (and ideological) ends, made evident through textual (and postmodern) exegeses.
- 3 We acknowledge that additional editorial framing effects are likely to be encoded in the *COPS* data we analyze, other than fear and laughter. However, from our viewing, transcription and empirical investigation, these two 'grammars' engulfed the media text. Accordingly, they represent the focus of our postmodern inquiry.
- 4 The proceeding theory does not reject the structural, institutional, and interpersonal forces that contribute to or otherwise sustain the manifestation of punishment and/or various punitive practices. Instead, the argument advanced here acknowledges the intrapsychic, linguistically mediated, and discursively constructed dynamics that inform these forces. As such, the theory spotlights how 'human subjects progressively lose sight of their productive contribution [to harm others], and increasingly in that which they produce to the point of some becoming excessive investors and others victims of denial, reduction, repression' (Henry and Milovanovic, 1996: 170; Milovanovic and Henry, 1991).
- 5 We note that cultivation analysis is not limited to television. It is concerned with other media forms as well; however, its architects single out television because it is most pervasive in this culture (Allen, 1987; Fiske, 1987; Wahl, 1995). According to Morgan and Signorielli (1996: 16–17) cultivation analysis 'begins with identifying and assessing the most recurrent and stable patterns in television content . . . tries to ascertain if those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and repetitive messages and lessons from the television world . . . [and] attempts to document and analyze the independent contributions of television viewing to viewers' conception of social reality.'

- 6 This cultivation effect also is mediated by several control variables. Examples in the literature include: race, class, gender, socio-economic status, the audience's neighborhood crime level, the 'portrayee' in the program, the realism of the program, the attitude and perception of individual viewers, the frequency of viewing and the modality of the victimization experience (Potter, 1986; Potter et al., 1995; Shrum and O'Guinn, 1993; Slater and Elliott, 1982; St. John and Heald-Moore, 1996; Weaver and Wakshlag, 1986).
- 7 How the principal character came to be defined as 'mentally ill' would be, in and of itself, a warrantable topic for further analysis, and several scholars have varyingly offered interpretations on identity construction along these lines (Goffman, 1961; Foucault, 1965; Scheff, 2000). For purposes of our inquiry, Smith's (1978) labeling perspective is persuasive. She notes that being mentally ill is contingent upon the way the initial account is socially organized, with assumptions about normativity already presupposed into the structure of the interaction. For the present study, this ascription became evident after one of the authors viewed the entire vignette, and realized the intertextual link among the framing narrative, the actual encounter (interaction phase), and the debriefing narrative.
- Moreover, classifying someone as mentally ill in a field research setting usually involves a trained observer in one of the clinical disciplines (e.g., social work, psychology) who witnesses a subject exhibiting concrete signs of psychiatric disorder, such as confusion/disorientation, as well as inappropriate or bizarre speech and/or behavior (APA, 2003). According to Teplin and Pruett (1992: 142), a citizen can be labeled mentally ill 'if he or she possesse[s] at least one of the symptoms on the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual] checklist and [receives] a global rating of 'mentally disordered' by the field-worker. Both indicators [are] necessary to avoid categorizing persons as mentally ill when they [are] merely exhibiting bizarre or unusual behavior.' The present article addresses the interpretive or dialogical procedures the police employed to linguistically and symbolically transform a citizen's expression of difference (i.e. mental illness) into the sign of punishment, understood as harms of reduction and repression.
- 8 This phenomenon has been termed the criminalization of the mentally ill hypothesis (Teplin, 1984). Commenting on her seminal findings regarding comparative arrests rates for psychiatrically disordered and non-psychiatrically disordered citizens, Teplin (2000: 12) noted the following: '[t]he probability of being arrested was 67 percent greater for suspects exhibiting signs of mental disorder than for those who apparently were not mentally ill. Fourteen of the 30 mentally disordered suspects, or 47 percent, were arrested, compared to 133 of the 476 other suspects, or 28 percent. . . . Clearly, mentally ill citizens in the study were being treated as criminals.' In the present inquiry, the linguistic and symbolic dimensions of the criminalization of the mentally ill hypothesis are explored as disclosed through the reality-based television show, *COPS*. In particular, how mental illness (i.e. difference) was psycho-semiotically transformed into the sign of punishment through the grammars of fear and laughter is examined.
- 9 In this respect, the method employed is akin to an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). The one P-C interaction is used to psycho-semiotically illustrate the phenomenon of punishment as linguistically conveyed through the grammars

of fear and laughter and as vividly depicted through the reality-based TV show, *COPS*.

