

## **ABSTRACT**

HYATT, AUTUMN AMOUR. Black Men's Encounters with White Cops: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach to Social Justice Reform - (Under the direction of Dr. April Fernandes and Dr. Robin Dodsworth).

In response to the litany of social injustices centered around the racial profiling of black men, some members of the black community have assumed the responsibility of being whistleblowers of police brutality and white oppression. The racial profiling of black men has led to the perpetuation of legal cynicism within the black community. With the advancement of technology in conjunction with the instantaneous nature of social media, some black men have now taken it upon themselves to record their encounters with white cops and to upload them to YouTube for public viewership. Aside from recording these encounters primarily for self-protection, these black men are also using their individual platforms to address the racist ideologies and implicit biases embedded within the criminal justice system. In addition to their individual platforms on social media, the linguistic patterns these black men are adhering to in these encounters to denounce white oppression has yet to be analyzed discursively. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be on the analysis of two core features of AAE used by black men to denounce the preconceived notions white cops have about black men and criminality.

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Black Men's Encounters with White Cops: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach to Social  
Justice Reform

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gave me the strength to overcome the many obstacles I faced in my graduate career. Second, to my wonderful family and friends who supported me throughout the completion of this thesis. May The Lord bless and keep each and every one of you. I cannot thank you enough for all the thoughtful comments and encouragement. I love you all!

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Autumn Amour Hyatt was born in Miami, Florida. Both of her parents are from Moore Haven, Florida. She spent a number of years living in Tallahassee, Florida. She received a Bachelor of Arts in English from Florida International University in Miami, Florida. She is particularly interested in Sociolinguistics and Crime, Law, and Social Control, specifically African American English and the assumption of criminality of black men. In her spare time, she loves listening to old school jazz, R&B, and neo-soul music, watching reruns of old television shows, and reading books about Christian theology.

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## INTRODUCTION

The black community's distrust of police officers stems from decades of mistreatment and inequality in the name of preserving the law (Tyler *et. al.* 2014) As compared to other racial groups, black men have a well-established history of being disproportionately interrogated, stopped, and harassed by law enforcement (Brunson 2007; Brunson and Gau 2014). This long-standing history of discrimination has led to a series of social justice movements and public demonstrations and protests about the legality of these acts. As evidenced by the amount of civil unrest that followed the Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown cases, such displays of outrage are indicative of the black community's views of controversial police practices (Berg *et. al.* 2016). Aside from these public demonstrations and protests, the racial disparities associated with police interrogation and harassment matched with the use of excessive force has been used to justify recording these encounters. In addition to providing visual documentation of their mistreatment, these black men are also looking to bring these issues to the forefront in the discussion about law enforcement officials and communities of color.

Prior research has focused mainly on the physical aspects of black men's encounters with white cops, ignoring the role of language in these interactions (Voigt *et al.* 2017). The present study analyzes two core features of African American English (AAE) in black men's language in their recorded encounters with white cops. The central finding is that they use AAE to disassociate themselves from the white cops' perceived assumption of criminality while simultaneously asserting their innocence. They use the following features of AAE as an act of to the more normative ways of speaking – copula absence and verbal *s*-absence to position themselves as American citizens whose constitutional rights have been violated while addressing the ways in which cops have labeled and categorized black men as criminals.

## The Context of Police Distrust & Legal Cynicism

The existing research regarding black men and the criminal justice system is still primarily focused on the following: racial disparities between blacks and whites and local law enforcement officials, police distrust within the black community, and police brutality. Beginning with the racial disparities between blacks and whites, Mears *et. al* (2013) discuss the racialization of crime. Mears *et. al* (2013: 273) state that the racialization of crime refers to this notion that race is somehow linked to a propensity to offend. Black masculinity and the perceived threat of criminality have become so intertwined that separating the two in discussions about public policy and criminal justice reform is nearly impossible (Welch 2007, Peffley and Hurwitz 2010).

According to Welch (2007), the inability or unwillingness to separate the two has served as the crux of the cognitive biases white cops may have. Consequently, the racialization of crime has led to black men being labeled as aggressive and less likely to submit to legal authority when or if they protest their mistreatment (Tyler *et. al* 2014). Both the racialization of crime and the perceived threat of criminality have conditioned white cops to respond to black men more forcibly than any other racial group (Mears *et. al* (2017).

In regards to how white cops have been conditioned to respond to black men in these encounters, Mears *et. al* (2017) discuss some of the ways in which these cognitive biases directed towards black men have perpetuated the false notion of perceived threat in these encounters. Mears *et. al* (2017: 12) state that “cognition research has shown that humans are predisposed to make rapid decisions—to rely on “cognitive shortcuts,” or heuristics, to “think fast”—when they perceive risk.” Additionally, Mears *et. al* (2017) also state that it is possible that black men are displaying higher levels of aggression in these encounters because of their own cognitive biases towards white cops. Voigt *et al.* (2017) have provided empirical evidence

to support their claims about how cops are more likely to use disrespectful language when interacting with black men; thereby escalating rather than diffusing the confrontation between the two. Intense physical interactions with white cops have been normalized and expected in the black community because of the alarming rates in which they occur (Jones-Webb *et. al* 2018)

According to The Department of Justice's Ferguson Report (2015), black people are twice as likely to have their vehicles searched for weapons and/or contraband than whites, and blacks are more likely to be forcibly restrained than whites. Additionally, the criminological literature regarding the policing of black men in urban neighborhoods shows that the police are likely to resort to more forceful tactics on black men than any other racial group (Worden 1996; Brunson and Miller 2006). Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss (2007) state that some cops have defended these practices of detaining, harassing, and physically assaulting black men on the basis of assuming that whites commit less crimes than blacks do, which further contributes to ongoing legal cynicism within the black community. These controversial police practices directed towards black men has prompted researchers to uncover any additional links between the use of excessive force and black men.

Regarding law enforcement specifically and the use of excessive force, Alpert and Smith (1994) discuss some of the reasons why cops are more inclined to do so against people of color. Alpert and Smith (1994) suggest that one of the reasons why this is so is because of the implicit racial biases embedded within police training police. Black bodies have been criminalized based on a false perception of black culture and other physical aspects of the black male exterior (Hall *et. al* 2016, Kleider-Offutt *et. al* 2017). Kleider-Offutt *et. al* (2017) also suggest that there are certain facial features black males possess that make them more susceptible to police brutality. According to (Kleider-Offutt *et. al* 2017: 31), black males who have dark skin, full-lips, and a

wide nose are more likely to have violent encounters with white cops. This vague description of “Black face-type” that Kleider-Offutt *et. al* (2017) refer to has also been used to justify instances of police harassment and brutality, which further solidifies the black community’s legal cynicism and police distrust.

As the list of police encounters that have been mishandled within the black community continues to grow, so does the distrust of local law enforcement officials and politicians. Prior research posits that members of the black community residing in socially disorganized neighborhoods do not believe police officers possess a genuine interest in their well-being or their safety (Bell 2016; Berg *et. al.* 2016). The perceived lack of interest in the sustainability and protection of predominantly black neighborhoods suggests that black people are less inclined to call the police for assistance with crime related matters. The perpetuation of police distrust within the black community is fostered by pessimistic views of both police actions and behaviors in relation to the criminal justice system as citizens question the legitimacy of the legal authority (Desmond *et. al.* 2016).

