"But I Do Clean Up Real Fuckin' Pretty": *True Detective* and Motorcycle Subculture Representation as Spectacle and Diversion

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Abstract

Drawing on the extensive scholarship on subcultures, this paper shall discuss the ways in which the television series *True Detective*'s renderings of outlaw motorcycle clubs (O.M.C.'s), and its suggestion that such representations are authentic actively undermines these groups' "alternative hegemony" (*Marxism and Literature* 111). Instead of challenging normative assumptions held by our society and media outlets to which they cater, the series' directors engage in a method of incorporation that employs both caricature and inaccurate representation of bikers to reinforce preconceptions and/or misconceptions about this subculture. Whereas the directors would like us to focus on individual identities that are hidden behind presumed subcultural facades, or "masks" (Pizzolato), we should instead consider what Williams calls our willing "distraction from distraction by distraction" (O'Connor 5), and understand the class struggle that is occurring beyond these representations. By studying the meaningful tenets and practices of this diverse "alternative and oppositional formation" (119) and how the values and practices of these groups are distorted by the show's creators, my paper will interrogate the ways in which *True Detective* offers its audience an "authentic" image of subversion and, through its portrayal of O.M.C.'s, reinforces dominant ideological beliefs about such groups. Finally, I will consider how the show's representation of subcultures occludes a larger discussion about race, gender, and class in America.

Keywords: True Detective, Motorcycle Subculture

“Ama Ben Gerçekten Kahrolası Güzel Temizlerim”: ‘True Detective’ ve Motosiklet Alt Kültürünün Gösteri ve Yanıltmaca Olarak Temsili

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Özet:
Bu makale alt kültürlere ait derin literatürden yararlanarak ‘True Detective’ isimli televizyon serisinde kanunsuz motosiklet kulüplerinin nasıl sahnelendiğini ve bu tip önerilen temsiliyetlerin gerçekten etkin bir şekilde bu grupların ‘alternatif hegemonyalarını’ (Marksizm ve Edebiyat 111) nasıl zayıflattığını tartışacaktır. Bu serinin yönetmenleri, toplumumuza ve medya kuruluşlarımıza hitap eden ve bunların destekledikleri normatif varsayımlara karşı çıkmak yerine, bu alt kültür ile ilgili önyargıları ve/veya yanlış kanıları motosiklet sürücülerini hem karikatüre ederek hem de doğru olmayan simgelemeyle güçlendirecek birleştirici bir metodoloji ile uğraşmaktadırlar. Madem ki yönetmenler bizim farz edilen alt kültürel yanılsamaların, veya ‘maskelerin’ (Pizzolato) arkasına gizlenmiş bireysel kimliklerine yoğunlaşmamızı istiyor, bizim bunun yerine Williams’ın adlandırdığı gönüllü “oyalama tarafından oyalanmadan oyalandım” (O’Connor 5) durumunu değerlendirmeli, ve bu temsillerin arka planında meydana gelen sınıf çatışmasını anlamalıyız. Bu muhtelif ‘alternatif ve muhalif oluşumun’ manidar ilkeleri ve uygulamalarını çalışarak, ve bu grupların değer ve pratiklerinin nasıl çarptırıldığını inceleyerek bu makale motosiklet kulüplerini tasvirinden yola çıkarak ‘True Detective’in izleyicilere sunduğu ‘özgün’ bir yıkım imgesi olarak ortaya çıkarmasını ve bu gruplarla ilgili baskın ideolojik fikirleri güçlendirmesini sorgulayacaktır. Son olarak, bu programın alt kültür temsillerinin Amerika’da ırk, toplumsal cinsiyet ve sınıf ile ilgili daha geniş bir tartışmayı nasıl engellediğini de göz önünde bulunduracağım.
Anahtar Kelimeler: True Detective, Motosiklet Altkültürü

True Detective, Biker Subculture, O.M.C., Ideology, Incorporation, Representation, Raymond Williams, Cultural Studies, Television Studies, NicPizzolatto, Cary Fukunaga

> *It is perhaps the full development of what Wordsworth saw at an early stage, when the crowd in the street…had lost any common and settled idea of man and so needed representations…to simulate if not affirm a human identity.* (6)
>
> -Raymond Williams, *Selected Writings*

When in Rome, brother.

