

**The Representations of Race and Ethnicity on *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*:  
An Analysis of the Portrayal of New York City on Crime and Police Drama**

Melissa Koski  
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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the study is to look at the representations of race in the popular television genre, the crime drama. An analysis of episodes of Law & Order and NYPD Blue was utilized to discover what portrayals the show contains of ethnicity in New York City, with an emphasis on the depictions of the victim of the crime, the perpetrator, and the criminal justice personnel. Along with these variables, theoretical analysis was taken into consideration. Results showed that although whites make up the majority of the characters on the programs, blacks and Hispanics do not always portray lesser roles. Blacks portrayed various high-powered roles, such as district attorney and other law enforcement officials, as did Hispanics to a lesser extent. When blacks were portrayed, however, they were most likely shown in a negative light. In terms of other races, Native Americans and Asians were nearly nonexistent on the episodes watched. Still, there were some qualifications to this argument, indicating that this area needs further study.*

## INTRODUCTION

### *Background*

The use of television in the United States suggests that it is an important and significant source of information for those who are watching. For many years, Americans have been concerned with the effects of television's images on society. It is important to determine these effects and decode these images. Television is the most pervasive media in our society. Each day, the average family has its television on for seven hours (Carlson & Trichtinger, 2001). Television is the most popular and widely used communication medium (Althiede & Snow, 1979; Gerbner & Gross, 1980; Firestone 1993; Livingstone 1996; Soulliere & Windsor, 2003) and is also a "window to the world; the one medium that most Americans have in common" (Carlson & Trichtinger, 2001, p. 254). "Television provides, perhaps for the first time since preindustrial religion, a daily ritual that elites share with many other publics. The heart of the analogy of television and religion, and the similarity of their social functions, lies in the continual repetition of patterns that serve to define the world and legitimize social order" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994, p. 194). We cannot experience all of reality, and thus we experience much of it through television (Butler, 2002). "People are born into a symbolic environment with television as its mainstream. Children begin viewing several years before they begin reading, as well as before they can even talk. Television viewing both shapes and is a stable part of lifestyles and outlooks. It links the individual to a larger synthetic world, a world of television's own making" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994, pp. 197-198). As former Commissioner of the FCC

Nicholas Johnson said, “all television is educational television” (Huston, et al, 1992). Although television is a form of entertainment, it carries important messages that can influence attitudes, actions, and the values of its viewers. Television is undoubtedly one of the most influential sources of information in our country.

Television plays various roles in society besides transmitting information. For example, television has been said to play an agenda-setting role for society (Butler, 2002). Those who control the media not only have the ability to manipulate the events that are depicted, but they also have the ability to choose what is portrayed. By ignoring some topics and emphasizing others, the media influences the issues that are important to the public (Surette, 1998). Thus, what we are watching on television is not a complete depiction of reality; instead, it is what the media deems as important (Butler, 2002). The media sets the agenda, so to speak, of what we will learn, and “we have no choice but to rely on its varying and incomplete representation in the media” (Butler, 2002, p. 61).

The social construction of reality hypothesis is a communication theory that is important to understand when looking at racial representations on crime drama. The social constructionist perspective assumes that our reality is what we derive from symbols and images through social interactions (Herd-Rapp, 2003). Television, with its many character portrayals and story lines, becomes a social interaction. Our social construction of the world becomes based partly on our past observations and experiences, and partly on the information we receive from mass media, such as television (Ogles, 1987). People then act in accordance with this construction of the world (Surette, 1998). “Heavy exposure to this symbolic world may eventually make the televised images

appear to be the authentic state of human affairs” (Bandura, as cited in Bryant & Zillmann, 2002, p. 137). People use the information they receive from the media to create a view of the world. Television, therefore, can help to construct the reality in which we live, shaping our beliefs, views, and fears in the world (Herd-Rapp, 2003). “Indeed, many of the shared misconceptions about occupational pursuits, ethnic groups, minorities, the elderly, social and sex roles, and other aspects of life are at least partly cultivated through symbolic modeling of stereotypes” (Bandura, as cited in Bryant & Zillmann, 2002, p. 138). Television’s particularly strong influence on children may be explained by this theory. Children are likely to learn from what they watch, and they will imitate what they believe to be rewarding (Austin & Meili, 1994). “The media may act as a special form of peer influence on norm setting and expectancies, given that children by middle childhood increasingly look to the media for information about self and society” (Greenberg, 1974; Van der Voort, 1986, as cited in Austin & Johnson, 1997, p. 324).