- 10 We note that using an edited program such as *COPS* for data differs from other televisual information, including video recordings of news and talk shows. There are researchers who study discourse as it appears on television (Clayman, 1989, 1992; Greatbatch, 1992; Gruber, 1998; Hutchby, 1998), and on video (Heath and Luff, 2000); however, ‘their [reporters’] work practices are commonly broadcast “live” without the benefit of editorial review, and are thus open to immediate scrutiny’ (Clayman, 1992: 163–4).
- 11 A second noteworthy point about *COPS* and its technologically mediated nature of talk is the function of the video recorder in the overall interpretive process. In short, what role does technology assume in the production and coordination of conversation – not only metaphorically – but constitutively? In this view, technology is not a neutral medium that objectively records and facilitates interaction; rather, it influences, shapes, and changes the trajectory of the interaction. As such, it is ‘procedurally consequential’ (Schegloff, 1992). Notwithstanding this relevant concern, our focus addresses only the intertextual construction and situated meaning of mental illness-as-punishment linguistically and symbolically structured through one excerpted *COPS* P–C exchange. The effect of the video recorder with respect to this phenomenon is decidedly beyond this article’s scope.

References

- Allen, R.C. (1987) ‘More talk about TV’, in R.C. Allen (ed.) *Channels of discourse*, pp. 1–30. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.
- American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2003) *The diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders – IV-R*. Washington, DC: APA.
- Arrigo, B.A. (1993) *Madness, language, and law*. New York: Harrow & Heston.
- Arrigo, B.A. (1995) ‘Subjectivity in law, medicine, and science: A semiotic perspective on punishment’, in C. Sistare (ed.) *Punishment: Social control and coercion*, pp. 69–92. New York: Peter Lang.
- Arrigo, B.A. (1996) *The contours of psychiatric justice: A postmodern critique of mental illness, criminal insanity, and the law*. New York: Garland.
- Arrigo, B.A. (1997) ‘Transcarceration: Notes on a psychoanalytically-informed theory of social practice in the criminal justice and mental health systems’, *Crime, Law, and Social Change: An International Journal* 27(1): 31–48.
- Arrigo, B.A. (2001) ‘Transcarceration: A constitutive ethnography of mentally ill offenders’, *The Prison Journal* 81(2): 162–86.
- Arrigo, B.A. (2002) *Punishing the mentally ill: A critical analysis of law and psychiatry*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Arrigo, B.A. (2003) ‘Justice and the deconstruction of psychological jurisprudence: The case of competency to stand trial’, *Theoretical Criminology: An International Journal* 7(1): 55–88.
- Arrigo, B.A. and C.R. Williams (1999) ‘Chaos theory and the social control thesis: A post-Foucauldian analysis of mental illness and involuntary civil confinement’, *Social Justice* 26(2): 177–207.

- Arrigo, B.A., D. Milovanovic and R.C. Schehr (2005) *The French connection in criminology: Rediscovering crime, law and social change*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Bahktin, M. (1981) *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Baker, C. (1998) 'Membership categorization and interview accounts', in D. Silverman (ed.) *Qualitative research: Theory, method, and practice*, pp. 130–43. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Bauman, R. and C. Briggs (1990) 'Poetics and performance as critical perspectives on language and social life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59–88.
- Bittner, E. (1967) 'Police discretion in emergency apprehension of mentally ill persons', *Social Problems* 14: 278–92.
- Bosworth, M. (1999) *Engendering resistance: Agency and power in women's prisons*. Sydney: Ashgate.
- Byme, P. (1999) 'Stigma of mental illness: Changing minds, changing behavior', *British Journal of Psychiatry* 174: 1–2.
- Caplan, P.C. (1995) *They say you're crazy: How the world's most powerful psychiatrists decide who's normal*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Cavendar, G. and L. Bond-Maupin (1996) 'Fear and loathing on reality television: an analysis of America's Most Wanted and Unsolved Mysteries', *Sociological Inquiry* 63: 305–17.
- Chiricos, T., K. Padgett and M. Gertz (2000) 'Fear, TV news and the reality of crime', *Criminology* 38: 755–85.
- Clayman, S. (1989) 'The production of punctuality: Social interaction, temporal organization, and social structure', *American Journal of Sociology* 95(3): 659–91.
- Clayman, S. (1992) 'Footing in the achievement of neutrality: The case of news-interview discourse', in P. Drew and J. Heritage (eds) *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings*, pp. 163–211. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978) *Writing and difference*, trans. A. Bass. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dobash, R.E., P. Schlesinger, R. Dobash and C. Weaver (1998) "'Crimewatch UK": Women's interpretations of televised violence', in M. Fishman and G. Cavender (eds) *Entertaining crime: Television reality programs*, pp. 37–58. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Doyle, A. (1998) "'Cops": Television policing as policing reality', in Mark Fishman and Gray Cavender (eds) *Entertaining crime: Television reality programs*, pp. 95–116. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Drew, P. and E. Holt (1988) 'Complainable matters: The use of idiomatic expressions in making complaints', *Social Problems* 35(4): 398–417.
- Drew, P. and E. Holt (1998) 'Figures of speech: Figurative expressions and the management of topic transition in conversation', *Language in Society* 27: 495–522.
- Entman, R.M. (1990) 'Modern racism and the images of blacks in local television news', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7: 332–45.
- Entman, R.M. (1992) 'Blacks in the news: Television, modern racism and cultural change', *Journalism Quarterly* 69: 341–61.
- Entman, R.M. (1994) 'Representation and reality in the portrayal of Blacks on network television news', *Journalism Quarterly* 71: 509–20.
- Fishman, M. and Cavender, G. (eds) (1998) *Entertaining crime: Television reality programs*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

