

# A Qualitative Multi-Theoretic Analysis of Boyz N The Hood (1991): Exploring The Cinematographic Representation of Crime and Racism

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| ARTICLE INFO                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <p><i>Article history:</i><br/>Date of Submission: 14-10-2024<br/>Date of Acceptance: 26-02-2025<br/>Date of Publication: 30-10-2025</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i><br/>Boyz n the Hood, Systemic Racism, Black Lives Matter, Critical Race Theory, Social Learning Theory, Social Control Theory, Narrative Analysis, African American community</p> | <p>This paper examines the experiences of Bangladeshi female garment workers regarding patriarchy, empowerment, and emotional well-being. While some authors have argued that paid work in the garment sector has improved women's status and liberated them from patriarchal restrictions, others emphasized the double burden of work and household chores and the experiences of violence both in the family and at the workplace. This article argues that while garment work has improved garment workers' economic conditions, they experience anxiety and diminished emotional well-being due to separation from children. Furthermore, this article also argues that while paid employment in the RMG sector has enhanced women's consumption capacity, women still adhere to patriarchal ideologies by relinquishing their income to their husbands and not owning assets in their names. Understanding economic empowerment in relation to patriarchy and emotional well-being is crucial for holistically assessing garment workers' experiences.</p> |

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## Introduction

*Boyz n the Hood* (1991), directed by John Singleton, stands as a notable achievement in Hollywood (American Cinema Industry) for its portrayal of life in South Central Los Angeles that continues to offer powerful social commentary. In the wake of movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) and slogans such as “Abolish the Police” following the tragic death of George Floyd—an African American man killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020—the film’s relevance has taken on renewed significance. That BLM advocates for the rights and safety of Black (a racialized, political and skin colour-based category for specific populations with a mid- to dark brown complexion), highlighting issues such as racial profiling, police brutality, and violence in Black communities. Here, the film’s poster also declares, “*It ain’t no fairy tale,*” which sums up the daily struggles of its characters and themes of victimization, resistance, and survival amidst systemic oppression in the post-1980s ghetto (a disadvantaged urban neighborhood characterized by poverty, narcotics, crime, gang violence, and social isolation).

The study’s primary objectives include examining how the film’s narrative engages with Critical Race Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Social Control Theories, and exploring their relevance to the Black Movement. Instead of assuming a deductive approach where the theories are imposed upon the narrative, the analysis is grounded in an inductive methodology, allowing the film’s elements to shape the application and interpretation of these frameworks. Critical Race Theory views the law as a white male’s advocate, overlooking intersectional identities and criminal acts (Yasso, 2005), as seen in *Boyz n the Hood*. Social Learning Theory, which paints a society’s communicating actions, is reflected in the learned behaviors of the film’s characters, influenced by observation, modeling, and the socio-environmental pressures of their community (Akers, 1998). Social Control Theory adds another layer by focusing on internal and external mechanisms for conforming to societal norms, which are challenged and reshaped by the characters’ circumstances (Bandura, 1977).

Then, this study will also delve into three key themes: Re-establishing Blackness through legal activities (examining attempts within the film to reclaim positive Black identity through constructive actions in the face of oppression), Conformity as a means of safety (exploring how characters navigate and survive their environment, sometimes resorting to conformity as a survival strategy), and Criminogenic space (analysing the film’s portrayal of the community setting itself as a factor influencing behavior). By engaging with these themes, the study aims to show that the film remains relevant to contemporary social and political issues and to critical race studies, particularly in its portrayal of African Americans.

**Plot:** *Boyz n the Hood*, belongs to the Hood film genre, which emerged in the United States during the 1990s. This genre primarily focuses on the experiences of young individuals, particularly African Americans and Latinos, living in low-income, urban neighborhoods. These films highlight issues such as violence, gang activity, and systemic challenges, including racism, economic disparity, and police brutality. In *Boyz n the Hood*, Singleton vividly portrays the harsh realities of life in South Central Los Angeles, emphasizing how systemic oppression, driven by powerful external forces, perpetuates a cycle of dysfunction within the community. The film examines the erosion of crucial social structures, such as the prevalence of single-parent households (often with absent fathers), substandard education, substance abuse, gang violence, and frequent encounters with the criminal justice system, including police, courts, and correctional facilities. Each character navigates these challenges in distinct ways, reflecting diverse responses to their shared environment.