As previously stated, much research has been done investigating the effects of television on an audience. One of the most important effects of television is what is now called the cultivation effect, as studied by George Gerbner. Gerbner was one of the first individuals to investigate the linking of violence with television (Fiske and Hartley, 1996). In the 1970s, Gerbner conducted some of the most famous studies investigating violence and crime on television. Using content analyses for a series of studies, he concluded that television portrayed a much more dangerous, violent world than exists in real life. Because of this, the audience develops a “mistrust, cynicism, alienation and

perceptions of higher than average levels of threat of crime in society” (Surette, 1990, as cited in Dowler, 2003). Gerbner culminated his studies in what he called the cultivation theory: The symbolic environment of television provides indirect experiences that we use, along with our direct experiences in cultivating our social beliefs. The media cultivates and spreads a certain false image of reality that is misshapen, inaccurate, and more violent (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, in Heath & Petraitis, 1987). “The repetitive ‘lesions’ we learn from television, beginning with infancy, are likely to become the basis for a broader worldview, making television a significant source of general values, ideologies, and perspectives as well as specific assumptions, beliefs, and images” (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994, in Morgan, 2002, p. 194). Viewers’ expectations of reality are often due to television’s “mediated reality” that “may be every bit as credible a foundation for belief and even behavior” (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 147). The media affects some viewers more than others, but everyone is somehow affected by the media’s representations of reality. Over time, the repetitive themes and content of the media begin to regiment the perspectives and viewpoints of the public. Audiences begin to think like the media, and eventually, to think alike (Surette, 1998).

All individuals, according to Gerbner, are affected by television’s presentation of reality.

Television is different from other media also in its centralized mass production of a coherent set of images and messages produced for total populations, and in its relatively nonselective, almost ritualistic use by most viewers...the historically new and distinct consequences of living with television [are] the cultivation of shared conceptions of reality among otherwise diverse publics. (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994, as cited in Morgan, 2002, p. 194)

To Gerbner, everyone of all races lives in a symbolic environment that provides direction and meaning to our actions and thoughts. Cultivation is simply the outcome of our interactions with this symbolic environment (Morgan, 2002). Both minorities and non-minorities watching the television program may believe the stereotypes that are shown on crime drama. If a member of a minority group sees inaccurate portrayals on television, he may begin to perceive himself in light of this stereotype instead of seeing himself for his personal attributes. This in turn only leads to self-perpetuation of the stereotype shown on television (Mastro, 2003).

Gerbner also discovered that the more violence found on television and the more integral the role of the violence is in the story line, the more likely it is to cause in viewers a fear of crime or violence. Television is incredibly violent, with at least five acts of physical violence occurring per hour, involving half of fall major television characters (Casey et al., 2002). From his work studying the cultivation effect, Gerbner created his Mean World Syndrome (Gerbner, et al., 1994, in Shrum & Bischak, 2001). Because television's portrayals are abnormally violent, viewers, he said, tend to believe that the world is much more violent, mean, and cruel than it truly is. Heavy viewers of television are more likely to believe in this mean, violent world that is portrayed. For them, television creates a "mean world" of which they are afraid and cynical (Gerbner, et al., 1994, in Shrum & Bischak, 2001).

If television truly does create this mean world, as Gerbner suggests, is this true with television shows in all settings? More specifically, how is the mean world portrayed in the city, and what roles do different races play within this mean city? Who tends to

commit these crimes and what race tries and convicts the criminals? Who is the “bad guy” we fear so much and who is the “good guy” that saves the day? A prime goal of this research is exploring depictions of race especially on crime programs based in New York City.

### *The City*

The representations of the city on television are numerous and it is an important rhetorical artifact that seeks to be understood more deeply. “Mankind’s greatest creation has always been its cities. They represent the ultimate handiwork of our imagination as a species, testifying to our ability to reshape the natural environment in the most profound and lasting ways” (Kotkin, 2005, p. xx). During the Middle Ages, city life meant freedom as there was removal from the usual rural obligations to one’s lord and community (Kotkin, 2005). The city was seen as a sacred place, dominated by religious structures, such as temples, cathedrals, mosques, and pyramids (Kotkin, 2005). In the beginning, the city was home to only few individuals, specifically those generated most of the world’s art, religions, culture, commerce, and technology (Kotkin, 2005).