The perceived criminality and police distrust that black men have been living with for decades has prompted them to find alternative methods of self-protection. Stalcup & Hahn (2016) argue that cell phone cameras and social media platforms have become the main mechanisms by which police brutality is documented on a regular basis. By recording their encounters with white cops and uploading them to the social media platform of their choice, these black men are aggressively pushing back on the perceived threat of criminality and police brutality. However, there has yet to be a study centered around the linguistic patterns black men use in these encounters to counter the police harassment they are subjected to. Therefore, the

goal of this study is to uncover black men's discursive goals in police encounters as it relates to the theme of legal cynicism.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

The linguistic choices these black men make in their recorded encounters with white cops could be approached from any one of several theoretical frameworks and methodologies. but the theoretical framework that promises the most insightful analysis for this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is known for its ability to reveal the intricate inner-workings of power dynamics, racism and social control that are being conveyed through the language.

According to Cameron (2001) one of the reasons why CDA is so prominent in both the classical sociological and linguistic literature is because it provides scholars with a glimpse of the social order of things in that particular context. Additionally, Fairclough (2001) also states that CDA is known for its ability to be more inclusive of other sociological methods and frameworks used to analyze meaning making and/or identity construction because it equally assesses both the theoretical perspective of the respected field of study in relation to the action being performed.

Therefore, in these encounters, the white cops are displaying various forms of social control towards black men that are often met with high levels of aggression and retaliation - CDA serves as the sociological lens used to further examine the nuance of the discourse given the sensitivity of the legal matter being discussed.

While discourse is indeed a social practice, Blommaert & Bulcaen (2000) state that CDA can be used to assess the psychological effects the social order of things has on the speaker's ability to navigate his/her way through the conversation. In the case of black men's recorded encounters with white cops, it can be inferred that they have been conditioned to react and respond in certain ways to racial profiling because it is omnipresent in the black community

(Voigt *et. al.* 2016). Referring back to the sensitivity of the legal matters being discussed in these contexts, CDA can lead to uncovering the ways in which the discourse is being used to simultaneously reify and denounce the social stigmas associated with black men and the assumption of criminality. Such social stigmas include behaviors such as wearing dreadlocks, having dark skin, tattoos, gold teeth, wearing baggy pants, and, speaking African American English (AAE).

CDA can demonstrate the rationale behind this integrated approach to black men's encounters with white cops because it helps to identify specific patterns within the discourse that can be traced back to the oppressive and systemic tactics that are specifically aimed towards the black community. The oppressive nature of the social order within these contexts alludes to some of the links between discourse and power that Fairclough (1989) discusses at great length. Fairclough (1989: 49) states that "Power in discourse between members of different cultural groupings is in this perspective an element in the domination of, particularly, black and Asian minorities by the white majority, and of institutionalized racism." Fairclough's (1989) insights about the power dynamics hidden within the discourse align well with both the sociological and linguistic goals of this study.

Additionally, one of the integral components of discourse analysis is the social processes associated with how speakers assign meaning to groups of people, speech acts, and, certain patterns of behavior. For example, Goodwin & Alim's (2010) study addresses some of the ways in which social identities within the black community are both assigned and performed on the basis of speakers' interactions with everyday things such visual signs, musical genres, literature, and TV shows. Therefore, this study also aims to discursively analyze black men's rates of usage

of two core features of AAE – copula absence and verbal s-absence in their police interactions that are being used to pushback against the social identities pre-assigned to them.

While CDA encompasses a wide-range of discursive tools that have all made notable contributions to the literature, the discursive tools associated with this study were chosen because they each shed light on how some aspects of being a black man in today's society have yet to change in spite of the general public being more aware of the black community's quest for equality. However, in more of a general sense, the discursive tools chosen for this study also reveal some of the links between the black male experience, linguistic subordination, and power dynamics conveyed through the discourse. Positioning and indexicality are the discursive tools that will adequately assess the different mechanisms by which these black men are using AAE to establish their own individual platforms of social justice. While each of these men may utilize different tactics to make their stances on the legal matter known, it is clear that all of them have common goals in mind regarding denouncing the false perception of reality of all black men being linked to criminal activities.

### **African American English**

African American English (AAE) is a rather difficult term to define. “Historically, AAE has been labeled “broken” English, slang, a dialect, and a language” (Reed & Webb 2006:3). It has also been referred to as *Ebonics* or a language that is spoken by African Americans from impoverished communities also known as the *ghetto*. Although *Ebonics* is a term that is used to describe AAE, linguists have become much more inclined to use the term *African American English* because of its neutrality. Contrary to popular belief, AAE is a rule-based, and rule-governed dialect of English. While AAE is in fact an umbrella term encompassing multiple language varieties, several core grammatical features unite all varieties of AAE that have been

studied empirically to date. Two of these features, copula absence and verbal s-absence, are the focus of this study.

### **Copula Absence**

Copula absence is perhaps the most salient grammatical feature of AAE. Copula absence refers to the absence of finite (conjugated) instances of the verb *be* in present tense clauses (Rickford et al 1991, Wolfram 1969) other than first person singular (e.g. *\*I nice* or *\*I laughin'* is not permissible in the AAE system. For example, in the sentence, “*she walkin'*,” the verb *is* has been deleted before the verb *walkin'*. Copula absence is an extremely nuanced variable in AAE, subject to multiple grammatical and phonological constraints. In particular, copula absence is most to likely when the following word is either *gonna* or a present participle such as *walking* (Labov 1969, Rickford et al 1991, Rickford & Sharma 2009, Wolfram 1969, Labov 1972) and the form is equivalent to a contracted form of *are* (e.g. *They gonna*) as opposed to *is*. In many communities, rates of copula absence are higher among working class speaker and among males; middle class speakers may only delete the copula before *gonna* (Wolfram 1969). Because copula absence is indexical not only of Black identity but also of working-class identity, it is a potentially powerful symbolic choice for black men in their encounters with white cops.

The dialect prejudices associated with copula absence in AAE have impacted African Americans in the criminal justice system for decades. Rickford & King (2016) provide a classic example from a witness in the controversial Emmett Till case where the witness said *thar he* when he pointed at one of Till’s killers in the court room. The witness’ testimony was transcribed incorrectly, and he was deemed non-credible for speaking his dialect of preference. In sum, the research regarding copula absence in AAE and the criminal justice system is still up

and coming (Baugh 1995), which further demonstrates the need for such an analysis in the context of police interactions.

### **Verbal *s*-absence**

Verbal *s*-absence is another core grammatical feature of AAE. Verbal *s*-absence refers to the absence of the third person singular agreement morpheme on present tense verbs (Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Wolfram and Thomas 2002). For example, in the sentence *when a man get arrested everyone talk down to him*, the *-s* suffix does not appear on the verb *get*. This can also be seen in the following examples: *that's how she eat* and *that's how she like it*. Unlike SAE, where the *-s* suffix is mandatory with third person singular objects, the *-s* suffix is optional in AAE depending on the contexts.

Poplack & Tagliamonte (2004) discuss one reason why verbal *s*-absence has become a prominent grammatical feature of AAE. According to Poplack & Tagliamonte (2004) refer to the notion of *non-redundant pluralization*, which states that because the subject is mandatory in most indicative clauses in present-day English, the person and number is already known, and so the (redundant) *-s* morpheme can be dropped without loss of information. Verbal *s*-absence was chosen for this study because it will provide more of an insightful analysis regarding which subjects warrant the *-s* morpheme being dropped within these contexts. It is possible that some speakers will drop the *-s* morpheme when the subject is a noun phrase (NP) as opposed to a pronoun.

Other core features of AAE have been analyzed in similar contexts in relation to the current social status of marginalized African Americans. AAE, socio-economic status, and power dynamics were analyzed by Smith (2016) in their study about the historical segregation of Chicago. Smith (2016) used the CDA framework to demonstrate how some core features of AAE

have remained stable in Chicago because they can be traced back to the social inequalities marginalized African Americans are still facing today. Smith (2016: 318) “r-lessness, ee” sounds that replace “i” vowels, and the /ai/ unglided that changes words like my to mah, as well as the tendency to re-syllabify the sound- “ay” before laterals.” Smith’s (2016) findings posit that there are some links between dialect preference and socio-economic status that need to be further examined.