-Rust Cohle, from *True Detective*

Considering the ways in which television operates as both mythmaker and constructor of reality for a broad American audience is integral when confronted with fictional, televised subculture representations. This is especially true when the television series in question carries such extensive cultural cachet that critics hail it a "'dark masterpiece,'" it breaks viewership records, entire cultural news media sites devote pages to it, and even the president claims to be a devoted fan (Nussbaum; Paskin; Day). Keeping in mind the works of Raymond Williams and other prominent cultural theorists, I shall discuss the ways in which the series *True Detective* acts as a text that serves—through its surface renderings of outlaw motorcycle clubs (O.M.C.'s), and its implicit assumption that such representation is authentic—to actually undermine the group's "alternative hegemony" (*Marxism and Literature* 111). Instead of challenging normative assumptions held by our society and media outlets to which they cater, the series' directors engage in a method of incorporation that adheres to exhausted cultural stereotypes, and employs caricature and an inaccurate, overly simplistic representation of bikers—which, in turn, support preconceptions and misconceptions about that group.

Whereas the series' creators, NicPizzolatto and Cary Fukunaga, would like us to focus on individual identities that are hidden behind

presumed subcultural facades, or "masks," (Pizzolato) we should instead consider what Williams calls our willing "distraction from distraction by distraction" (O'Connor 5), and understand the class struggle that is occurring beyond our blind acceptance of such misrepresentation—misrepresentation that serves to alienate citizens within the same ideological framework. This holds especially true, since, as Graeme Turner notes, "for cultural studies, ideology is the very site of struggle" (197). Instead of highlighting the struggle between so-called normative society and O.M.C.'s—a trope in which the series' creators thoroughly engage—I will emphasize the actual struggle between that particular subcultural group and the ideological apparatuses and practices that enhance its status as a cultural scapegoat. Finally, I will illuminate the ways in which *True Detective* conforms to such practices and acts as such an apparatus.

Motorcycle club subculture emerged proceeding the end of World War II, during a time of enhanced American prosperity—and thus consumerism—in which phenomena such as the increased alienation of returning veterans and the advents of the civil rights and women's rights movements caused many working class white men to search out arenas of belonging in which to articulate desire for power through dress and activity (Hebdige 17; Quinn 384, 388; Librett 263). Utilizing many aspects of military culture, such as hierarchal structure, misogynistic tendencies, "mental toughness" and "solidarity" (Schouten and McAlexander 48; Librett 259), traditional biker culture since then has appeared, like many subcultures, to appropriate aspects of the dominant culture for its own use. This is particularly true of outlaw bikers, whom Barbara Joans characterizes as a group that "may or may not be criminals," that has not necessarily "broken any laws" but has forsaken society's rules and chosen to "reject common authority" in order to "follow [its] own rules" (8). In other words, outlaw bikers are not literally outlaws, but maintain a mindset of rebelliousness that differentiates itself from middle-class American values. However, their occupation of the liminal space between and within subculture and dominant culture has achieved a relationship between the two groups of

simultaneous hostility and indispensability. Without law enforcement to brand them as criminals, outlaw bikers would lose that integral feature of their identity. Without major corporations like Harley-Davidson from which to purchase the necessary artifacts of their subculture, they lose not only the aesthetic aspect of style that Dick Hebdige sees as a necessary component of all subcultures, but also what Whang, et. al., refer to as that "romantic relationship" they share with their motorcycles (324). Without the rules and common practices to stretch, parody, and break from—while still existing as American citizens—these groups would not pose any danger, since their very identity is interwoven within the society that creates such rules. That identity is a reaction against certain mores (conformity, complacency, tolerance), and yet it adheres to others (consumerism, patriarchy, white supremacy). Mid-20th Century biker films such as *The Wild One* and *Easy Rider*—and even films where bikes are not a thematic focus, but contribute to a diegetic structure of feeling within the text, such as *Rebel Without A Cause*—reflect such an identity both explicitly and implicitly, with their overwhelmingly white male casts who exude toughness, encourage female objectification, and engage in lawlessness.