Tre represents how the film believes things should be: he seeks development by education and respect, rather than violence. Tre, the protagonist, appears in a stressful teleconference with his mother, Reva, and his elementary school instructor. While appreciating Tre's intelligence, the teacher expresses concern about his behavior, indicating latent bias. This microaggression, combined with questions about Reva's past, causes Reva to send Tre to live with his father, Furious, in South Central Los Angeles. Reva's decision underscores the obstacles that Black families confront. She emphasizes having a strong father's impact on Tre, even if it means being separated. These moves expose Tre to a different reality – one marked by social and economic hardship, but also one that allows him to develop resilience. The contrast between Tre's upbringing and that of his friends, Ricky and Doughboy, is a key plot point. Tre benefits from Furious' governance, whilst Ricky and Doughboy lack a positive role model. The difference in parental participation has a substantial impact on their life and their future. As the boys navigate the struggles of their environment, their choices and experiences lead them down divergent paths in adulthood.

## Literature Review

The literature on *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) explores its engagement with themes of social justice, inequality, critical race theory, social disorganisation, and media representation. Key insights from the scholarship are summarized as follows:

### *Social Justice and Inequality*

Benjamin (2018) argues that the film critiques distributive justice by highlighting the lack of resources in low-income neighborhoods and the unequal treatment of these areas compared to wealthier ones. The disparity is evident in the criminal justice system, where young Black and Latino men face disproportionate punishment. Nadell

(1995) emphasizes the film's critique of racist capitalism, which exacerbates material and social hardships for the Black community. *Critical Race Theory and Social Disorganisation*. Aligned with critical race theory, Ali (2017) notes that *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) illustrates how systemic racism and limited opportunities push some characters toward crime. Mimura (1996) adds that the film avoids solely blaming individuals for their circumstances, instead emphasizing the structural social and economic challenges they face. Social disorganisation theory further frames this narrative, as the lack of resources and positive influences in the community contributes to the prevalence of crime (Benjamin, 2018). *Media Representation and Counter-Hegemony*. The film challenges stereotypical media portrayals of young Black men as criminals. According to Ali (2017), it employs counter-hegemonic strategies, exposing the root causes of crime, such as poverty and systemic oppression. Mimura (1996) highlights how the film refrains from glorifying violence, focusing instead on the lived experiences of Black men in South Central Los Angeles. However, Laura (1999) critiques the film for overlooking the experiences of young Black women.

### ***Gaps in Existing Literature***

While prior studies provide valuable insights into the film's social commentary, they often neglect its visual storytelling. This analysis seeks to address this gap by integrating theoretical analysis with a detailed exploration of the film's cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, and other visual elements. By focusing on cinematic techniques, this study aims to deepen understanding of how the film communicates its themes of race, conformity, and violence.

### **Research Objectives:**

- Examining the representation of legal activities as a means of re-establishing Blackness.
- Investigating how conformity is depicted as a survival strategy in the hood subculture.
- Analysing the depiction of South-Central L.A. hoods as a criminogenic space.

### **Methodology**

**Research Approach and Paradigm** This study adopts a **qualitative** research approach, grounded in an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm facilitates an in-depth exploration of the film *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), emphasizing subjective interpretations and the socio-cultural implications of its narrative and visual elements. The interpretive framework supports the identification and analysis of themes related to systemic racism and the Black Movement, aligning with the study's objectives.

### **Data Collection**

- **Primary Source Analysis**
  - **Film Viewing and Scene Analysis:** Multiple viewings of *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) ensure a comprehensive understanding of key themes, narrative structures, and cinematic techniques. Specific scenes are selected based on their relevance, and particular attention is given to dialogues, monologues, and visual elements that convey messages about race, identity, and systemic oppression.
- **Secondary Sources**
  - A review of existing scholarly articles, critiques, and interviews contextualize the film within broader cinematic and social discourses.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis integrates theoretical frameworks such as critical race theory and film theory. The following methods guide the analytical process:

- **Thematic Analysis:** Major themes such as racial profiling, economic disparity, and community solidarity are identified and examined. The film's content is coded to uncover recurring motifs and their significance within the narrative. This method helps elucidate how the film portrays systemic racism and its impact on individual and collective experiences.
- **Visual Analysis:** The study dissects cinematography, mise-en-scène, and editing techniques to understand how visual elements reinforce the film's thematic messages. Camera angles, lighting, set design, and shot composition are analysed to explore their role in storytelling. This approach highlights how cinematic tools evoke emotions, symbolize themes, and draw attention to critical issues.