The robustness of AAE, specifically, the two features chosen for this study call for an integrated approach regarding how dialect preference is used to question the norms of social control. Copula absence and verbal *s*-absence will shed light on the ways in which these black men are positioning themselves as American citizens whose rights are being violated. Copula absence, specifically, will showcase the ways in which they are openly challenging the legal authority of the cops they are interacting with; whereas verbal *s*-absence will focus more on the narrator roles they play in relation to the cops’ pre-established legal authority.

### **Positioning**

Positioning is a discursive tool that aligns well with the goals of this study because it demonstrates the necessity for social scientists to be well-versed in both the history and the current social status of the target population. In other words, positioning, as a discursive tool in these contexts, requires social scientists to be socially conscious of the black male experience in relation to today’s society with respect to the generations that came before them. Wortham & Reyes (2015) state that subject positioning refers to how “participants position themselves with respect to one another in the narrating event” (Wortham & Reyes 2015: 45). However, De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2011: 160) argue that “positions appear to have a cognitive status to the extent that there is an assumption that people mentally store sets of roles and rules, as a sort of

non-discursive moral order, which can then be realized and traced (by the analysts) in discursive environments.” Additionally, Tirado & Galvez (2007:7) state that “once a determined position has been taken, the individual perceives and interprets the world from and through that strategic position.” Tirado & Galvez’s (2007) views on positioning are applicable to this study because it sheds light on the ways in which both the black men and the white cops believe their interactions with each other ought to be handled. By using positioning as a discursive tool within these contexts, it will allow for an in-depth analysis of how these black men are demonstrating their social consciousness of the roles white cops are playing in maintaining the social order of police interactions.

De Fina & Georgakopoulou’s (2011) perspective on positioning aligns well with the inner-workings of the CDA framework because it further explains one of the rationales behind black men recording their encounters with white cops on the basis of them not adhering to the role of submission to legal authority - black men expect white cops to mistreat them or presume them to be guilty of a crime without any evidence. The non-compliance of submission to legal authority by black men in relation to the predetermined social order of the context in which the white cop is racially and legally inferior by default suggests that positioning specifically assess the power dynamics within the discourse.

Power dynamics and positioning both align with the CDA framework because they signify the subtle authoritative nature of language in use - one speaker will always have the authority over the other in any given interaction. On the basis of skin color alone in relation to discourse, whiteness is akin to normalcy and sustainability; whereas blackness poses a threat to that normalcy because it has been linked to more fluid and chaotic behavior norms. The utilization of positioning as a discursive tool in these analyses will highlight some of the crucial

moments in the discourse in which these black men voice their opinions about the power dynamics being used to control them.

### **Indexicality**

Blommaert (2007: 115) states that indexicality refers to “meanings that connect discourses to contexts and induce categories, similarities and differences within frames, and thus suggest identities, tones, styles and genres that appear to belong or to deviate from expected types.”

Specifically addressing the black community, inaccurate portrayals of black culture have been used to stigmatize some of the core aspects of the black experience such as hairstyles, dialect preferences, and rap music - thereby providing outsiders with a distorted view of what it means to be black in America. As this distorted view continues to gain momentum in the mainstream media, so do the justifications for the mistreatment of black men by white cops based on these stigmas.

Blommaert (2007) writes that indexicality is ordered in the sense that it can be used to reify the social order of the interaction based on the pre-assigned social categories for each speaker. The social order associated with these recorded encounters stems from the belief that black men are unlearned in the ways of the law; therefore, they are incapable of providing any sort of defense for their unwillingness to cooperate with white cops. However, when the roles are reversed and black men dare to disrupt that social order by asserting that their rights are being violated, white cops are then charged with the task of defending their stance on the matter by also relying on the law from an entirely different perspective.

Indexicality differs from the other discursive tools mentioned in the CDA framework to the extent that it can be viewed as a precursor to affective/epistemic stance and positioning

because it sheds light on the characteristics of behavior that have already been assigned to black men. It is these characteristics of behavior coupled with the societal view of how these behaviors ought to be addressed within the legal setting that warrants the use of indexicality because it acts as a base for the categories and labels black men and white cops are subconsciously already aware of even if they do not vocalize it as such in these encounters.

The discursive tools chosen within the CDA framework to analyze the specific lines from each speaker are appropriate for this study because they will highlight the ways in which language is being used to take a stand against the pre-established social order of police interactions with black men. In addition to challenging that social order, the discursive tools chosen for this study will also reiterate the necessity for sociolinguistic analysis within these contexts because of the importance of language during the lead-up to a potentially violent encounter with the police. I hypothesize the following:

H1: Black men are manipulating copula absence and verbal *s*-absence to position themselves as American citizens whose constitutional rights are being violated while simultaneously pushing back on the police officers' perception and assumption of criminality.

## **DATA & ANALYSIS**

The black men in these YouTube videos are using copula absence and verbal *s*-absence in AAE to position themselves as American citizens whose constitutional rights are being violated. One of the reasons why they are positioning themselves as American citizens first, and black men second is because they are demonstrating their knowledge of their social status in relation to the white cops they are interacting with. In other words, these black men are aware that the white cops do not view them as American citizens who are afforded the same constitutional rights as

they are, so they are using their dialect of preference, AAE, to challenge the pre-established social norms of police interactions. Each video will be presented in the following format: video context, a partially transcribed excerpt, and a table displaying the percentages of copula absence and verbal s-absence used by each speaker. The instances in which each feature occurs have been highlighted in the excerpts. Additionally, instances of where the copula appears in its contracted form in cases of that's, what's, and it's have been omitted from this analysis because AAE speakers do not delete them as often as they do in other grammatical environments conducive to copula absence.

### Video 1 Context

In this video, the black man is being detained for a turn signal, and he proceeds to yell at the cop about how he mishandled the situation by approaching his car with his gun drawn at him. The cop remains silent and only says 'okay' from time to time as the black man is yelling at him. As the conversation continues to progress, the black man begins to assert his innocence to the cop by telling him that there is nothing illegal about the car or himself, but a gun was drawn on him regardless of these facts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIYaXYDisPQ>

### Video 1 Excerpt

**Black Man:** I don't, I don't, and I know it's an individual not every **cop is fucked up**, but when I hear somethin' fucked up happened to a cop, I be like "eh, he probably had it fuckin' comin'

**White Cop:** Okay.

**Black Man:** Cuz of motherfuckers like you, good cops get fucked up reps because of people like you

**Black Man:** You came to da car wit your gun out...for what? Do you have no conscious...you don't see **what the fuck goin' on on TV**? But you don't give a fuck, right? Cause I woulda just been another dead black motherfucker, right? You woulda just went about your business, right? Right? Let's keep it real, let's keep it one hundred. I have no issue if if you could just be honest. Right? You woulda just been like "oop, a mistake happened." Right? You woulda been there the next day, not lose a drop of motherfuckin' sleep, but I'da had three fuckin' kids, three kids wit no dad. "**Dad criminal**? Nope. **Dad a thug**? Nope. **Dad shot dead** by a cop made a mistake" cause you wanna come wit your gun drawn.

**Black Man:** You got kids and a wife? Don't you want to make it to your kids and your fuckin' kids and wife? You picked a dangerous fuckin' job, and I respect that, I respect ya job, but my gee, drawin' a fuckin' gun? That's where I lose the respect, **the respect is outta the fuckin' window**. You drew a fuckin' gun on me for a fuckin' turn signal. It's nothing illegal in this car, about the car, about me, but I got a gun drawn on me. **Shit is fucked up, man**.