- Fiske, J. (1987) *Television culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1965) *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*, trans. R. Howard. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and punish: The birth of a prison*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1979) *The history of sexuality: Vol 2. The use of pleasure*. London: Penguin.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1914) *The psychopathology of everyday life*. New York: MacMillan.
- Garfinkel, H. (1956) 'Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies', *American Journal of Sociology* 61: 420–4.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gee, J.P. (1999) *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. New York: Routledge.
- Gerbner, G. (1980) 'Dreams that hurt: Mental illness in the mass media', in R.C. Barton, I.D. Rutman and G. Klacznska (eds) *The community imperative*, pp. 19–23. Philadelphia, PA: Horizon House Institute.
- Gerbner, G., L. Gross, M. Morgan and N. Signorielli (1980) 'The mainstreaming of America: Violence profile no. 11', *Journal of Communication* 30: 10–29.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The constitution of society: Outline of a theory of structuration*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.
- Gitlin, T. (1979) 'Prime time ideology: The hegemonic process in television entertainment', *Social Problems* 26: 251–66.
- Glasson, J. (1996) 'The public image of the mentally ill and community care', *British Journal of Nursing* 5(10): 615–17.
- Goffman, E. (1961) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame analysis: An essay on the social organization of experience*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms of talk*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Goodwin, C. (1986) 'Audience diversity, participation and interpretation', *Text* 6(3): 283–316.
- Greatbatch, D. (1992) 'On the management of disagreement between news interviewees', in P. Drew and J. Heritage (eds) *Talk at Work*, pp. 268–301. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grob, G. (1994) *The mad among us: A history of the care of America's mentally ill*. New York: Free Press.
- Gruber, H. (1998) 'Disagreeing: Sequential placement and internal structure in conflict episodes', *Text* 18(4): 467–503.
- Habermas, J. (1975) *Legitimation crises*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Hannigan, B. (1999) 'Mental health care in the community: An analysis of contemporary public attitudes towards, and public representations of, mental illness', *Journal of Mental Health* 8(5): 431–40.
- Heath, C. and Pl. Luff (2000) *Technology in action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henry, S. and D. Milovanovic (1996) *Constitutive criminology: Beyond postmodernism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Herbert, S. (1996) *Policing space: Territoriality and the LAPD*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- Holstein, J. (1988) 'Court-ordered incompetence conversational organization in involuntary commitment hearings', *Social Problems* 35: 801–16.
- Holstein, J. (1993) *Court-ordered insanity: Interpretive practice and involuntary commitment*. New York: Aldine.
- Howe, A. (1994) *Punish and critique: Towards a feminist analysis of penalty*. London: Routledge.
- Hutchby, I. (1998) 'Rhetorical strategies in audience participation debates on radio and TV', *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 32(3): 243–67.
- Isaac, R.J. and V.C. Armat (1990) *Madness in the streets: How psychiatry and the law abandoned the mentally ill*. New York: Free Press.
- Kittrie, N.N. (1972) *The right to be different: Enforced therapy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kooistra, P., G. Mahoney, J. Mahoney and S.D. Westervelt (1998) 'The world of crime according to "Cops"', in M. Fishman and G. Cavender (eds) *Entertaining crime: Television reality programs*, pp. 141–58. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Lacan, Jacques (1977) *Ecrits: A selection*, trans. A. Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton.
- LaFond, J.Q. and M.L. Dunham (1992) *Back to the asylum: The future of mental health law and policy in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lanier, M.M. and S.D. Henry (1998) *Essential criminology*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lopez, L.R. (1991) 'Adolescents' attitudes toward mental illness and perceived sources of their attitudes: An examination of pilot data', *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* 5(5): 271–80.
- Manning, P.K. (1988) *Symbolic communication: Signifying calls and the police response*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Manning, P.K. (1998) *Police work: The social organization of policing*, 2nd edn. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Mastrofski, S.D., R.E. Worden and J.B. Snipes (1995) 'Law enforcement in a time of community policing', *Criminology* 33: 539–63.
- Matas, M., N. el-Guebaly, A. Peterkin, M. Green and D. Harper (1985) 'Mental illness and the media: An assessment of attitudes and communication', *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 30: 12–17.
- Mayer, A. and D. Barry (1992) 'Working with the media to destigmatize mental illness', *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 43(1): 77–8.
- Maynard, D.W. (1988) 'Language, interaction, and social problems', *Social Problems* 35(4): 311–34.
- Maynard, D.W. and J.F. Manzo (1993) 'On the sociology of justice: Theoretical notes from an actual jury deliberation', *Sociological Theory* 11(2): 171–93.
- Meehan, A.J. (1995) 'From conversion to coercion: The police role in medication compliance', *Psychiatric Quarterly* 66(2): 163–84.
- Milovanovic, D. (1988) 'Jailhouse lawyers and jailhouse lawyering', *International Journal for the Sociology of Law* 16(4): 455–75.
- Milovanovic, D. and S.D. Henry (1991) 'Constitutive penology', *Social Justice* 18(2): 204–24.
- Morgan, M. and Signorielli, N. (1990) 'Cultivation analysis: Conceptualization and methodology', in N. Signorielli and M. Morgan (eds) *Cultivation analysis: New directions in media effects research*, pp. 111–26. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Newnes, C., G. Holmes and C. Dunn (1999) *This is madness: A critical look at psychiatry and the future of mental health services*. Llangarron, UK: PCCS.
- Oliver, M.B. (1994) 'Portrayals of crime, race, and aggression in reality based police shows: A content analysis', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 38: 179–92.
- Oliver, M.B. (1996) 'Influences of authoritarianism and portrayals of race on Caucasian viewers responses to reality based crime dramas', *Communication Reports* 9: 141–50.
- Oliver, M.B. and G.B. Armstrong (1995) 'Predictors of viewing and enjoyment of reality based and fictional crime shows', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72: 559–70.
- Patch, P. and B.A. Arrigo (1999) 'Police officer attitudes and the use of discretion in situations involving the mentally ill: the need to narrow the focus', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 22(1): 23–55.
- Perlin, M.L. (2000) *The hidden prejudice: Mental disability on trial*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Philo, G. (1997) 'Changing media representations of mental health', *Psychiatric Bulletin* 21: 171–2.
- Philo, G., J. Secker, S. Platt, L. Henderson, G. McLaughlin and J. Burnside (1994) 'The impact of the mass media on public images of mental illness: Media content and audience belief', *Health Education Journal* 53(2): 271–81.
- Porter, E. and J. Gleick (1990) *Nature's chaos*. New York: Viking.
- Postman, N. (1985) *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Potter, W.J. (1986) 'Perceived reality and the cultivation hypothesis', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 30: 159–74.
- Potter, J., W. Vaughn, W. Misha, R. Warren, K. Howley, A. Land and J.C. Hagemeyer (1995) 'How real is the portrayal of aggression in television entertainment programming?', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 39: 496–516.
- Prigogine, I. and I. Stengers (1984) *Order out of chaos*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Sacks, H., E.A. Schegloff and G. Jefferson (1974) 'A simplest systematics for the organization of turn taking in conversation', *Language* 50(4): 696–735.
- Sacks, H. (1984) 'On doing being ordinary', in J. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds), *Structures of Social Action*, pp. 413–29. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Scheff, T. (2000) *Being mentally ill: A sociological theory*, 3rd edn. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Schegloff, E.A. (1968) 'Sequencing in conversational openings', *American Anthropologist* 70: 1075–95.
- Schegloff, E.A. (1980) 'Preliminaries to preliminaries: "Can I ask you a question?"', *Sociological Inquiry* 50(3/4): 104–52.
- Schegloff, E.A. (1987) 'Analyzing single episodes of interaction: An exercise in conversation analysis', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50(2): 101–14.
- Schegloff, E.A. (1992) 'On talk and its institutional occasions', in P. Drew and J. Heritage (eds) *Talk at work*, pp. 101–34. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schegloff, E.A. (1999) 'What next? Language and social interaction study at the century's turn', *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 32(1/2): 141–8.
- Schellenberg, E.G., D. Wasylenki, C.D. Webster and P. Goering (1992) 'A review of arrests among psychiatric patients', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 15: 251–64.