As in many upturns of a nation's overall socioeconomic status, those at the bottom rungs of the earnings ladder remain marginalized, even when their capacity to consume increases. As Hebdige, in his study of English subculture, notes, "the advent of the mass media, changes in the constitution of the family, in the organization of school and work, shifts in the relative status of work and leisure, all served to fragment and polarize the working-class community, producing a series of marginal discourses within the broad confines of class experience" (74). Analysts of American biker subculture, such as Joans, Mitch Librett, and Hunter S. Thompson agree that a similar shift was occurring in the United States. When their financial situations seemed dire or precarious in opposition to the burgeoning incomes of the seeming majority of their generation, such working-class groups tended to externalize their frustrations, since they lacked "[t]he possession of wage itself" which, it can be argued, aids in establishing a man's sense of masculinity (Willis,

"Social Reproduction as Social History" 92). Fears of "becoming apparently useless" and the increasing numbers of female heads of household from the middle of the last century into today have also encouraged their "aggressive assertion of masculinity and masculine style for its own sake" (93-97). Joans discusses exactly how the influence of economic stagnation and the subsequent growing number of women in the workforce affected these men's thoughts and actions, noting how, even into the present day "[i]t is difficult, if not impossible… to make a middle-class living on one paycheck. It is just as difficult to achieve a working-class lifestyle." She goes on to acknowledge that, "[s]ince economic support, paychecks, and male status no longer symbolize manhood in America, men look toward other expressions of masculinity" (85). Thus, bikerdom is not simply an outgrowth of criminality-as-personal-choice, but is also a reaction to growing economic disparity, the diminishment of the middle class in America, and the unstable autonomy of the white male.

Hebdige, in summarizing Stuart Hall, notes how "appropriated objects reflect values, beliefs, concerns, and self-image of the subculture" (114). The most obvious appropriated item, in this case, is the motorcycle. This tangible object sums up for biker subculture more than simply a means of transportation or a status symbol. Rather, it serves as an extension of the self—as a metaphor of otherness and liberated autonomy as well as a visible attribute that sets the rider apart from the rest of society. It also can be seen as an empowering phallic symbol, enhancing the bikers' manhood abstractly in ways they feel incapable of doing so financially. As Marhsall McLuhan points out, "the main feature of" such "machines…is the immediate expression of any physical pressure which impels us to outer or to extend ourselves, whether in words or wheels" (247). The bike facilitates symbolic expression and the need to communicate with others in a way that is pertinent and meaningful for the individual, and in a way that he is perhaps disallowed by the dominant culture in which he lives. McLuhan goes on to write that, "[t]o have such power by extension of their own bodies, men must explode the inner unity of their beings into explicit fragments." (252)

This implies that possessing the same tangible source of power that biker culture necessitates also limits the expresser, in the sense that, by compartmentalizing the self, and by enhancing one of many attributes to the diminishment of others—in this case, riding a motorcycle—the individual is often perceived as wholly possessive of that single, prominent characteristic. The biker, then, appears just that and that alone—a motorcyclist, and nothing more, to the outsider.

However, these individual caricatures of seemingly singular characteristic need group dynamic structure in order to solidify their identity and purpose. As Paul Willis states, groups such as biker "proto-communities produce, or have the capacity to produce from within themselves…moral and ethical feelings and capacities to fill the moral vacuum left by the market and to place against the unacceptable elitism and authoritarianism of party and institution." (146). Within them, any given member can create a space for himself that provides what the dominant ideology lacks, excludes, or finds deviant—becoming what Hebdige, in borrowing from Roland Barthes, sees as "the 'mythologist' who can no longer be one with the 'myth-consumers,'" for whom "'the bric-a-brac of life' summon up…the very fears which they alleviate for others." (139). As Joans also notes, biker culture engages in "separatism" because of its very wariness of the practices of the dominant culture. This, she notes, is ultimately interpreted by members of that dominant culture as "racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, and misogynistic" (242). While such descriptions are true of some bikers, it is also helpful to note that those traits did not grow simply from the clubs themselves—that, in fact, they mirror the very racism, homophobia, and misogyny that has existed as part of American ideological practices since well before the presence of motorcycle clubs.

Phil Cohen states that "subculture is also a compromise solution to two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference…and the need to maintain the security of existing ego defenses" (84). Such an interaction between expressed power and internalized vulnerability reflects the anxieties of masculinity that are characteristic of outlaw motorcycle clubs. There are several overt and