In the United States, cities have traditionally been a sign of the ultimate social achievement (Rapping, 2003). A city signifies all that we as Americans stand for, from its tall buildings signifying success, to the many races and cultures that reside there. The immense buildings and “evocative cultural structures” (Kotkin, 2005, p. xxi) help to recreate the sacred place that the city once was seen as. “Such sights inspire a sense of civic patriotism or awe, albeit without the comforting suggestion of divine guidance”

(Kotkin, 2005, p. xxii). “The city is above all the concrete embodiment of the achievements of industrial civilization...The ‘state of the city’ is, in a sense, the ‘tide-mark’ of civilization, it embodies our civilization and the degree to which we are successful in maintaining that level of achievement” (Hall et al., 1978, as cited in Sparks, 1992, p. 145).

Besides the legacy and greatness that embody a city, on television the city is often the location of crime-drama and cop shows (Sparks, 1992). Whether on television fictional programming, on news shows, or in novels, “American cities...have long provided especially fertile, if not archetypal, settings for crime stories” (Sparks, 1992, p. 125). The images of the city in these crime stories can clash with the image of the city as a symbol of glory, freedom and success. “While it is still worth the risk of life and limb to protect, it is nonetheless a rather shady, tainted arena” (Rapping, 2003, p. 50). Because of all that a city stands for, the violence and danger as shown on cities can have unsettling effects on its viewers.

### *New York City*

New York City is one of the cities most portrayed on television (Rapping, 2003). Partially perhaps because of it is a “paradigm of modernity”, or perhaps because it is “the metropolis of metropolises” (Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2003, p. 166). According to Tallack, New York City started to become this representative of American modernity in 1898 when the five boroughs (Staten Island, Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn) combined to create one city: New York City (as cited in Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2003). With its

consolidation, New York City increased its population 126 percent in just ten years, becoming the largest American city (Ellis, 1966). Adding to its immense population, at the same time the city was experiencing a greater amount of immigration than any other city in history has ever witnessed (Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2003). Its population was greater than one million, with more than 42% of its inhabitants being foreign born (Kotkin, 2005).

Shortly thereafter, New York emerged as the city and symbol we know it today, with the growth of its skyscrapers and monumental structures, such as the Brooklyn Bridge, Statue of Liberty, Times Square, and Empire State Building. Its subway system, starting in 1904, soon became the “most heavily traveled passenger railroad in the world” (Ellis, 1966, p. 467). With its structures and various well-known places, New York City has been called “a Baudelairean forest of symbols conceived and executed not merely to serve immediate economic and political needs” but as a “symbolic action” to “demonstrate to the whole world what modern men can build and how modern life can be imagined and lived” (Berman in Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2003, 166). As with all cities, it has a sacred mysticism that accompanies it:

The city is like poetry: it compresses all life, all races and breeds, into a small island and adds music and the accompaniment of internal engines. The island of Manhattan is without a doubt the greatest human concentration on earth, the poem whose magic is comprehensible to millions of permanent residents but whose full meaning with always remain illusive. (White, 1949, as stated in Jackson and Dunbar, 2002, p. 700)

Throughout the years, New York City has become a popular image on television and other forms media. It is important to look at the images of New York City, because

first, as a city it signifies an important part of the American culture, including success and growth (Fitzmaurice, 2003). However, it also can also be portrayed in a very different manner. Besides the glorifications we see so often, New York City is also shown to be a center of organized crime and violence. Corruption, gangs, and the loss of innocence in the large city is often portrayed (Clapp, 1984). This dangerous image of New York City is not a new idea. In the early 1900s, Will Rogers was quoted in the *Reader's Digest* as stating:

Hardly a day goes by...that some innocent bystander ain't shot in New York City. All you got to do is be innocent and stand by and they're gonna shoot you. The other day, there was four people shot in one day—four innocent people – in New York City. Amazing. It's kind of hard to *find* four innocent people in New York. That's why a policeman don't have to aim. He just shoots anywhere. Wherever he hits, that's the right one. (Clapp, 1984, p. 204)

Over the years, countless articles and commentaries have been published about the danger of living in such a city. The 1954 New York Police Commissioner Francis Adams once stated:

Before this hot August Sunday is over one of us in this city will have been murdered. Another of us will have died as the result of criminal negligence. Twenty-seven of our people will have been feloniously assaulted. Three women will have been raped. One hundred and forty of our homes and businesses will have been burglarized. Forty of us will have had our cars stolen. Thirty-one of us will have been held up and robbed on the streets of this city. Sixty-nine grand larcenies will have taken place before this day is over. And there will have been fifteen other miscellaneous felonies—such as frauds, possession of dangerous weapons and sex offenses...Even in the brief half hour in which I will talk to you, seventeen crimes will be committed in the city of New York – more than one every two minutes. This then is an average day in this city – far from quiet, far from peaceful. (Clapp, 1984, p. 2)