### Video 1 Tables

#### Video 1 Copula Absence

Clause	Copula
Cop is fucked up	Present
What the fuck goin' on on tv?	Absent
Dad a criminal?	Absent
Dad a thug?	Absent
Dad shot dead by a cop	Absent
Shit is fucked up	Present
Percentage copula absence	66%

### Video 1 Verbal s-absence

Clause	Subject	Verbal s-absence
But that come wit yo job	Pronoun	Absent
It comes wit yo job	Pronoun	Present
Percentage Verbal s-absence		50%

### Video 1 Analysis

In this video, the speaker is showing higher rates of copula absence than verbal s-absence.

However, the copula absence is more prominent in his speech when he is challenging the cop's assumption of criminality after he has informed him that he has children depending on him as in the lines "Dad a thug," and "Dad a criminal." He rhetorically asks the cop if he is socially aware of the harsh reality black men are currently living in because of encounters like these.

Additionally, it can be inferred that he is blatantly asking the cop the questions he believes the media will already have the answers to about why he wound up being the next casualty because of a turn signal. His use of the words "thug" and "criminal," in particular suggest that he is aware of how those two terms, in particular, will be used by the media to label him as a threat to society and that the cop was just doing his job.

The speaker's verbal s-absence in this video is unremarkable in the sense that he only omits the "s" from the verb one time when he repeats the phrase "it comes wit yo job." At this point in the conversation, it can be inferred that he is trying to reiterate to the cop that he made a choice to go into this profession regardless of the potential risks that come with it. In a sense, it seems as though the speaker is trying to convey to the cop that he ought to approach his

encounters with black men with more objectivity as opposed to the racial prejudices associated with the criminal justice system.

With respect to positionality, this man is positioning himself as an American citizen who is well-versed in the ways in which cops have been mistreated in today's society. His word choices imply that he sympathizes with people who have mistreated cops in the past because of police brutality directed towards black men. However, the context of the conversation changes when he starts speaking about having a gun drawn on him because he conveys his fear of death to his viewers. At this point in the conversation, he directs his aggression to both the cop and the implicit biases used to justify having a gun drawn on him. He is also demonstrating his knowledge of how his aggression can be misconstrued as an escalation trigger even though that is not his intention (Rengifo & Pater 2017).

As the conversation continues, he positions himself as a father who is actively engaged in his kids' lives as if to denounce the absentee black father narrative pushed by mainstream media outlets (Smith *et. al.* 2005). Additionally, his copula absence is the most readily apparent when he positions himself as a father because he might be trying to establish some common ground between the two of them so that the cop can hear how he has mishandled the situation. Aside from trying to establish some common ground between the two of them, it can also be inferred that he positions himself as a father to inform the cop of how his death would then unintentionally feed into the absentee black father narrative.

Towards the middle of the conversation, the speaker positions himself as an American citizen who respects cops for the work they do, but that respect is now dwindling because of what just happened. The speaker says "You picked a dangerous job, and I respect that but... drawing a fuckin' gun, that's where I lose the respect, the respect is outta the fuckin' window."

The copula is present in both its contracted and full-forms to possibly emphasize his stance on how he is being mistreated.

As the conversation nears its end, the speaker once again positions himself as an American citizen who is challenging the legal authority being directed towards him. The speaker positions himself as someone who is aware of the perceived threat that black men in these encounters are suspected of having when he utters the lines “it’s nothing illegal in this car, about the car, about me.” The positionality within these lines indicates that the speaker is positioning himself as a law-abiding citizen in relation to the perceived threat of criminality. The copula is also present in the line “it’s nothing illegal in this car,” which means that he became more standard when he positioned himself as a law-abiding citizen.

### **Video 2 Context**

In this video, the black man is talking to the cop and refusing to give him his date of birth and social security number because he is not the owner of the car, nor was he the one driving. The cop stated that they are both being legally detained because of an equipment violation on the car. As the interaction progresses, the cop continually asks the passenger of the car for his ID after he has already informed him that does not have to provide him with that information.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3G7zFMt0uQ>

### **Video 2 Excerpt**

**White Cop 1:** I need your name, your address, and your date of birth

**Black Man 1:** My name is, my name is Demitrus, and that’s all you getting’ so you better pull up everything you need from that

**White Cop 1:** Nope, I need your name, your date of birth

**Black Man 1:** I'm not givin' you that

**White Cop 1:** Okay, if you refuse to identify yourself, we have a charge

**Black Man 1:** What's the charge?

**White Cop 1:** Refusing to identify yourself

**Black Man 1:** What's the charge? I just told you my name.

**White Cop 1:** Why do you keep interrupting me?

**Black Man 1:** I'm not interrupting you, what's the charge?

**White Cop 1:** Step outta the car?

**Black Man 1:** For what? What am I stepping outta the car for?

**White Cop 1:** Because I asked you to.

**Black Man 2:** Can we get a supervisor here?

**Black Man 1:** You don't even have a reason for what ya'll pulled us over for.

**White Cop 1:** Step outta the car.

**Black Man 1:** I'm not stepping outta the car.

**Black Man 1:** We're asking for your supervisor

**White Cop 1:** It doesn't matter, just because you ask, I have to provide that to you?

**Black Man 2:** Can I talk to you? Your guy over here, he's angry and I don't know why.

**White Cop 2:** Stay in the vehicle don't step out.

**Black Man 2:** Now I can't step out? Why am I being detained because he never told me.

**White Cop 2:** Your bumper's dragging on the ground and it's an equipment violation, so he has every right to pull you over.

**White Cop 2:** He can write you a ticket for having your bumper dragging on the ground.

**Black Man 2:** So can he write me the ticket then cause he don't need my passenger's information by law. That's all I'm saying, so we can go on our merry lil way. **If you're gonna write me a citation**, write the citation. He asked me a question, I answered it and **he's still not happy**, so what else do you need from us because he don't have to give him his information right here.

**Black Man 1 to White Cop 1:** **You're pulling him over**, you need his identification, you don't need mine.

**White Cop 1:** I'm just tryna figure out why you're not gonna give us your ID.

**Black Man 1:** Why? What do you need my ID for?

**White Cop 1:** We just like to know who's ever in the car.

**Black Man 1:** So, I gotta give you my information because you'd like to know. No, that's bullshit, **you not getting it**.

**White Cop 1:** Do you have any warrants?

**Black Man 1:** I don't have a warrant that's not the point of the matter here. The point of the matter is, I know my rights, and I don't have to give it to you.