contradictory forces that exist simultaneously within biker identity— on the one hand, aggressive masculinity, a sense of personal autonomy, power, authority and freedom, and acts of outrageousness and lawlessness, and on the other hand, group dynamics, strict obedience to the tenets of the subculture, and acts of consumer loyalty (Schouten and McAlexander 51-55). These traits further complicate one-dimensional renderings of people from such groups as *True Detective* delivers because they illuminate the multi-dimensionality of those groups while still reconciling their members' need to assert a tough and manly image, even when that very image seems to be fading from their grasp. What Thompson noted in the 1950's, and what still holds true today, is that "[i]n a world increasingly geared to specialists, technicians and fantastically complicated machinery [today we could substitute the term, "technology"], the outlaws are obvious losers and it bugs them. But instead of submitting quietly to their collective fate, they have made it the basis of a full-time social vendetta. They don't expect to win anything, but on the other hand, they have nothing to lose" (54). However, where difficulty arises is in normative society's interpretation of bikers. As Hebdige points out, the subculture's "objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed…at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: at the level of signs" (17). Where the communication between bikers and outsiders breaks down, then, is at this level, especially when a meaningful context is not provided to non-bikers and other members of the dominant culture that explains the causes or reasons for their seemingly deviant behavior. When the bikers, indeed, feel they have "nothing to lose," they oftentimes find nothing to gain, either, because society misinterprets their actions as criminal only, and not as indicative of larger issues within the dominant culture.

True Detective utilizes these relationships not in the complex and contradictory ways in which they are often found in society, but as a means to create an overly simplistic, stereotypical, and utterly alienating representation of them. The effect is that a negation of the subculture's rich history, beliefs and practices leads to a dangerous re-branding of what biker subculture is truly about, and this reinterpretation becomes

inevitably limiting and misleading. Instead of noticing the complex interplay between subculture and dominant culture, the viewer is only given a terrifying and stereotyped caricature from which to assess O.M.C.'s. As Suzanne McDonald-Walker points out, "[i]n the complex social circumstances of contemporary society, wherein people rely increasingly on information from external sources for knowledge rather than relying on the rooted, face-to-face experience of daily life, it thus becomes easier to demonize people" (34-35). Rather than view bikers as part of our society, then, we distance ourselves from them in order to judge them based on inaccurate information.

Instead of critiquing the perceived singularity of bikers, the series offers up something similar to what McLuhan assumes, where the aesthetic elements of biker culture—not to mention our traditionally held preconceptions about it—come to the forefront and are, in fact, all that the directors require the audience to understand about that group. As Cohen points out, actual bikers' very criminality serves as a symbolic commentary on the ways in which they feel limited by society. To Cohen, "[d]elinquency can be seen as a form of communication about a situation of contradiction in which the 'delinquent' is trapped but whose complexity is excommunicated from his perceptions by virtue of the restricted linguistic code which working-class culture makes available to him" (86). However, more often than not—and definitely in the case of *True Detective*—such criminality appears only as spectacle, and the biker, who "embrace[s] the outlaw life" (Pizzolatto) seems entirely responsible for it, while the society that has facilitated his place at its margins escapes culpability. Hebdige writes, "a credible image of social cohesion can only be maintained through the appropriation and redefinition of cultures of resistance…in terms of that image" (85)—by "mak[ing] them both more and less exotic than they actually are" (97), and by presenting them to "be trivialized" or "transformed into meaningless exotica" until "the difference" between them and outsiders "is simply denied." (97). *True Detective*'s Iron Crusaders are more exotic because they appear dangerous, devil-may-care, even violently racist, and less exotic or trivialized because, ultimately, they fail in acquiring

the money they set out to steal—and this, it is implied, is due to their bumbling inefficiency and hair-trigger responses. The fact that they are placed into a violent struggle over this money with an equally poor and marginalized group of African Americans—if done effectively, could have highlighted their struggle within a society of class inequality in an effective and nuanced way, but in execution does quite the opposite—only makes caricatures of everyone involved. The scene devolves into an image of the exhausted trope of Southern good ol' boys versus poverty-stricken, hip hop-loving, black drug dealers. These groups are in no way affected by the conspiracy instituted by the religio-political, hegemonic Tuttle dynasty that plagues other marginalized groups throughout the series; they are merely puppets Rust uses in order to ultimately gather information about his case. Worst of all, they conform to and reinforce stereotypical assumptions held by normative society: that all bikers and poor African Americans are violent criminals to be feared. Because of that, we don't understand their violence. We only witness it as spectacle, to dismiss or enjoy as we please.