The 1974 poem, “Ode to New York,” says

Let us not forget that TV is in New York and the worst slums/the largest fortunes/the most essential in humanity/Since Nero or maybe Attila.../I don't like New York much/All that corrupt stone/All those dishonest girders decadent manholes diseased telephones/New York reminds me of when I had jaundice/New York is sick in the inner soul. (Whittemore, 1974, as cited in Jackson and Dunbar, 2002, p. 835)

Television has taken this image of New York and used it repeatedly. New York City was the first of cities to come to be shown in social commentary and popular culture as a “barometer of generalized social rot” (Will Straw in Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2003, p. 167). Even though New York City has improved its image throughout the last few decades and was named the safest large city in the United States in 1993, it continues to be portrayed in a dangerous light (“NYC,” 2006). With this depiction, it is important to look at the role of the many races in New York City that are shown on television. What races are shown in a positive light can affect the way viewers see these races. Similarly, if a certain race is shown to be the cause of this “social rot,” it can influence the way television viewers see these individuals. The representations of ethnicity in New York City as represented on crime and police programs, either glorification or vilification is important to be analyzed.

### *Race*

For years, minorities have been underrepresented in all of television programming. Many of the people of whom we watch on television are white, middle to upper class, males (Entman, 1992; in Eschholz, Mallard, and Flynn, 2004). According to the United States Census (2000), the population of New York City is made up of 44.7%

Caucasians, 26.6% Blacks, and 27% Hispanic. Episodes of programs on television, including televised crime and police programs rarely reflect this statistic.

### Blacks

A study conducted from 1955-1986 found that only 6% of the characters on prime-time television were African American, while 89% were white (Tamborini et al., 2000). A demographic analysis of network television from 1966 to 1992 revealed that the highest percentage of black characters on television throughout those years was 1%, and the numbers decreased in the early 1990s (Greenberg & Collette, 1997).

Over the years, however, the numbers of African Americans on television has steadily increased. In 1971, blacks made up about 6% of the population on prime-time television. In 1980, they were 8% of prime-time characters (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). In 2001, African Americans made up nearly 14% of all speaking characters in prime-time programming (Glascock, 2003). Despite their increasing presence on television, the portrayals are not always positive. Often, blacks are overrepresented as criminals and perpetrators (Glascock, 2003). About half of African Americans shown on television do not have a high school diploma and are of low economic status (Tamborini et al., 2000).

Tamborini et al. (2000) conducted a study to look at stereotypes about African Americans and Latinos in the criminal justice system, as their positions as both criminals and court officers. A sample including all prime-time programming (including cartoon, crime drama, family drama, medical drama, news, reality, science fiction, soap opera, and action) from Fall 1997 on ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX was utilized. The study coded speaking characters who were police officers, representatives of the courts, and criminals.

The results showed that whites were most likely to be portrayed as both representatives of the court and criminal suspects. It found that 83% of the officers or representatives of the court were white, 13% were black, and 4% were Latino. Eighty-two percent of criminal suspects were white, 11% were black, and 7% were Latino. The portrayals of blacks and Latinos was found to be very similar to the portrayals of whites on the same television programming; yet despite the similar images, the minorities, especially Latinos, were hardly shown on television.

#### Hispanics

While blacks are becoming more visible on television, there is still a lack of portrayal of Hispanics (Greenberg & Collette, 1997). In studies looking at the depiction of Hispanics on television from 1950 to the 1980s, it was found that they comprised only 1.5%-2.5% of the television population (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002; Gerbner & Signorielli, 1979; Greenberg & Baptista-Fernandez, 1980). Even by the early 1990s, Hispanics made up less than 2% of the television population, a gross underrepresentation compared to real-world statistics (11%) (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002; Gerbner, 1993). The most recent studies have shown a further decrease in Hispanic characters, from 3% in 1999 to 2% in 2001 (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002).