By combining these methods, the study ensures a holistic analysis of *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), bridging theoretical insights with an exploration of its visual and narrative elements.

### **Discussion**

John Singleton's groundbreaking film, *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), utilizes a powerful visual language to explore themes of race, hood subculture, social and economic exploitation, and violence in South Central Los Angeles. Here's an analysis of how cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, camera angles, lighting, set design, and shot composition contribute to the following themes, such as *re-establishing Blackness through legal activities*, *conformity as a survival strategy*, and *the concept of South-Central L.A. hoods as a criminogenic space*.

### ***Re-establishing Blackness: Through Legal Activities in the Film***

The discussion begins by dissecting the portrayal of systemic racism within the film's narrative, particularly through the lens of legal interactions between the characters and law enforcement. The analysis highlights instances of racial bias and discrimination faced by the characters, emphasizing the societal structures that perpetuate racial inequalities.

Throughout the film, the viewers encounter events through which the conflicting relationship of the hood with the dominant legal forces in society is portrayed in symbolic characterizations. It defines categories and illustrates re-establishing (to reiterate) the blackness in the hood as a constant and figured out deviant attitude. Critical Race Theory, Social Control Theory and Social Learning Theory -all excavate that the tension of the hood is instead inflicted upon and is not anything biological or constant throughout history; rather, it is due to the forces of socio-politico-cultural relations existent amongst society.

The law, legal institutions and the hood's relations express a very racially biased communication. After the delay in the appearance of the police when Furious calls for help after having an almost burglary, to convict juvenile Doughboy and Little Chris as an adult criminal for shoplifting and in another, to also interrogate Tre and Ricky, with them not even being acquainted with crime, rather interrogating for a purely racial reason on hunches shows a racial tension between these two agencies (Grislet, 1999). These attitudes of the legal forces express a clear divide towards the acceptance of the racial minority into the greater society and illustrate that the law is well on its path to run "Governance through Crime", with the constant helicopter hovering and the over-criminalization of even a child for shoplifting, establishing the community of a minority as a community who are more prone to being delinquent (Simon, 1997).

As Critical Race Theory puts forward the notion of looking at the problem through the centrality of race and racism, it challenges the liberal eloquence of law and legal orders being able to fix the social problems by turning a blind eye to the lived experiences of the community that goes through the discrimination of bureaucracy and the unthought repetition of the society. It becomes clear with the last statement made by Doughboy that "Either they don't know, don't show, or don't care about what's going on in the hood."

Even though Tre was not an active participant in the feud that sprouted out in the hood, the police officers stopped Tre and Ricky to interrogate them. This expresses an attempt to link the crime with an individual with little to no association with the crime, yet expresses the extensive subordination that the black minority individual lives under in the current status quo (Crenshaw, 1989). As Furious puts it in the conversation

beneath the advert board, the alcohol and gun stores are willingly placed near the community to make sure the community acts the way the desired “black criminals” of the legal system are beneficial for the white males. This induced establishment of blackness is only to aid more severe racial profiling.

Social Learning Theory also elucidates that a usual response to the police racially attending to the community is normalized to be met with, instead, a very victimized response as the system appropriates a sociological web of domination over the individual of colour (Valdes et al., 2002). The community is being recognized for the idea of the stop and frisk as seen through the holding up of Tre, the contacts, rather than becoming merely normal. Doughboy is seen out of jail for the second time after seven years; it is expressed that Doughboy has been going in and out of the prison system regularly. The learning is thus as Sutherland expresses when he explains the variance of the action based on priority and intensity (Sutherland, 1947). It means the crime is done based on priority and on the required intensity needed. Social Learning Theory, however, says, later on, through the Social Structure and Social Learning (SSSL Model), that the social structural causes of crime are rather more relatable to affect the Social Learnings of crime or deviance (Akers and Seller, 2004), which means the inductions of the institutions are present as well as that of the social cohort of the black community to be familiar in the behavior they are thought to have as criminalized individuals.

