



Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement

David D. (Dimitri) Perlmutter

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Policing the Media is an investigation into one of the paradoxes of the mass media age. Issues, events, and people that we see most on our television screens are often those that we understand the least. David Perlmutter examined this issue as it relates to one of the most frequently portrayed groups of people on television: police officers. **Policing the Media** is a report on the ethnography of a police department, derived from the author's experience riding on patrol with officers and joining the department as a reserve policeman. Drawing upon interviews, Perlmutter describes the lives and philosophies of street patrol officers. He finds that cops hold ambiguous attitudes toward their television characters, for much of TV copland is fantastic and unrealistic. Moreover, the officers perceive that the public's attitudes toward law enforcement and crime are directly influenced by mass media. This in turn, he suggests, influences the way that they themselves behave and perform on the street, and that unreal and surreal expectations of them are propagated by television cop shows. This cycle of perceptual influence may itself profoundly impact the contemporary criminal justice system, on the street, in the courts, and in the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

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