When Hispanics are portrayed, often it is in a subservient or menial role, such as immigrants who can't speak English or manual laborers. Images of Hispanics often stem from early film (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002; Barrera & Close, 1982; Ramirez Berg, 1990). Ramirez Berg (1990) classified the traditional Hispanic roles into distinct categories: the dishonest Mexican bandit, the sexual harlot, the comic or buffoon, and

the seductive Latin lover (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002, p. 337). The bandit is usually a youthful, dishonest, Latino male with an unkempt appearance (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). The sexual harlot is hot-tempered and sexually aggressive, also unprofessionally dressed. The buffoon usually has a heavy accent and is known for his or her laziness and lack of intelligence. Of these, the Latin lover is the only well-groomed and professionally attired character, yet he too is known for his heavy accent, hot temper, and sexual aggression (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). Despite the little research that delves into the perceptions of Latinos on television, studies indicate that whites believe that television represents Latinos fairly and accurately (Mastro, 2003; Burgoon et al., 1983; Faber et al., 1987).

In 2005, Mastro and Behm-Morawitz conducted a study to analyze the amount and depictions of Latinos on primetime television. They wanted to see whether or not the character traits associated with primetime characters varied by race and hypothesized that status-based characteristics associated with Latinos would be much less favorable than the characteristics associated with other races (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). Two weeks of primetime television on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and the WB from October to November 2002 were used for the study. In these two-weeks, it was found that Latinos made up 3.9% of all characters on television. Whites made up 80.4%, blacks made up 13.8%, and Asians made up only 1.5%.

The study looked at Latinos in comparison to other races in their occupations, conversations, social and job authority, physical attributes, and character traits. Latinos were more often than whites to be family members, while whites and blacks were more

likely to be identified by their occupational roles. Latino men were more likely to be shown discussing crime than their white counterparts. Latinas were significantly lower in social authority than white women, and Latinos were lower than white males in job authority. Most often, Latinos were significantly less appropriately dressed than whites and blacks. Latinos were also more often depicted as lazier and less intelligent than whites and blacks on television (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005).

#### Asian Americans

In the early 1900s, there were rarely roles for Asians on television. These roles also paralleled the roles of Asians from early film, such as the notion of the “yellow peril” (Fung, 1994; Mok, 1998; Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002). Often, Chinese would be portrayed passive laborers and Japanese would be brutal soldiers (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002). Asian American women’s roles included the geisha, peasant, or the seductive “Dragon Lady” (Mok, 1998; Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002).

After the 1960s, some notable portrayals of Asian Americans arose, with appearances on *Star Trek*, *Quincy*, and *Barney Miller*. In all these shows, the latest running until the 1980s, Asians were depicted in respectable and noteworthy roles (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002).

From the mid-1990s to 2001, the percent of Asian Americans making up the television population increased from 1% to 3% (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002).

#### Native Americans

In the 1950s in the beginning era of television, Native Americans were widely shown on television (Mastro & Greenburg, 2000). Cowboys and Indians shows were

widely popular across television, filled with many negative depictions of Native Americans. They were shown as inhumane, violent, and uncivilized (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002). It was the job of the cowboys to tame these Indians and fight them to protect their families (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002).

As these programs have lost their popularity, Native Americans have become the least represented ethnicity on television. In Maestro and Greenberg's (2000) analysis of 1996-1997 prime time seasons, there were no Native Americans seen at all (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002). The few recurring roles that have existed for Native Americans on television programs from the 1990s included *Northern Exposure* and *Dr. Quinn: Medicine Woman* (Greenberg, Mastro, & Brand, 2002; Merskin, 1998). Today, however, Native Americans are rarely portrayed on network prime-time television. No studies on television provide enough numbers to come to enough conclusions other than that their portrayal continues to be nonexistent, making up about 1% of characters (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Steenland, 1990).

### *Crime and Police Programs*

Americans are fascinated, yet horrified, by crime. After the US Crime Bill passed in 1994, a Gallup Poll revealed that greater than 80% of Americans believed that the greatest threat to individual rights and freedoms was crime (Munro, 1999). Television has only taken advantage of this fear and today there is a great deal programming on television that deals with crime. Crime and police programs satisfy the needs of many audiences. It is pleasing for some viewers to watch topics that are troubling or

dangerous. These shows can comfort and entertain, while also appealing to the anxious or fearful viewer, as in the conclusion of many dramas is reached when good prevails over evil (Sparks, 1992) “They entertain because they frighten and provide glimpses of realities we are not likely to encounter. They comfort because they relieve our social conscience for crime and violence by constructing crime as not due to social inequities, racism, or poverty- things society could be held responsible for and might address.” (Surette, 1998, p. 227).