Social Control Theory posits that even though the police taunt the individuals in the film, Tre, Ricky, or even Furious controls their urges not to create tension within the community, as they all have a stake in the community higher than that of the others in many cases. For instance, Furious has a stake in rearing his son, Tre, and not setting a bad example; Tre has a stake in not disappointing his father and Ricky has to provide for his family. However, Doughboy had minimal stakes in the community and continued to go to jail, even committing murder. These stakes created by society and an individual's entanglement are seen to keep the imposed blackness away (Toby, 1957). The stakes express an individual's feelings towards the cost of exclusion and rejection. The individual control theory explains that the individual commits a crime when they have little to no reason to have been excluded or rejected from society. The positioning of blackness in the community is thus not met with violence due to the factor of stakes.

The overlapping points of the above-discussed theories are that these consider the society itself to have initiated a categorization of the ethnic communities for which they are repulsive, yet that is being masked by enabling more racial discrimination, not improving the system, which causes the communities to have been treated in this manner in the first place.

The limitations of the system are that, even though the imposed features are from the legal representations of the society, there is no feedback from the black community due to this profiling except for one, that is to say, only one single individual, Tre's Father, Furious to stand up and elaborate on the placing of gun and alcohol stores near the community to enunciate violence on the community, later on reducing the price of the homes and buying them. This scripted and simplified form of experience is only taken in by Critical Race Theory, but not Social Learning Theory and Control Theories, for which the limitations persist in not giving a more holistic picture.

In sum, through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the analysis exposes instances of racial bias and discrimination embedded within legal interactions (Gillborn, 2005). By challenging the notion of inherent criminality in Black communities, CRT highlights how social, political, and cultural dynamics contribute to “deviant behavior” rather than innate traits (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Social Control Theory (SCT) further illuminate how marginalized communities adapt to oppressive environments. Individuals internalize societal expectations and norms, shaping their behavior (Bandura, 1977).

***Cinematography and Editing:*** Scenes showcasing positive Black experiences, like Tre excelling in class or Furious working as a mechanic, often use brighter lighting, handheld camerawork for a sense of intimacy, and slower cuts, allowing the audience to appreciate these moments (Singleton, 1991).

**Figure 1: Trey in the Classroom**



Cinematography frequently uses close-ups and medium shots to focus on the characters' faces, emphasizing their emotional journeys and personal struggles. For instance, shots of Furious Styles (played by Laurence Fishburne) often use low angles to present him as a figure of authority and wisdom, underscoring his role in guiding his son, Tre, towards legal and righteous paths.

**Figure 2 Furious in Low Angle Shot as an Idol Black Man**

The careful framing of Furious during his speeches about responsibility and community involvement highlights his efforts to re-establish Blackness through positive, legal activities. Eye-level shots place Black characters on equal footing with others, challenging power dynamics.

**Mise-en-scene:** The mise-en-scene in Furious' home, filled with books and African art, contrasts sharply with the more chaotic and impoverished surroundings of South-Central L.A. This visual distinction emphasizes the theme of re-establishing Blackness through education, culture, and legal means. The set design supports this by creating a space that reflects stability and empowerment

**Figure 3 Furious home is full of books.**

Settings like Furious's well-maintained home or classrooms with diverse students visually counter the stereotypical portrayal of Black neighborhoods.

**Lighting:** Lighting in scenes involving legal activities or moments of wisdom, such as Furious' monologues, is often bright and natural, creating an aura of clarity and hope.

**Figure 4: Shadowed lighting used in scenes depicting crime and violence**



This contrasts with the harsher, more shadowed lighting used in scenes depicting crime and violence, visually reinforcing the theme of positivity associated with legal endeavors.

### ***Conformity as a survival strategy***

The discourse then shifts to examine the role of conformity as a means of safety within the film's narrative. Characters like Tre, his mother, and Ricky navigate a world where conforming to societal norms and values offers a perceived sense of security and stability (Singleton, 1991).

Tre, his parents, Brandi, and Ricky are seen throughout the film conforming to the values, and practices that lead them to safety, apart from their neighborhood's general and rampant violent community. They associate themselves with opportunities that would guarantee a more apparent chance of safety from the economic, social and political (even religious) backlashes they face every day. To extend the scenario, two faces of the neighborhood have been shown here, one of which is a clear proponent of violence, domination, hurried acts, black patriarchy and less conforming to society. The other, however, is one that is clearly opposed to that. That is, of calmness, non-violence, liberal opposition to patriarchy, and, in short, conforming to the values and metrics of the society and state they live in. However, both of them are subjugated to the same responses through the state, society, and forces. This is a matter of responding to the issues. Tre's mother expresses herself in the film where she lives and has her coffee in a crowded white coffee shop, and she has done her master's degree, whereas most of the people in the black community are not even accustomed to receiving the practices of education. Tre as well is seen to conform by joining a store as a part-time worker and goes on to work diligently to get into a university along with his girlfriend. Ricky is a conformist because of his care towards his child and his wife along with his mother, he gathers a mission to support his family by getting into a university through receiving scholarships or even joining the army.