## Video 2 Tables

### Video 2 Copula Absence

Clause	Copula	Speaker ID
My name is Demitrus	Present	1
You getting'	Absent	1
Where's your supervisor?	Present	1
We're asking for your supervisor	Present	1
We're asking for your supervisor	Present	1
You're asking for my ID, right?	Present	1
He's angry	Present	2
We're not tryna give him any trouble	Present	2
He's still not happy	Present	2
So where's the supervisor?	Present	2
You guys are UC Police, right?	Present	2
My name is Sexton	Present	2
UC Police officers are harassing me	Present	2
And if they're not providing it to me...	Present	2
You're not getting that information	Present	2
This crazy	Absent	1
If you're pulling him over for something	Present	1
You not getting it	Absent	2
He tryna like..	Absent	2
Cause ya'll not able to	Absent	2
Are we going to jail?	Present	1
We're asking	Present	2
You da one wit da gun and shit	Absent	1
So why are we being detained?	Present	1
What else is going on?	Present	1
So what are we doing about this equipment violation?	Present	1
What are we doing about this equipment violation?	Present	1

So what are we doing about it?	Present	1
Are you writing a ticket for it?	Present	1
Are we free to go?	Present	1
What are we doing then?	Present	1
What are we doing?	Present	1
We're not doing..	Present	1
We're being detained for this?	Present	1
Are you writing a ticket for this or not?	Present	1
You're a public servant?	Present	2
You're a public servant, right?	Present	2
My lawyer's going to eat this up	Present	2
My lawyer's going to eat this up	Present	2
You said "you're not going to give me your supervisor"	Present	2
You're a public servant	Present	2
"Oh you're not going to get my supervisor"	Present	2
So what are we doing here?	Present	2
We're all grown here	Present	2
You're not gonna get my supervisor	Present	2
"No, you're going to get my supervisor"	Present	2
If they dealin wit him	Absent	1
If they dealin wit him	Absent	1
You're not gonna use the scare tactic	Present	1
Why is his door open?	Present	2
If you guys are dealing with me?	Present	1
You guys are public servants	Present	2
Why are we still here?	Present	1
"You're not the driver"	Present	1
Percentage Copula Absence (speaker 1)		7%
Percentage Copula Absence (speaker 2)		5%

### Video 2 Verbal s-absence

Clause	Subject	Verbal s-absence	Speaker ID	Percentage verbal s-absence
He see	Pronoun	Absent	2	100%

### Video 2 Analysis

In this video, both speakers are showing relatively low levels of copula absence. However, speaker 1's levels of copula absence are slightly higher because he is the one who is interacting with the cop more in the beginning, and he is the one who started recording the encounter. Speaker 1's copula absence is more prominent when he speaks about how he is unwilling to provide the cop his ID and when he states that the cop should only be interacting with the driver/owner of the vehicle. There is also an instance where speaker 1 omits the copula when he is challenging the cop's authority in the line "you da one wit the gun and shit."

Speaker 1 does not delete the copula when he asks for the cop's supervisor and when he repeatedly asks him why they are being detained for an equipment violation. Speaker 1 becomes more standard when does the following: asks questions about being detained, when he addresses the cop's notion about him potentially having a warrant, asking if they are free to go or if they are going to jail and voicing his concerns about his rights being violated; however, he only becomes more vernacular when he challenges the cop's authority.

Speaker 2 is notably more standard than Speaker 1 in this video seeing that his percentage of copula deletion is only 5%. He only omits the copula when he is talking to another cop about how his passenger does not need to provide him with his ID if he is not the owner/driver of the vehicle and when he is expressing his concerns about how the situation has been mishandled by

the cop asking for his passenger's information. In all other instances in which the copula is eligible for omission, Speaker 2 does not do it, which implies that he might be choosing to be more standard when speaking directly to the cops. Although, Speaker 2's verbal s-absence is 100%, there is only one instance of it, which makes it unremarkable in this encounter.

While both speakers position themselves as American citizens whose rights are being violated because they are being unlawfully detained for an equipment violation, Speaker 1 is more direct with it. Speaker 1 positions himself as such by explicitly stating that he is not going to violate his rights just to appease the cop. Speaker 1 also positions himself as an American citizen who knows the law in relation to the cop's unlawful request for his ID. He continually reasserts his stance on this matter to the cop when he states that he is not the owner of the car nor was he the one driving, so the cops have no legal reason to interact with him. Additionally, it can also be inferred that Speaker 1 is intentionally positioning himself in such a way that he is demonstrating to the cop that he is a black man who both knows the law and is willing to firmly stand on it to the cop's dismay.

Not only is he more standard at this point in the conversation, Speaker 1 is openly challenging the cop's assumption of a perceived threat because he refuses to give him his ID when he redirects the nature of the conversation in the line "I don't have a warrant that's not the point of the matter here. The point of the matter is, I know my rights, and I don't have to give it to you." It can be inferred that Speaker 2's goal in this line is to inform the cop of two things: he is a black man who knows the law, and he is breaking the law by asking him to identify himself.

Speaker 2 positions himself in a similar fashion to Speaker 1 in the sense that he echoes what Speaker 1 says about his passenger not having to provide the cops with his ID. Speaker 2, like Speaker 1, is challenging the cop's assumption that black men do not know the law, so he

positions himself as a victim of police harassment when he calls the police station for help. Speaker 1 positions himself as an American citizen in a way that distinguishes him from the other speakers when he boldly states that he is going to call his lawyer to inform them of what just happened, implying that there could potentially be legal ramifications for the cops who are currently harassing. When Speaker 1 mentions his lawyer, he, like Speaker 2, implies that he is willing to firmly stand on the law regardless of how the cops are treating him.

### **Video 3 Context**

In this video, the black man is speaking to a cop about why he is sitting outside of a store smoking a cigarette. The cop then proceeds to ask him to present some ID to which he responds by asking if he is being legally detained. As the video progresses, he continually refuses to show the cop his ID on the grounds that this is a “no-show” state, so he is within his rights to deny the cop’s request for his ID. Additionally, the cop keeps asking him if he was at the Walgreens nearby because they received a phone call about some suspicious activity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6j-jbZokUQ>

### **Video 3 Excerpt:**

**Black man:** I have money in my pocket, I don’t need to ask anyone for anything.

**White cop:** Were you over there or no?

**Black man:** Over where? I’ve been sittin out here, you can go ask the guy that’s working in there, I been sittin here ever since

**White cop:** So you weren’t sittin at Walgreens?

**Black man:** Sittin at Walgreens doin what?

**White cop:** Were you at Walgreens?

**Black man:** No, I wasn't, so you can get back in your car and leave, no I wasn't.

**White cop:** Let me see your ID real quick.

**Black man:** For what?

**White cop:** Because you're being lawfully detained currently so that I can talk to you.

**Black man:** For what? What am I being lawfully detained for? Have I committed a crime?

**White cop:** So you're being asked to identify yourself because...

**Black man:** Why? Is this a show state? Do I have to show my ID in this state? I'm not operating a motor vehicle, so why do I have to show my ID.

**White cop:** First of all, Imma write you a ticket for smokin within 50 feet of this building, you understand?

**Black man:** Okay, well write me a ticket then. **So you looking for something** to arrest me for then?

**White cop:** Let me see your ID and we'll go from there.

**Black man:** **So this is harassment. Cause you're harassing me.** You asked me a question, I'm giving you an answer. What's your name?

**White cop:** Officer Scott.

**Black man:** You asked me if I was over there, I told you "no" so that's the end of the conversation.

**White cop:** No, it's not.

**Black man:** Okay, I've been sittin here for 2 hours waiting for someone from my job to come get me. I feel harassed and I'm tired. I haven't been over at Walgreens. Do I look like someone that needs money?