Finally, the fact that a drug deal would occur within the public biker milieu is also unlikely, since, as Librett points out, "[o]utlaw club officers…maintain that any illegal activity that involve[s]…individuals or even groups…d[oes] not involve the…organization" (259). In other words, it would be a cardinal sin for a member of an outlaw motorcycle club to conduct illegal business in view of, or as representative of, the rest of the club. J.F. Quinn echoes such sentiments, stating, "Most bikers have learned through personal or vicarious experience to conduct their business in a way that helps protect the club from direct prosecution" (386). So, an instance in which both a drug deal and robbery are concocted—the latter crime being immediately executed upon discussion of it—with such an outsider as the long-lost biker persona whom Rust Cohle performs, reflects a case of mostly fiction. For an organization that is built upon regular participation, obedience, and trust-building of its members—who must remain utterly familiar with one another throughout their subculture experience—such nefarious activity with someone who simply pops out of the blue and essentially

claims to have risen from the dead is antithetical to that organization's essential core values. The scene also paints this group as imbeciles who lack impulse control and proper planning. Such character diminishment to caricature-like status reeks of what Hebdige refers to as the "re-definition of deviant behavior by dominant groups" (94). Their criminality, then, becomes not a performance relating the struggle of people from their socioeconomic class, or of white male anxiety losing its dominance in an eve-increasingly pluralistic America. Rather, it merely serves to reinforce preconceptions about outlaw bikers—that they are backwards and inherently violent individuals whom we should either mock or fear accordingly. Thus, their very language—the way they communicate their frustrations to the rest of society by use of their bodies and practices as text—is appropriated, manipulated, and undermined by the show's creators, and their agency is therefore diminished. What once previously existed as a direct communication concerning identity and alternative lifestyle from bikers themselves to normative culture becomes, when intercepted by outsiders within that normative culture, an interpretation—a poor translation that effectively loses the significance and meaning of the original. Bikers no longer possess the autonomy of representing themselves; people from the very group that didn't understand them in the first place appoint themselves mediators and interpreters through such representation.

Devoid of meaning—as they are often understood by those who do not exist within the subculture—the groups' expressions turn into nothing more than spectacles for their own sake. During what Schouten and McAlexander refer to as "performing for an audience" in which "Harley riders seek, monitor, and respond to audience response" (46), the intercourse between subculture and larger culture provides for the former an expression of identity through difference—bikers let outsiders know through their very acts that they stand apart, that they belong to a community of alternative shared beliefs and values. Unfortunately, that is not always how the audience perceives such actions. The media's pervasive rendering of bikers as criminals, wayward youth, or tattooed hedonists generally offers little more than a cursory, negative illustration

of who they really are. As Librett notes, not only is the mass public's perception of biker culture influenced by the largely negative stereotypes of outlaw bikers presented in the media, bikers' images of themselves are affected by such media representation. Thus, they often unwittingly conform to it—because of a need to appear tough, different, or liberated from the confines of society—the consequence remaining that the bikers are only understood on the most surface of levels (258). Quinn, building upon Thompson's earlier work, states that, "bikers deliberately present themselves as dangerous outlaws with nothing to lose. However, this image is more commodity than reality" (384), since the display itself downplays the complex lives such individuals lead and only alludes to their existence as bikers. Furthermore, as several sources point out, the majority of biker culture is not criminal, hence the demarcation of "1%"—the traditional proportion of subculture members who consider themselves active criminals—versus the other "99%" of bikers who are average, primarily law-abiding citizens like the rest of society (Librett; Quinn; Schoten&McAlexander). Through the limited expression of these groups' style, a breakdown occurs at the level of meaning in that only style aspects and not belief systems or the meanings behind rituals are addressed. Such superficial interpretation is akin to Williams's discussion of television in general, in which we as viewers allow ourselves to watch "the shadows of shadows and find them substance" (O'Connor 5). Since we lack an understanding of their motives and of their internality, we find them objects of fascination, and nothing more. Or worse, we rely on misleading representations of them to formulate our knowledge and opinions of them.

While it would be a little too on-the-nose to say that because this racist, not highly educated batch of peripheral characters is the only type of motorcycle culture represented—and thus skews the audience's perceptions of all subcultures—it is still relevant to discuss this particular series' weak ability to translate motorcycle culture effectively to a mass audience. The fact that Pizzolatto and Fukunaga chose to represent the criminal aspect of outlaw biker culture is another indicator of the show's bias in favor of misrepresentation. If society's image and