Critical Race Theory proposes that these conformities are a reaction that is explicitly and forcefully demanded by the laws and the legal adjudicators of the state. These laws and legal exponents are only established upon the construction, which benefits white male power relations as being in an advantageous position within the framework of the laws and their expressions. This is extrinsic to the cause of the power construction through politics, indistinguishable from politics (MacDonald, 1995).

For instance, Tre's mother is asked whether or not she has a job in response to Tre's violence in class which is analogous to the idea of Tre's family being financially insolvent, making them susceptible to violence, the question is rather countered with Tre's mother asserting that she has conformed to the practices of society, and she is doing her masters. Tre, Ricky and Furious are all victims of racial profiling and saddening treatment from the legal forces, with no regard to their intersectionality. Intersectionality here prescribes that they all hold various social relations in society, and in this case, most of which suggest conformity. In Tre's case, his parents, along with Brandi, are suggestive of this. Nevertheless, they are all victims of the White Man's law. (Valdes et al., 2002)

Social Learning Theory tells us that conformity is a product of the learned experiences of the individuals in the film. The individuals are expressing this response of conformity as the means to an end of subordination (Sutherland, 1947). The first five characteristics of the Social Learning Theory, as quoted by Sutherland, tell us that these attributes are learned through interactions and specific techniques. Also, this coincides with the idea of imitation, as expressed by Ackers and Jenson (2010). This idea of imitation is seen through the characters of Tre, Ricky and Brandi. However, Tre's parents are conforming to the system due to their varied idea of opportunity cost, as discussed by Sutherland, where delinquency is a result of conditions being favorable or unfavorable to the law. With the favorability to be indicted more, this is also true for the idea of association, which leads to understanding of being a conformist or a rebel, as Tre's father indicates of his time when he became a father, his family association conforms more to the idea (Akers, 1998).

Social Control Theory, however, talks of these instances following rules. The case of Tre's parents matches the idea of Emile Durkheim, where it is suggested that society itself is socially controlling (Durkheim, 1938). For the cases of Tre, Brandi and Ricky, it is their family which has shown them to conform as the family instils morals and addresses more social control over them (Reiss, 1951). In the case of Brandi, the stake is also seen when she wishes to conform to her religion to not have a sexual relationship with Tre, yet later on, she detaches, which can be understood as the idea of social disorganisation as Shaw and McKay had suggested (1929). Ricky conforms to the norms of society, while Doughboy does not, even though they have socio-political conditions yet, their mother treats them differently, showing a varied pressure point in play to be of influence.

The overlapping similarities are seen in expressions, all similar to recognizing the conformity as prescribed by the social and political relations in society.

The limitation, however, is that Doughboy, who has a minor stake in society and its institutions as Toby suggested, remains a subject of curious study for not conforming, as his intersectionality even disengages from the stakes and illustrates that he too does not conform due to the same social relations yet different historical underpinnings (Toby, 1957).

CRT contextualizes this conformity within the framework of systemic oppression. Adherence to dominant cultural standards is often enforced through legal and social mechanisms that privilege white norms (Gillborn, 2005). SLT emphasizes the learned nature of conformity, highlighting how individuals internalize societal expectations based on their social interactions and experiences (Bandura, 1977). Control Theory (CT) adds another layer of analysis, exploring the influence of social structures and community organisations in regulating behavior. This framework emphasizes the complex interplay between individual agency and societal control (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1993).

**Lighting:** Scenes depicting conformity often have a flat, sterile quality. School hallways and sterile classrooms are brightly lit, emphasizing the pressure to conform (Singleton, 1991).

**Set Design:** Characters like Ricky's mother navigating a bureaucratic system are confined within cramped, cluttered offices, highlighting the limitations placed upon them.