**White cop:** You fit the perfect description of what they told us.

**Black man:** A black male with dreads?

**White cop:** That's correct.

**Black man:** Exactly! Exactly! A black male with dreads.

### Video 3 Tables

#### Video 3 Copula Absence

Clause	Copula
So you lookin for something to arrest me for?	Absent
So this is harassment	Present
Because you're harassing me	Present
You're harassing me	Present
So why are you asking me?	Present
Yeah, you are harassing me	Present
Because now you being pressed	Absent
You upset	Absent
Because this is not a no-show ID state	Present
So now you're just harassing me for no reason	Present
Now you're being just pressed for no fuckin' reason	Present
If they offended	Absent

You escalatin' shit	Absent
This is my ID	Present
He sittin over here actin like a fuckin dickhead	Absent
Percentage Copula Absence	32%

### Video 3 Verbal s-absence

Clause	Subject	Verbal s-absence
Ask the guy that works in there	NP	Present
Do I look like someone who needs money?	Pronoun	Present
And looks just like you	Pronoun	Present
This motherfucker wanna pull up	NP	Absent
Percentage Verbal s-absence		25%

### Video 3 Analysis

In this video, the speaker's percentage of copula absence is higher than his percentage of verbal s-absence. The speaker only omits the copula in the following instances: when he accuses the cop of harassment, accuses him of escalating the encounter, and when he calls the cop a "dickhead" from a distance. The copula is present in all other instances, including some that involve accusing the cop of harassment, his unwillingness to present his ID because they are allegedly in a no-show state, and when he challenges the cop's assumption of perceived threat based on his outward appearance. However, the copula is more prominent when he is accusing the cop of harassment; therefore, he becomes more standard when he speaks about harassment and not having to show the cop his ID and more vernacular when he resorts to name-calling. The

speaker's verbal s-absence is unremarkable in this video because it only occurred once, but, like his copula omission, he only omitted the "s" when he called the cop a bad name.

The speaker in this video, like the others, is positioning himself as an American citizen whose rights are being violated; however, he distinguishes himself from the other speakers when he specifically addresses the ways in which the outward appearance of black men has been used to label them. In his line "I have money in my pocket, I don't need to ask anyone for anything," he positions himself as a black man who works for a living and makes decent money despite what he believes are the cop's implicit biases about black men being unwilling or unable to maintain steady employment. He reaffirms his position on the matter when he utters the line "Do I look like someone that needs money?"

However, it can also be inferred that the speaker already knew what the response to his question was going to be because of his own cognitive biases about white cops. Therefore, when he utters the line "A black male with dreads?," to which the cop responded "That's correct" to the latter, he is openly challenging the assumption that all black men with dreads need to steal money to survive. Further analysis of the line "A black male with dreads?," refers back to the notion that vague descriptions of a black man's outward appearance serve as adequate justifications of police harassment (Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss 2007). He is also more standard when addressing these notions, which suggests that he is trying to distance himself from the cop's negative perception of him and/or black men in general.

#### **Video 4 Context**

In this video, the cop is telling the black man that he was pulled over because he was driving with earbuds in his ears. The black man then proceeds to tell the cop that he is not willing to

allow him to search his car. The black man reiterates to the cop that he did not do anything wrong and that the cop could have let him just written him a citation for earbuds and let him go, but the cop insists on searching his car. The following excerpt is from his interaction with the cop's supervisor. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT-9dhfGIzo>

#### **Video 4 Excerpt:**

**Black Man:** Excuse me, sergeant?

**White Cop:** Yes, sir?

**Black Man:** Can I speak with you for a second, please?

**White Cop:** Yes, you sure can.

**Black Man:** Sure can.

**White Cop:** Hi, son.

**Black Man:** How you doin' today, sergeant Schneider?

**White Cop:** I'm recording audio and video for my protection.

**Black Man:** So am I. Can I just say something, please?

**White Cop:** Yes, sir.

**Black Man:** I'm ridin' by, the gentleman pulls me over, okay? He comes up to my car and said "yo, you can't have uh earphones in your while you're driving"

**White Cop:** That is the state law.

**Black Man:** I said “no problem sir, I apologize. He said “you got license registration, insurance,” gave him everything. 2 minutes he come back, he gives me my registration back and he says uh “would you object to me searching the vehicle” damn right because it’s my United States Constitutional God-given right to object to a search.

**White Cop:** You have a right.

**Black Man:** I don’t have no guns, he don’t smell no drugs. I don’t use drugs. I’m up here to visit a family member. It is not a crime being in Williamsport. I asked for my ID back, he said he wanna call a search dog. I then called 911 because I don’t wanna die today. I didn’t do nothing wrong.

**White Cop:** Why do you think you’re gonna die today?

**Black Man:** Because he looking for a reason...why can’t he just give me my ID back and let me go? I haven’t given him any reason, I wasn’t bein’ hostile or nothin’

**White Cop:** Okay.

#### Video 4 Tables

#### Video 4 Copula Absence

Clause	Copula
All my paper work straightened out	Absent
Now he comin' back	Absent
He pullin' me over for nothing	Absent
Now he tryna justify to the sarge	Absent
Now he back there makin' up some bull crap	Absent
You not searching my car	Absent
You not getting no drug dog	Absent

Everything is legit	Present
Now, da sarge getting' back in da car	Absent
Da sarge drivin' off	Absent
Da sarge pullin up beside me now	Absent
He in da black charger	Absent
How you doin' today?	Absent
Because he lookin' for a reason	Absent
All my paperwork is legit	Present
Why you sayin' back up?	Absent
He gon' try to shoot or somethin'?	Absent
Why is he sayin' back up now?	Present
Why is he sayin' back up?	Present
Yes, you live on Facebook	Absent
Yes, you live on Facebook	Absent
Yes, you're live on Facebook	Present
Yeah, you live on Facebook	Absent
Because he live on Facebook	Absent
He's giving me a ticket now	Present
They killin' black men	Absent
These men are unarmed	Present
Cops are killin'	Present
But black men are being killed	Present
You a sergeant for a reason	Absent
He's an undecover KKK member	Present
He's targetin' black men	Present
He's makin' me feel	Present
Well, you not under arrest	Present
He's recording on Facebook live	Present
Shit is crazy, man	Present
Percentage Copula Absence	58%

### Video 4 Verbal s-absence

Clause	Subject	Verbal s-absence
He keep my license	Pronoun	Absent
Here come his back up now	Pronoun	Absent
So now here come his back up	Pronoun	Absent
Now this look like a whole different township	NP	Absent
The gentleman pulls me over	NP	Present
2 minutes he come back	Pronoun	Absent
He gives me my registration back	Pronoun	Present
Now he wants to deal with the violation of the car	Pronoun	Present
The whole world see this right now	NP	Absent
When he back up	Pronoun	Absent
He make me nervous now	Pronoun	Absent
So it takes a half hour?	Pronoun	Present
He wants to search my car	Pronoun	Present
He come up	Pronoun	Absent
Percentage Verbal s-absence		57%

### Video 4 Analysis

In this video, the speaker's percentages for copula absence and verbal s-absence are within proximity to each other. This speaker's copula absence is most prominent when he is speaking about the following: speaking to his audience about what is going on while the cops are in the background, when he is telling the sergeant the story about the events leading up to him being stopped, and when he is voicing his concerns to the sergeant about how the cop before him mishandled the situation. The instances in which copula is present in the speaker's dialogue is when he is asserting his innocence to the sergeant, specifically about his paperwork in the lines

“everything is legit,” however, there is another case where the speaker omits the copula when utters the same phrase.

Additionally, this speaker adheres to the grammatical constraint of the copula being omitted before the word “gon” in his line “he gon’ try and shoot or something?” The fact that he omits the copula as he expresses his fear of being shot to the sergeant further demonstrates his ability to choose whether or not he wishes to do so. This also suggests that he becomes more vernacular as he narrates his version of the encounter to the sergeant, which implies that he feels more comfortable speaking AAE once he feels as though he has provided the cop with enough information about how the encounter was mishandled.

The speaker’s verbal s-absence in this video is notable because of the instances in which it occurs. The tokens indicate that this speaker usually omits the “s” from the verb when the subject of the sentence is a pronoun as opposed to a noun phrase (NP). Additionally, like he did with copula absence, he omitted the “s” from the verb when he was narrating the series of events to the sergeant. His omission of the “s” from the verb fluctuates as he is talking to the sergeant about the other cop, but this also suggests that the speaker is choosing to omit the “s” as he gets feels more comfortable telling his story to the sergeant.