bikers' images of themselves are influenced by media representation, then several possibilities emerge. First, non-bikers see bikers as more criminal, tough, or rowdy than the majority of them actually are. Second, bikers themselves, or at very least peripheral and neophyte members of the subculture, enter into it with the notion that they will achieve such toughness, individuality, outsider status, or sense of liberty, when in fact they are engaging largely in consumerism, and not much more. This is especially true if we consider that the constructed media "reality" only represents those surface aspects of the subculture already mentioned. Such representation implies that anyone—even a cop—can infiltrate the subculture as long as he walks the walk and talks the talk. However, he does not have to believe the beliefs. This is apparent with Rust, who literally becomes a biker by fishing around for a costume within a kit. Even Marty's inability to blend in at the biker gathering is a result of not of his middle class anxieties, his desire to assert his masculinity, or his misogynistic tendencies (all things that he would share in common with members of biker subculture). Instead, it is his inability to fully adopt the style alone of bikers that makes him an outlier—his Pink Floyd shirt, his mid-priced sedan, and his baseball cap are what let us know that he doesn't belong. What Pizzolatto and Fukunaga are implying, then, is that it is only the superficial and not the consistent practice of beliefs and meaningful rituals that make a biker. This is best symbolized in Marty's not knowing the password for entry that allows Rust into the gang's elusive fold. Because he doesn't know the stylistic code, the "talk" as it were, we understand that he is not a biker. We also understand, then, that shared frustrations about the dominant ideology—those qualities Marty shares with the bikers—don't matter, either, and only surface aspects do.

Such a limited representation is complicated by the idea that—as Hebdige, in borrowing from Barthes, notes—the "principal defining characteristic" of "mainstream culture" is "a tendency to masquerade as nature" (102). We are expected to take this representation as a natural and realistic rendering, when actually our notion of what it means to belong to biker culture is based on artifice and misreading. The truth of

the matter is that "[o]ften the grounded aesthetics of the young are suppressed or even criminalized rather than developed" by our mainstream culture (Willis, *Common Culture* 146). Therefore, the belief in a false reality where criminality is entirely voluntary and inherent within the individual—and nothing more—denies the actual extenuating forces of class, of otherness, and of the oppressive hegemony of the dominant culture. When we hear a character, such as bike gang leader Ginger, saying that he "embrace[s] the outlaw life," (*True Detective*) we conclude that his situation exists within a vacuum—that the circumstances of socioeconomic status, crisis of masculinity, and racial tension engendered by a Southern, isolationist culture should be overlooked primarily in favor of his voluntary lawlessness.

It would surprise no one that, from the directors' perspectives, the impetus for coherently and thoroughly articulating their specific, artistic aims would trump the desire for accurately representing a group that receives less than an entire episode's worth of screen time. However, it is important to note that when such a group is, in fact, misleadingly portrayed, and that portrayal exists within an "episode [whose] theme is identity and the masks people can wear," (Pizzolatto*True Detective: Inside*) then the audience ultimately presumes that simply by belonging to such a subculture, one engages in the act of concealment and pretense. This is further made problematic by the very single-dimensionality in which the group is illustrated. If motorcycle subculture reflects style without substance, the masquerading of a façade persona that hides the true individual beneath it —as *True Detective* would have us mistakenly believe—then, of course, we come to the misconception that every object or ritual associated with it is nothing more than an act of pretense. However, as Willis points out, the very purpose of subcultures is to apply meaning for those who otherwise find its lack in contemporary society (*Common Culture* 146). If we take this meaning away from them, they become caricatures with no existence or purpose beyond their surface. While the idea put forth by Rust Cohle, that "we are things that labor under the illusion of having a self," (*True Detective*) can be perceived as provocative and even transcendental, in this context it is entirely

dangerous, because it attempts to reduce the significance and purpose of subculture to a pointless exercise in asserting an identity that is not really there. Pizzolatto's answer to Lawrence Grossberg's question, then, regarding "the conditions through which people can belong to a common collective without becoming representative of a single definition" (88) seems to imply that such conditions do not exist—that, in fact, we are all the same and that it is the collective itself that is at fault for promoting diverse and alternative ways of existing, and not the outsider from within the larger, normative culture who interprets it in an overly simplified manner.

If, as Hebdige points out, "it is this alienation from the deceptive 'innocence' of appearances…[that gives subculture members] impetus to move from man's second 'false nature' to a genuinely expressive artifice," (19), then what happens when those appearances are presented as false, or as masquerade? What if the "genuinely expressive artifice" is ultimately intended to appear disingenuous? While Pizzolatto and Fukunaga would like to think of the abandonment of subcultural ties as a positive experience, in which men ultimately come together in shared vulnerability to shed the artifices of projected self and be "true" with one another (as they do at the series' end), they also fail to understand that individuals do not abscond the self within their proto-communities, but rather find a more valid sense of reality and identity within them. The directors' antidote for alienation, then, becomes problematic because it assumes the fictitiousness of subculture—or, at very least, the superficiality of it—and favors a more normative "truth." As Hebdige notes, "If we emphasize integration and coherence at the expense of dissonance and discontinuity, we are in danger of denying the very manner in which the subcultural form is made to crystallize, objectify, and communicate group experience" (79). Bikers are no less true to themselves than anyone else because they engage in struggle, in contradiction, and in tension. When truth becomes predicated on whether or not men can get along, then conformity becomes a requisite reality.