**Figure 5: Trey's Mother**



**Shot Composition:** Symmetrical framing in certain scenes suggests a desire for order and control, reflecting the characters' need to conform for safety.

**Camera Angles and Movement:** The film uses various camera angles and movements to convey the pressures of conformity. For instance, high-angle shots are often employed to depict the vulnerability of young characters like Tre and Ricky. These shots illustrate how conforming to societal expectations and peer pressures is often a strategy for survival in their environment.

**Editing:** Editing plays a critical role in illustrating conformity. Quick cuts between scenes of normal daily activities and sudden violence or police presence create a sense of unpredictability and tension. This editing technique underscores the idea that conformity, whether to peer groups or societal expectations, is a necessary strategy to navigate the dangerous and unstable environment.

**Mise-en-scene:** Costumes and props also reflect conformity. Characters like Doughboy (played by Ice Cube) wear gang-affiliated clothing, indicating their conformity to gang culture as a means of protection and identity. In contrast, Tre's more conservative attire represents his attempt to conform to a different, more socially acceptable set of norms promoted by his father.

**Figure 6: Doughboy (played by Ice Cube) wears gang-affiliated clothing**



**Figure 7: Trey is more socially acceptable in his conservative attire**



***Hood as the “Criminogenic Space” of South-Central L.A.***

Finally, the analysis examines the concept of the “criminogenic space” depicted in the film, particularly within the context of South-Central Los Angeles. *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) portrays the community as a site of systemic violence, where residents navigate constant threats from both law enforcement agencies and internal conflicts (Singleton, 1991).

The film ends with a song which illustrates the idea of surviving in the South- Central community of Los Angeles. The song explicitly talks of the struggles that the community members go through on a daily basis. It also talks of police and gang violence, racial segregation by the state system itself, and the distrust amongst the communities within the community. The space of community is; to say, the space identified as a “criminogenic space” by the police and the community. The lyrics of the song speak of different attributes in the community, and the film complements these notions through and through by portraying the hood and its actors in their rawest form. Tre, Doughboy, Ricky, Little Chris, Brandi, Furious, and Tre’s Mother are all victims of expressing the attitude of the greater community that infuses specific actions as problematic for them only due to the colour of their skin. This idea of criminalizing the actors in space is also giving a name to space. The song establishes the normalcy of firing a gun as a day-to-day activity to save oneself from the hurdles of the community. These learnings, as Ice Cube announces, are not to be learnt through

books. Getting a 9mm gun and putting it in the glove compartment of the car is one that needs to be done due to the police treating the community members as beasts, while the police perform it is a due job when it serves the white. It criminalizes the black community before it even does anything, and the community's representatives have to put their hands on the steering wheel if they want to stay alive. The song also talks about not trusting anybody and not believing anything that we see on TV, as Doughboy resonates as well when Ricky dies and speaks, saying none of the media covered his brother's death, also not getting caught up, as it is not only the police who kill. It is also the rival gangs who might end up doing the same. Calling the hood a concrete Vietnam, even the strong do not survive here easily due to the community facing troubles throughout all spheres of activity.

At the very beginning of the film, the gunshot sounds, and two quotations perfectly describe the constant violence in the ghetto by quoting "One out of every twenty-one Black American Males will be murdered in their lifetime", followed by "most will die at the hands of another black male". Here, the ecology of control is clearly evident, arguing that crime is neither randomly nor uniformly distributed throughout the city.

Evidence of violence within the black community is also demonstrated by the two scenes where little boys and girls visit the murder spots and when Tre, Doughboy, Ricky and other boys without any hesitation or not providing any expression (discomfort or fear, which is very normal for children at that age) after observing the dead body and blood, but only holding their nose for bad smell. These scenes are closely relevant to the point Shaw & McKay highlighted in the ecology of control theory that different ethnic groups seemingly conform to the level of crime and delinquency that characterize their neighborhood. Shaw & McKay (1929) also explain that rates of neighborhood crime are relatively stable over time, as Tre several times in the film finds himself at this kind of murder spot.

Ecology of control theory describes that neighborhoods characterized by high crime and delinquency also have high rates of a host of other social ills (Shaw & McKay, 1929) which is very relevant in explaining the ghetto subculture shown in the film, for example- language (use of slangs), clothing style, eating habit, divorce and early marriage, alcohol and substance abuse, illiteracy, unemployment, violence, gang affiliations. In this subculture, the power of social institutions is weakened over the members and therefore, individuals are free from control internally and externally, as well as directly and indirectly. This freedom from control actually results in crime and delinquency, which is clearly presented in the film.