- Schiffirin, D. (1994) *Approaches to discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Shon, P.C. (2000) "Hey you c'me here!": Subjectivization, resistance, and the interpellative violence of self-generated police-citizen encounters', *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* XIII: 159-79.
- Shon, P.C. (2003) 'The social organization of mass-mediated and actual police-citizen encounters', PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago.
- Shrum, L.J. and O'Guinn, T.C. (1993) 'Processes and effects in the construction of social reality: Construct accessibility as an explanatory variable', *Communication Research* 20: 436-71.
- Signorielli, N. (1989) 'The stigma of mental illness on television', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 3: 325-31.
- Signorielli, N. (1990) 'Television's mean and dangerous world: A continuation of the cultural indicators perspective', in N. Signorielli and M. Morgan (eds) *Cultivation analysis: New directions in media effects research*, pp. 85-106. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications
- Signorielli, N. and Morgan, M. (1996) 'Cultivation analysis: Research and practice', in M.B. Salwen and S. Stacks (eds) *An integrated approach to communication theory and research*, pp. 111-26. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Slater, D. and Elliot, W. (1982) 'Television's influences on social reality', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68: 69-79.
- Smith, D. (1978) 'K is mentally ill', *Sociology* 12: 23-53.
- Spencer, W.J. (1987) 'Self-work in social interaction: Negotiating role-identities', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50(2): 131-42.
- St. John, C. and T. Heald-Moore (1996) 'Racial prejudice and fear of criminal victimization by strangers in public settings', *Sociological Inquiry* 66: 267-84.
- Stake, R.E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Steadman, H.J. and J.J. Cocozza (1978) 'Selective reporting and the public's misconceptions of the criminally insane', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 41: 523-33.
- Szasz, T. (1994) *Insanity: The idea and its consequences*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tannen, D., ed. (1993) *Framing in discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Teplin, L.A. (1984) 'Criminalizing mental disorder: The comparative arrest rate of the mentally ill', *American Psychologist* 39(7): 794-803.
- Teplin, L.A. (1985) 'The criminality of the mentally ill: A dangerous misconception', *American Journal of Psychiatry* 142(5): 593-9.
- Teplin, L.A. (2000) 'Keeping the peace: Police discretion and mentally ill persons', *National Institute of Justice Journal* 9: 12-15.
- Teplin, L.A. and N.S. Pruett (1992) 'Police as streetcorner psychiatrist: Managing the mentally ill', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 15: 139-56.
- Thomas, J. (1988) *Prison litigation: The paradox of the jailhouse lawyer*. Totowa, NJ: Allen and Littlefield.
- Torey, E. Fuller (1997) *Out of the shadows: Confronting America's mental illness crisis*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Wahl, O.F. (1992) 'Mass media images of mental illness: A review of the literature', *Journal of Community Psychology* 20(3): 343-52.