Every aspect of the exchange between Rust and The Iron Crusaders is superficial, misleading, and not what it is made to appear: from Rust acting undercover, to his occupation as law enforcement officer while engaging in more lawless activity than virtually anyone on the show, to the bikers' need to set themselves apart as outlaws. Because they are ready and willing to do business with someone who is clearly inauthentic, we begin to question the authenticity of their subculture. The protagonist's smarmy, ultimate revelation at the season's closing—that of his (and thus, all our) inclusion in some transcendental, community of pan-humanity that exists beyond the space-time continuum—reinforces the idea that all personae and affiliations, subcultural or otherwise, are only facades, and that the only true self is the one that exists as part of the whole. If this idea existed on its own, it would still be quaint, but at least acceptable. However, the presence of material ideological forces that Louis Althusser discusses and the pervasive, oppressive, normative, and homogenous cultural atmosphere that they serve to reproduce—studied by the likes of Hebdige, Willis, Hall, and many others—should remind the audience that any talk of difference-as-illusion dangerously flirts with a championing of submission and obedience to the dominant, the oppressive, and the normative.

We must keep in mind the milieu within which the directors are operating—first and foremost, as part of television "broadcasting," what Williams calls a "powerful form of social integration and control" whose development is facilitated by "corporations which express the contemporary interlock of military, political, and commercial practices" (*Television* 23, 134). According to Murdock and Golding, "to focus simply on the media's representations of the real…is to ignore the structure that determines their very existence" such as the controllers and owners of cultural production, the dominant capitalist class, and the media (Turner 191). It is not in the directors' financial interests, then, to provide a program that thoroughly, honestly, and objectively explores the ways in which a fringe culture such as an outlaw motorcycle club creates alternative ways of being for its members who cannot conform wholly to

mainstream ideology. Nor is it feasible for the directors to actively critique the ways in which society is responsible for its own deviant outgrowths and its subsequent repression of them. Rather, by relying on stale interpretations of such a group (and many other margin groups), Pizzolatto and Fukunaga not only secure their status within the ideological framework, they become its purveyors. Because of this, they accomplish one of the primary aims of mass media—the creation of visual mythology "in which class is alternately overlooked and overstated, denied and reduced to caricature" (Hebdige 87).

We must also keep in mind the larger American culture within which the milieu of television broadcasting operates—a culture that, as Williams points out, implicitly reminds us all that while the bikers' "unauthorized violence is impermissible," (*Television* 123) our government's institutionalized and systematic violence perpetrated in a myriad ways, as well as our implicit agreement via our role as taxpaying citizens who fund such violence—should be considered normative. In the same way that Joans discusses how we cannot extricate bikers' racism and sexism from the larger American culture from which those concepts were adopted, neither can we assume their violent criminality is entirely of their own making, and not an outgrowth of ingrained cultural ideas and practices. Our fixation with these brutal archetypes, then, is a result of our own brute culture. Whether we understand them as cathartic elements of whose lack of inhibition we can only fantasize, or as receptacles for our ire and judgment (which, in turn, affirm our own constructed sense of righteousness), does not matter. What matters is that, in either case, our ability to distance ourselves from such a community becomes apparent, and shows that we are unable to consider our own involvement with its genesis. We find a scapegoat for our transgressions, and move on with our feigned redemption.

When surface aspects of the subculture being portrayed are realistic, but its tenets, history, and rituals are either ignored or undermined, then a very plausible consequence arises. There grows an understanding, on the part of outsiders, that such a limited and one-dimensional representation is entirely truthful, and that, at its core, the