Critical Race Theory talks of intersectionality as a significant reason for which crimes take place and criminals are made (Yasso, 2005). Hyper criminalization of the

community is taking place to displace the community members only to prevail over the laws of the land in the hood, whereas the hood faces the scarcity of basic amenities not being provided to them only for racial segregation (Victor, 2006).

Social Learning Theory elaborates that the expressions of criminal behavior can also be the same as non-criminal behavior. The reason is that the person holds or has to hold an association in their life. As disrupted by the scarcity of resources, the community is faced with a clear embargo on living a peaceful and tranquil life, resulting in massive feuds. That feud normalized over the day and day is learned and is in interaction as the song implicates, saying that the hood acts are not to be learnt from the book (Sutherland, 1947). To survive, it makes the norm violent, that is, the mirroring of the other in oneself (Ackers & Sellers, 2004). The results can be seen with Doughboy learning deviance with the rugby game played with Ricky's ball by another group of boys who did not vacillate to assault (verbally and physically) those kids and also committing shoplifting. This can also be seen in the community as it always requires a two-team effort later on in the hood, one being a performative team and the other being an audience. The random show-up of the car is an example of this, the share of violence that led to Ricky's death (Goffman, 1959). The audience learned from the performance as the ones who were playing the games were the performers, and Doughboy was merely an audience replicating another deviance further on. The song tells viewers of this similarity too, with carrying a gun and alcohol all the time as Doughboy carries with the others doing the same as well.

Social Control Theory talks of the more robust community organisations in society, the less there is a chance of a crime taking place. To elaborate, there is an ecology of control that is needed in the community to persist in controlling the exhibition of crime. However, it is not persistently present in the community alongside there not being a uniform action of the existing social organisations in the community. The police consider blacks as beasts, for example, talking to Furious saying, if he had died, the police would have one less nigger to worry about, meaning a racial reason for crime, which excludes the factors that compel them to be associated with the crime, even in the context, Furious of rather a victim (Simon, 1997). This becomes more severe with the entire society becoming a place of social control with the constantly excessive policing and lack of association being enabled with the members of society, for example, Doughboy, who has fewer stakes in society and is constantly taken to jail for his activities. The song talks of how even the strongest cannot survive in the hood, the reason being that, without the advocacy of self-safety by carrying a gun, as society itself is compelling the members to be controlled (Durkheim, 1938; Shaw & McKay, 1929). That is, the criminogenic space itself is the reason for the control that propagates the violence in the first place in the community.

There are no limitations of the theories to explain the phenomenon of the criminogenic space, and multiple overlapping instances are the society and its organisations being the creators of the form of insecurity being preached and later on, looked for to be solved in the society. The theories explain the intersectional views necessary to explain the victimization and criminalization of the space of the community.

CRT underscores the intersectional nature of crime and victimization, emphasizing how racial discrimination and socioeconomic disadvantage create a breeding ground for violence (Crenshaw, 1989). SLT highlights the role of learned behaviors and social interactions in perpetuating criminality within marginalized communities (Bandura, 1977). SCT further explores the influence of societal organisations and structures in regulating behavior within these environments. A lack of cohesive community control mechanisms can exacerbate the cycle of violence and insecurity (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1993).

**Figure 8: Darren and Criss went to the juvenile**



Overall, the discussion section synthesizes these interpretative insights, offering a comprehensive analysis of the film's portrayal of systemic racism, conformity, and criminogenic spaces within the framework of critical race theory, social learning theory, and social control theory. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study unpacks the complex socio-cultural dynamics depicted in *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), shedding light on the film's enduring relevance in contemporary discourse on race and justice.

**Lighting:** Dim lighting and harsh shadows create a sense of unease and danger in gang-controlled areas. Streetlights cast long, menacing shadows, amplifying the threat of violence (Singleton, 1991). The lighting in South Central L.A. scenes often uses natural light with stark contrasts, creating a gritty and realistic aesthetic. Night scenes are particularly telling, with dim, often insufficient street lighting that casts long shadows, symbolizing the omnipresent threat of violence and crime.