Similar to that of the speaker in video 1, the speaker in this video is positioning himself as an American citizen whose rights have been violated with the insinuation that there are illegal substances in his car because he was stopped for a traffic violation. He positions himself as a law-abiding citizen when he tells the sergeant his version of the story about how he willingly cooperated with the other cop until he asked to search his vehicle. As evidenced by the lines “All my paperwork straightened out,” and “everything is legit,” the speaker insinuates that he believes the cop only asked him to search his vehicle because he was looking for a reason to arrest him.

The speaker in this video continues to position himself as a law-abiding citizen who is also willing to firmly stand on the US Constitution when he cites it as his reason for being unwilling to undergo a search. He firmly stands on the law in an attempt to convey to the sergeant that other members of his squad have violated his rights without any probable cause. He aggressively tells the sergeant that the cop before him suggested that he might have drugs in his car because he refused to allow them to search his car on the basis of his constitutional rights. He positions himself in such a way that he is also challenging the notion of perceived threat of criminality when he utters the lines “I don’t have no guns, he don’t smell no drugs, I don’t use drugs.” These lines indicate that he is trying to distance himself from that perceived threat while simultaneously positioning himself as a law-abiding citizen.

Further analysis of the lines “I don’t have no guns, he don’t smell no drugs, I don’t use drugs,” suggests that the speaker is demonstrating his knowledge of the pre-established criteria the cops are using to justify asking him to submit to a search of his vehicle (Gelman, Fagan & Kiss 2007). Notice how the speaker ranks these criteria in order of importance. He mentions guns first and drugs second because he knows that if the cops do not find any weapons in the car, the next thing they will be searching for is drugs. In these lines, the speaker reiterates his belief to the sergeant that his subordinates are looking any type of incriminating evidence that can be used against him in the court of law.

### **Video 5 Context**

In this video, the cop is explaining to the black man that the reason why he is being detained is because his license is canceled, but the black man believes otherwise and subtly accuses him of racial profiling. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZpwZujEIJ4>

**Video 5 Excerpt:**

**White Cop:** How you doin' Mr. Sutherfield?

**Black Man:** Yes, sir. What's the problem?

**White Cop:** The reason I stopped is because your license has been canceled.

**Black Man:** Really? And how do you know that?

**White Cop:** Because I ran it whenever I saw you pass me just a minute ago?

**Black Man:** Is that so?

**White Cop:** Do you have your driver's license on you?

**Black Man:** Now, let me ask you somethin'

**White Cop:** Do you have your driver's license on you?

**Black Man:** I wanna ask you somethin' cause I know you lyin' first of all. This is a form of racial profilin' and harassment about DPD because I been filmin' you all and puttin' you on Facebook.

**White Cop:** Do you have your driver's license on you?

**Black Man:** Are you familiar with racial profilin'?

**White Cop:** I'm very familiar with racial profilin,' I know what it is and that's not what this is. What this is is you don't have a license.

**Black Man:** Did you notice me in process of committin' any crime, violatin' any traffic law?

**White Cop:** You're driving without a license.

**Black Man:** And you know that because you just rode past me on da corner about 2 blocks ago, it takes you longer than that to access my information. How you run my information without having my DOB and social?

**White Cop:** Do you have your license?

**Black Man:** Do you have my DOB and social?

**White Cop:** Do you have your license?

**Black Man:** Of course I do.

**White Cop:** I need to see it please.

**Black Man:** If you give me some justification for why you stopped me.

**White Cop:** I need to see your license, please.

**Black Man:** No, do you not.

**White Cop:** Okay.

**Black Man:** Cause you lyin first of all.

**White Cop:** H-here's the deal mkay? Under state law, anytime that you are stopped, and a police officer orders you to give me your-gives us your driver's license, you're required to do that.

**Black Man:** Under state law, you not allowed to use that Lex system uhhhh arbitrarily. You not allowed to run my information without some proper cause, and what is your proper cause for runnin it?

## Video 5 Tables

### Video 5 Copula Absence

Clause	Copula
This is another form of harassment	Present
I know you lying	Absent
This is a form of harassment	Present
This is a from of harassment and racial profiling	Present
Are you familiar with racial profiling?	Present
Cause you lying	Absent
You not allowed to use that	Absent
You not allowed to run my information	Absent
Because I know you lying	Absent
We gon' get to da bottom of dis	Absent
You lying	Absent
And this is what I've been reportin' on	Present
The law enforcement here in ....is conducting	Present
How our taxpayer's money is being spent	Present
You Corporal Connor	Absent
Dis a whole new day	Absent
Dis is September 7 2017	Present
You in cahoots wit his behavior	Present
You still on da force	Absent
You not resolving this issue	Absent
What you doing	Absent
That you lying	Absent
Cause you not a police officer	Absent
You a racist skinhead	Absent
You a racist skinhead	Absent
You a liar	Absent
You deceptive	Absent
This is officer Blake	Present

This is what we can expect from dese people	Present
They harassing	Present
This is what happens	Present
Dese people are not law enforcement	Present
Dese people are dirty cops	Present
They a group of Klansmen	Absent
(They) A group of bullies	Absent
This is not my doing	Present
But we bout to show them	Absent
This is a job we have to do	Present
If you really not a friend	Absent
If you tenderhearted	Absent
If you friends wit da po'lice	Absent
This is not proper policing	Present
This is harassment	Present
This is a form of intimidation	Present
This is a way to seemingly get to back	Present
These people are abusing their power	Present
These people are committing police misconduct	Present
They're responsible for selecting..	Present
And dis is not	Present
What we seein here	Absent
Corporal Connor is also the same Corporal	Present
This is why I can't have respect for him	Present
He still on this police force	Absent
The law is on my side	Present
The truf' is on my side	Present
You da supervisor on duty?	Absent
You a sergeant?	Absent
I know he's lying	Present
My license is valid	Present
There's my driver's license	Present
What he goin' on	Absent

Dis gon' be exposed	Absent
Dis one gon' be on Facebook, YouTube	Absent
Percentage Copula Absence	48%

### Video 5 Verbal s-absence

Clause	Subject	Verbal s-absence
Police cars that the tax payer money provide	NP	Absent
It take longer than that	Pronoun	Absent
It takes longer than that	Pronoun	Present
It take more than 30 seconds	Pronoun	Absent
I know it take longer than 5 seconds	Pronoun	Absent
He know who I am	Pronoun	Absent
Everybody else knows that	Pronoun	Present
Percentage Verbal s-absence		71%

### Video 5 Analysis

The speaker in this video has the highest rate of verbal s-absence out of all 5 speakers, but his copula absence closely resembles that of the other speakers because he usually omits the copula when he is accusing the cop of racial profiling and resorting to name-calling. Although this speaker's tokens for copula absence indicate that he fluctuates between being standard and vernacular when it comes to his utterances about racial profiling and name-calling, the tokens suggest that copula absence is more prominent for the latter. It could also be inferred that the speaker is showing higher rates of copula absence for name-calling because he feels that the only way he can adequately address the racial biases being displayed towards him is by using AAE.

Perhaps AAE, in that context, grants him a level of conviction about his accusations towards white cops that SAE is incapable of doing. Additionally, this speaker adheres to the grammatical constraint of the copula being omitted before the word “gon” 4 times as he is interacting with the cop and with his viewers while the cop is in the background. He is demonstrating his ability to choose whether or not to omit the copula regardless of who he is interacting with at the time.