subculture is hollow. When we, the audience, understand this to be reality, a dangerous outcome follows—that "the right of the subordinate class…to make something of what is made of (them)'" never occurs, and that same class never finds the opportunity to "rise above a subordinate position which was never of [its] choosing" (Hebdige 138-39). This is the unfortunate end result of Williams's notion of "incorporation" (*Marxism and Literature* 115)—that normative ways of life succeed over marginalized voices, that our disagreement with the dominant ideology is silenced, and that otherness is regarded as undesirable, criminal, or worst of all—becomes incorporated. When this happens, something that once seemed to challenge cultural practices becomes unthreatening, ubiquitous, and mainstream. In other words, it is swallowed up by the very dominant culture from which it has tried to rebel and whose practices it put into question. American culture reflects this tenuous sense of sameness in that "[t]he highest income cannot liberate a North American from his 'middle-class' life…[t]he lowest income gives everybody a considerable piece of the same middle-class existence," and where "we really have homogenized our schools and factories and cities and entertainment to a great extent" (McLuhan 299) Biker subculture's actual dangerousness as an expression of class, gender, and racial inequality becomes diluted into an exaggerated dangerousness of each member's presumed violent criminality. We cease to understand the group as reacting to the dominant's restrictiveness and oppression, and instead we react against bikers themselves.

Ultimately, it is biker subculture's desire to escape the sobering reality of class inequality that lies beneath the caricature we are presented. Since such a desire is never fully articulated onscreen, the audience never engages in the larger discussion it seeks to promote. Thus, no matter how different we are socioeconomically, intellectually, culturally, and otherwise, we cling desperately to the archaic notion that we are all, and should all be, exactly the same. Any deviance from this norm of homogeneity and any questioning of its validity, unless thoroughly understood as meaningful, will be undermined through the process of incorporation and assimilation. Cohen echoes these

sentiments even more cynically, writing that "[i]f the whole process [of emergent subcultures] seems to be circular, forming a closed system, then this is because subculture, by definition, cannot break out of the contradiction derived from the parent culture" (Cohen 84). If, as Cohen suggests, nothing has been transformed from one generation to the next, then change is not likely to occur, and subcultures never become capable of completely achieving the alternative hegemony they desire. Instead, they remain mired in the inability to articulate their frustration with the dominant culture and are only seen as others to be feared, mocked, or otherwise judged.

With *True Detective*'s biker gang, we are provided with a stereotype that likely would not corroborate with our real-life encounters with members of that same subculture. Its construction of such a group as a hollow and shallow, but also as tough and dangerous, conforms to our normative ideology's tendency to mark it as deviant while simultaneously allowing its incorporation into a culture that increasingly masks homogeneity as pluralism and consumerism as otherness. Willis refers to this phenomenon as "contradictory empowerment, " and while he considers the market as a limit to cultural emancipation, he also sees it as a means to "open the way to a better way" against such restriction (*Common Culture* 159). Sure, *True Detective* appears subversive in its portrayal of anti-hero Rust Cohle spouting such nihilistic gems as, "You got to get together to tell yourselves stories that violate every law of the universe just to get through the goddamn day? What does that say about your reality?" However, it does little to engage in such contradictory empowerment because, ultimately, the show rejects such nihilism while maintaining the falsity of identity. Willis also believes that individuals should become cultural producers rather than remain in their current state of cultural consumers (145-46). It seems, though, that most of us, like Pizzolatto and Fukunaga, when given the opportunity to do so, merely reiterate and reproduce the existing ideology through the material practice of art-making.

In order to substantially impact the current practices of ideology, we need to encourage a movement, as Grossberg states, that will "move beyond models of oppression," and "move towards a model of articulation as 'transformative practice'" (8). Put another way by Williams, "renewable social action and struggle" are what we need to revolutionize the "[c]urrent orthodox theory and practice" in which television production and viewership engages (*Television* 134). Presenting subculture isn't enough—we need to do so in a manner that brings under scrutiny the institutionalized practices that create such social schism. For, unlike McLuhan believes, it is not "uniqueness and diversity that "electric conditions" engender "as never before" (422). Rather, a television program like *True Detective* solidifies the ruse of diversity within an ideology that privileges homogeneity—that is "not irresistibly imposed…only 'preferred'" (Turner 91)—by only allowing the viewers to understand members of biker subcultures as effigies.

By studying the meaningful tenets, history, beliefs, practices, and cultural significance of biker subculture as a diverse "alternative and oppositional formation" (119) that acts as a response to dominant American ideology, and how a representation of that formation is distorted by the show's creators, we understand ways in which *True Detective* misleadingly presents an image of subversion and, through its portrayal of O.M.C.'s, actually conforms to and enhances dominant ideological beliefs about such groups. Such a practice diverts of the audience's focus on and understanding of biker subculture, serving to avoid larger discussions about race, gender, and class in America.

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