- Wahl, O.F. (1995) *Media madness: Public images of mental illness*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Wahl, O.F. and Lefkowitz, Y. (1989) 'Impact of a television film on attitudes towards mental illness', *American Journal of Community Psychology* 17(4): 521–8.
- Weaver, J. and Wakshlag, J. (1986) 'Perceived vulnerability to crime, criminal victimization experience, and television viewing', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 30: 141–58.
- Williams, C.R. and B.A. Arrigo (2002a) *Law, psychology, and justice: Chaos theory and the new (dis)order*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Williams, C.R. and B.A. Arrigo (2002b) 'Law, psychology, and the "new sciences": Rethinking mental illness and dangerousness', *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 46(1): 6–29.
- Wood, L.A. (2000) *Doing discourse analysis: Methods for studying action in talk and text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

PHILLIP CHONG HO SHON is Assistant Professor of criminology at Indiana State University in the Department of Criminology. His research examines the sociolinguistic organization of police–citizen encounters. His works have appeared in journals such as the *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, and *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*.

BRUCE A. ARRIGO is Professor of Crime, Law, & Society at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in the Department of Criminal Justice. He has written extensively in the areas of critical and philosophical criminology, criminal and legal psychology, and law and social control. Recent books on these matters include, *Philosophy, crime, and criminology* (2006), *Criminal behavior: A systems approach* (2006), and *the French connection in criminology: Rediscovering crime, law, and social change* (2005). Professor Arrigo is also a fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.