**Camera Angles:** Low-angle shots looking up at imposing buildings create a sense of entrapment and limited escape routes within the community. Wide shots and long takes are used to establish the setting of South-Central L.A., presenting it as a vast, desolate, and often hostile environment. The use of panoramic views of the neighborhood reveals its physical and social isolation, contributing to its depiction as a criminogenic space.

**Editing:** Fast-paced cuts and jump cuts during gang confrontations heighten the tension and chaos of these situations. The editing rhythm in the film's depiction of South-Central L.A. varies from slow-paced during moments of reflection and character development to rapid and jarring during violent confrontations. This editing choice emphasizes the erratic and dangerous nature of the environment, reinforcing the concept of it as a criminogenic space.

**Set Design and Mise-en-scene:** The set design of South-Central L.A. includes abandoned buildings, graffiti, and heavily policed streets, all of which contribute to the portrayal of the area as inherently criminogenic. The mise-en-scene incorporates these elements to build a realistic and immersive environment that highlights the socio-economic challenges faced by its residents.

These visual choices not only depict the themes but also evoke emotional responses in the audience. The emphasis on well-lit spaces during positive Black experiences fosters a sense of pride and accomplishment. Conversely, the darkness and confinement associated with conformity and the "criminogenic space" create feelings of anxiety and claustrophobia. Singleton goes beyond simply depicting these realities. For instance, a scene where Tre excels in class is intercut with one of Ricky and Doughboy causing trouble. This creates a parallel narrative, highlighting the divergent paths available to young Black men within the same environment. So, John Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) employs a rich tapestry of cinematographic techniques, mise-en-scene, editing, camera angles, lighting, set design, and shot composition to explore the complexities of life in South Central L.A. The film challenges stereotypes, critiques conformity as a survival strategy, and underscores the oppressive nature of the "criminogenic space" faced by Black communities. By synthesizing these visual and narrative elements, the film presents a powerful social commentary on systemic racism and the fight for a better future. This multifaceted visual language continues to resonate with audiences today, sparking important conversations about race, justice, and resilience within American society.

## Conclusion

The exploration of *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) through criminological and film theories offers a layered understanding of its socio-cultural impact. This study illustrates how

frameworks like social learning theory, social control theory, and critical race theory provide valuable insights into the behaviors and dynamics portrayed in the film. This study also critically examines the representation of legal activities as a means of re-establishing Blackness, offering insight into how characters attempt to reclaim their identities and dignity amidst systemic oppression. Furthermore, the analysis highlights how conformity emerges as a survival strategy within the hood subculture, reflecting the tension between individual agency and societal constraints. The depiction of South-Central L.A. as a criminogenic space underscores the systemic inequalities and structural barriers that perpetuate cycles of poverty, violence, and marginalization. By portraying the hood as more than a physical space—a socio-political construct shaped by historical and economic forces—the film challenges audiences to interrogate the root causes of crime and its broader societal implications.

By combining textual analysis with visual interpretation, this study bridges the gap between cinematic representation and social discourse. The film emerges as a profound reflection of historical injustices and ongoing struggles faced by marginalized communities, highlighting systemic issues such as racial profiling, economic disparity, and social disorganisation.

The critical and commercial success of *Boyz n the Hood* emphasizes its transformative impact on both the film industry and societal perceptions. By advocating for diverse storytelling, the film broadened the scope of Hollywood narratives and inspired subsequent works to tackle similar issues. As Ed Guerrero notes in *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (1993), films like *Boyz n the Hood* play a pivotal role in challenging stereotypes and advocating for greater representation of Black realities in America.

However, the analysis is not exhaustive; acknowledging the limitations of these frameworks and remaining open to alternative perspectives is crucial for a comprehensive understanding. While these theories shed light on systemic inequality, other perspectives might offer additional depth to the analysis of the film's themes.

The enduring relevance of *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) is particularly evident in light of contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, which underscore the persistent challenges of systemic racism. The film's narrative compels audiences to reflect on the socio-political and economic structures that perpetuate inequality while also portraying the resilience of impacted communities. Such themes resonate strongly in today's context, urging critical engagement with issues of racial injustice and societal reform.

Ultimately, *Boyz n the Hood* transcends its cinematic achievements to serve as a catalyst for meaningful discourse and social change. It reminds viewers of the potential

of storytelling to illuminate human experience and inspire action, standing as both a mirror to societal struggles and a beacon of hope for a more inclusive and equitable future.

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