Aside from the speaker having the highest rates of verbal s-absence, it is also worth noting the instances in which it occurs. This speaker equally omitted the “s” from the verb when the subject of the sentence was either a NP or a pronoun, which suggests that he is choosing when to omit the “s” when he sees fit while interacting with the cop and/or telling his viewers his version of the story when the cops are in the background conversing with each other. In short, it appears this speaker is equally vernacular and standard when he is interacting with the cops regardless of the topic.

The speaker positions himself in two different ways in this video. First, he positions himself as a victim of racial profiling by explicitly stating that that is what he believes the cop is doing to him. He positions himself as someone who knows the state law when he informs the cop that he is not allowed to run his information in his system without proper cause. He reiterates his position on this when he and the cop go back and forth about the information required to do so. As the cops are interacting with each other from a distance and he is speaking to his audience, the speaker utters the line “the law is on my side” to imply once again that he, like the other speakers, knows the law despite the cop’s assumption of ignorance.

Secondly, he positions himself as a law-abiding citizen who is being targeted by the police because he is known for recording his encounters with them and exposing the corruption

of the department. At this point in the conversation, he positions himself in such a way that he acting as an advocate for social justice for black men in these encounters. The lines “This is a job we have to do,” and “This is not proper policing” suggest that he is also positioning himself as a whistleblower of police harassment in that county. Although he spends more time positioning himself as a target for police harassment than racial profiling, he fluctuates between AAE and SAE to make his points known about where black men stand in relation to white cops.

### **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

The speakers in these videos all position themselves as not just American citizens, but law-abiding citizens who are also victims of perceived criminality; however, the results posit that further analysis is needed to discern a clear pattern of copula absence in these encounters. While these men are displaying higher levels of copula absence than verbal *s*-absence in these videos, it is possible that they are doing so because they are establishing a sense of agency within these contexts. Perhaps copula absence is strongly correlated with agency in relation to a variety of other factors such as aggression, legal authority, and knowledge of the law.

With respect to copula absence and positioning, the results posit that copula absence is more salient among black men in their interactions with white cops when they are positioning themselves as American citizens whose rights are being violated. In video 1, the speaker omits the copula when he openly challenges the cop’s perceived threat of criminality, but he does not omit the copula when he expresses his frustrations about how the cop’s willingness to approach him with his gun drawn is more threatening than he is. However, the speaker in video 1 is the only one who positions himself as a father in an attempt to establish some common ground with the cop, but it could also be inferred that he is positioning himself as a father first and a black man second so that he can distance himself from the perceived threat the cop is displaying

towards him. As he is positioning himself to the cop as a father, it suggests that he is subtly challenging the cop's assumption that black men do not or are unwilling to provide for their children (Hamer 2001, Smith et al. 2005).

Apart from Speaker 1, all others position themselves as American citizens who are willing to firmly stand on the law to deny the cop's the information they are asking for. In doing so, they are both showcasing their knowledge of the law in their dialect of preference while simultaneously challenging the social order of the encounter. The speakers in videos 2 and 3 tend to be more standard; whereas the speakers in videos 4 and 5 tend to be more vernacular as they position themselves as such.

The speaker in video 5 also positions himself differently from the others in the sense that he positions himself as a victim of racial profiling when he blatantly accuses the cop of doing just that. While it is apparent that the other speakers are accusing the cops of racial profiling, too, the speaker in video 5 is the only one to verbally make the claim. In a similar fashion, the speaker in video 3 openly accuses the cop of police harassment, which sheds light on the notion that these black men are positioning themselves as American citizens who are victims of racial profiling. It is through positioning themselves as such that these black men are exposing the controversial practices of their local law enforcement officials as it relates to black men (Robé 2016)

The verbal *s*-absence tokens from this study suggest that it is less common for black men to use them in their police interactions, but it is worth noting that the most common occurrences were when the subject of the sentence was a pronoun and when the speaker was narrating the series of events to another cop involved in the encounter. These findings about verbal *s*-absence suggest that these black men are more likely to be more vernacular when they are engaging in

the act of storytelling and more standard when they claim their rights have been violated and/or citing state laws for their own self-protection. However, these findings also suggest that both linguistic variables carry different indexicality, and that there is no reason to expect that every core feature of AAE will function the same way in terms of positionality. Both of these reasons further demonstrate the necessity for further analysis of other core features of AAE within these contexts to truly uncover the discursive goals these black men aim to achieve in their police interactions.

The results posit that all of the speakers are demonstrating their ability to choose between being more vernacular or standard regardless of the topic being discussed. With regard to AAE in these encounters, there were other features of the dialect that can be used for future studies such as multiple negation, consonant cluster reduction (CCR), and past-tense copula leveling. It is possible that these features will display varying degrees of use depending on the context, but each of them will make notable contributions to the sociolinguistic and criminological literatures in the years to come.

While the links between controversial police practices and black men have become more mainstream, there are still other mechanisms by which black men are exposing such corruption. Both Rap and Hip-Hop lyrics have played prominent roles in the sociological literature in regards to how linguistic prejudices have been used to justify the criminalization of black men (Weitzer & Kubrin 2009). The lyrics associated with these two genres of music have been linked to misogyny, the false notion of the hyper-sexual black male, and black men being labeled as brutes. Most importantly, these linguistic prejudices have contributed to the perpetuation of perceived threat criminality, which further demonstrates why black men are more inclined to record their encounters.

The mistreatment of black men by white cops will continue to be a topic of interest in the sociological literature. Prior research has initiated a series of conversations regarding this phenomenon, and, the integration of theoretical frameworks within the academic sphere has helped scholars to become more objective with their approach to such a sensitive topic. The results of this study have demonstrated a few of the ways in which black men adhere to specific linguistic patterns to voice their legal cynicism. The linguistic patterns observed in this study also reveal how black men are responding to the perceived threat of criminality as law-abiding citizens. They are using their dialect of preference to cite their rights as American citizens while attempting to avoid being the next casualty. The ability to discursively analyze the linguistic choices these black men make in these encounters in an attempt to protect themselves from police brutality challenges scholars to ask different kinds of questions about the roles language and identity play within these contexts.

Few studies have successfully integrated sociolinguistic methods into criminology by further examining the relationship between language, black men, and the criminal justice system. The emerging research has also failed to assess the ways in which these black men use language to advocate for the dismantling of the assumption of criminality they are subjected to. In an effort to shift the focus of the conversation about racial disparities within the criminal justice system, this study has examined some of the integral components of the discourse of these encounters in the YouTube videos chosen to better assess the inner-mechanisms of inequality and racial bias by focusing on 2 core features of AAE.

However, these findings suggest that there are other social factors in relation to other features of AAE that may be more prominent in future studies of the data set such as varying speech styles, style of dress, and location. With regard to the shortcomings of this study, there

are several that can be used for future research endeavors. The location of which these videos were filmed is unknown as are the state laws some speakers refer to in their respective videos. Also, it is unknown whether or not any of these men had any outstanding warrants or prior experiences with the law that may have justified the encounter with them to begin with. Additionally, it is unknown if these men have a history of mental illness that may have enabled them to display higher levels of aggression towards the cops they interacted with.

Altogether, these findings have demonstrated the necessity for more of an integrated approach to criminological and sociological methods associated with black men's encounters with white cops. An approach such as this sheds light on the ways in which black men use language to challenge the social order of the criminal justice system in their own individual encounters with their local law enforcement officials. The discursive tools used for this analysis have shed light on in the inner psyche of these black men as they use the discourse to convey their beliefs about the criminal justice system - it has been used to stigmatize and marginalize the black community for generations. The speakers in these videos have taken it upon themselves to use their individual platforms to stand up for their rights and the rights of others who were subjected to harsher forms of punishment in hopes of bringing more awareness to the mistreatment of black men at the hands of the police.

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