The
Unscripted
Series

About

There are scripts running all the time in our society that tell us how to act, what to say, what's right and what isn't. Sociologists describe these scripts as social norms or mores which determine what is acceptable or unacceptable in any given culture. These norms are often represented in different types of social contracts. Some contracts are very formal in that they spell out explicit expectations and rules that govern the expectations and acceptable actions of stakeholders or citizens (E.g. Laws or legal documents). Other scripts like "the status quo" are much more informal and sometimes even go unspoken. Make no mistake, however, the status quo is still a very powerfully force in creating, maintaining and perpetuating a state of affairs that governs how individuals and groups relate to each other. In the sections below, we hope to help you reconsider what is "normal" and "acceptable". We know that we will only scratch the surface, but if we can help you become a little more conscious of how bias or prejudice operates in our social contracts that influence our expectations and behaviors we will have taken a significant step toward unpacking the power of scripts in our society.

What?

For the purposes of this project, our focus rests on how students of color are exposed to the role of police within the justice system. As the civil arm of the government to enforce laws and keep public order and safety, the police are the subject of many formative scripts in our communities. For instance, from a very early age children mimicking concepts of good and bad as they play games like "cops and robbers". Our media is saturated with graphic depictions of justice and violence served on TV and film screens. Undeniably children and youth of color are barraged with scripts about the police but they need adult mentors and teachers to help them make sense of what they are experiencing. To dig deeper, we must consider developmentally appropriate ways to prepare for navigating different types of encounters with the police. In order to do this, communities must question how justice, and its enforcement, is worked out in neighborhoods. Perhaps new initiatives or partnerships are needed to ensure safer interactions with police - especially for communities of color.

So What?

In communities across the country, racial bias and prejudice is created, maintained and perpetuated through powerful scripts that are deployed in the media. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center survey, the majority of black and white Americans believe that black people are treated less fairly than whites in dealing with the police and the criminal justice system as a whole. Throughout our country's history, shared racial biases and prejudices have morph into powerful ideologies that have directly affected our understandings of enforcing justice and policing. The collective impact that racial profiling has had over the years to skewing justice in America can't be understated. Of particular concern is the increasingly blurred line between police and military action. While both systems are weaponized the goals, tactics and outcomes ought to significantly differ between the police and the military. However, this is not always apparent. One powerful example can be found in the 1985 domestic airstrike order against a Black liberation group by the Philadelphia police that killed eleven people, including five children and burned an entire Philadelphia neighborhood reducing 61 homes to ashes and displacing 250 residents. Over 500 police officers took part in the operation against the MOVE - a Black Liberation group that occupied the building the bomb was dropped on. Today, scenes of police SWOT teams in riot gear with military grade weapons continue to circulate through the media as protestors take to the streets to protest racial inequities and police brutality. We are not immune from this exposure and need safe places in our communities to pose questions and share emotions about what we are experiencing- especially if we have had negative encounters with the police in the past. Citizens must understand that it is considered illegal to resist or fight the orders of a police officer. If negative emotions get the better of us when we encounter the police, it could have disastrious consequences. Communities must ensure that accountability measures and adequate protections for those who have been mistreated or brutalized by law enforcement are in place.

Now What?

Here are some additional resources for consideration and discussion:

- "The day police bombed a city street: can scars of 1985 Move atrocity be healed?" https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/10/move-1985-bombing-reconciliation-philadelphia
- Pew Research Center "10 things we know about race and policing in the U.S.": https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/03/10-things-we-know-about-race-and-policing-in-the-u-s/
- Boston Globe article, "The statistical paradox of police killings" by By Aubrey Clayton: https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/11/opinion/statistical-paradox-police-killings/
- "What Exposes African Americans to Police Violence?" by Devon W. Corbato and Patrick Rock: https://harvardcrcl.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2009/06/HLC104_crop.pdf
- "The military and the police aren't the same thing": https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/letters/ct-the-military-and-the-police-arent-the-same-thing-20150729-story.html
- "Get Home Alive: Black Families Grapple With Teaching Kids How to De-Escalate Police Encounters" https://www.insideedition.com/get-home-alive-black-families-grapple-with-teaching-kids-how-to-de-escalate-police-encounters-60700
- Campaign Zero - Resources for those seeking policy solutions: https://www.joincampaignzero.org/