Crime and police programs utilize a specific structure, in which there is justice in the final outcome (Zillman & Wakshlag, 1987, in Sparks, 1992). Social order is disrupted, and then maintained. The programs show the “human contours by which we distinguish ‘deviance’ from ‘normality,’ the ‘outlaw’ from the good citizen who lives ‘within the boundaries of the law’” (Rapping, 2003, p. 50). Crime and police programs consistently have a strong following, “by fencing in a dominant representation of the city and of its sites and sources of danger. In doing so they stipulate courses of action and justified responses” (Sparks, 1992, p. 119).

Today’s crime and police shows perhaps have their roots in the 1940s law and police series (Rapping, 2003). These programs did not deal with the complex ideological issues that such shows deal with today and mainly portrayed simple, non-controversial courtroom drama, or “good guys” (police/detectives) versus “bad guys.” Many of the early police shows, such as *Dick Tracy* and *Mr. District Attorney*, began on the radio, and later found home in the television genre (Robards, 1985). The most popular, *Dragnet*, premiered in 1949 as a radio show. The show later moved to television and set the

example for crime dramas to follow with its consistent technical accuracy and use of professional jargon (Robards, 1985). Despite its accuracy, it contained very little violence and an issue of *TV Guide* quotes creator Jack Webb as saying that in one whole year of the show, “only 15 bullets were fired, and all of three fights took place” (Robards, 1985, p. 13). In the 1950s and 60s, law series began to focus on defense attorneys as their main characters. One of the first legal dramas was born in 1957, *Perry Mason*, its title character both a detective and a lawyer. In the 1960s and 1970s, law series became more complex, as they began to deal with the issues facing society, such as inequalities, abortion, labor rights, and Communism. At this time, the shows began to present the defense attorneys, not the detectives, as the main characters (Rapping, 2003). *The Defenders*, on the air from 1961-1965, was written by Reginald Rose, a black-listed screenwriter and often took on especially controversial issues (from abortion to labor rights) from a liberal stance. From 1969 to 1972, *The Lawyers* aired, about three partners who were all committed to working for unpopular causes. *Judd for the Defense*, another crime show of the time, dealt with issues of civil rights, draft evasion, labor rights, and war (Rapping, 2003).

The eighties was the first era that truly allowed what we know now as the crime drama to flourish (Thompson, 1996). It was in this decade that the missing cops from the sixties and seventies reemerged as *Hill Street Blues* and *L.A. Law*, both shows important predecessors of the crime drama we see today, were born. In its beginnings, *Hill Street Blues* struggled, like many popular crime shows to come. When NBC screened the pilot to a test audience in 1980, they found the program too violent, depressing, and confusing.

The network was hesitant to put in on the air. When they agreed to do so, they aired it on the most undesirable parts of the television schedule. Not surprisingly, *Hill Street Blues* struggled with the ratings. After winning a record-breaking number of Emmy awards, however, it rose significantly in the ratings by its third season and was able to stay on the air until 1987 (Thompson, 1996). Even though it is off the air now, its legacy remains. In 1990, a survey of college professors by the Siena Research Institute named *Hill Street Blues* the best television drama ever. The 1993 *TV Guide*'s "All Time Best TV" lists it as the best cop show (Thompson, 1996). *Hill Street Blues* is known today as forever changing the television cop show, as it borrowed elements from the sitcom, soap opera, and the movies (Schatz, 2005). *Hill Street* set the format for today's crime drama and cop shows, "it established the paradigm for the hour-long ensemble drama: intense, fast-paced, and hyper-realistic, set in a densely populated urban workplace, and distinctly 'Dickensian' in terms of character and plot development" (Schatz, 2005, 1).

*L.A. Law* continued in *Hill Street*'s footsteps to pave the way for crime drama today. It took the violence and creative plots from *Hill Street*, and brought the crime formula to mainstream audiences (Thompson, 1996). While *Hill Street* appealed mostly to young, urban, educated viewers, *L.A. Law* appealed to the masses. It left the depressing Hill Street station and brought to audiences new, upscale corporate lawyers and wealthy Beverly Hills clients (Rapping, 2003). "Part of the reason for *L.A. Law*'s success was its ability to adapt the quality formula to more commercial demands... It had tweaked the recipe of *Hill Street Blues* just enough to give it a wider appeal, but not enough to compromise its elevated artistic status (Thompson, 19996, 123). *L.A. Law*

was not afraid to sometimes let the “bad guy” win, and the “good lawyer” lose. The program did stand out from *Hill Street* by its portrayal of complex modern legal issues that *Hill Street Blues* did not touch, such as child abuse, date rape, to euthanasia. It has been praised for its accurate and sensitive depictions of abortion, homosexuality, HIV and AIDS (Thompson, 1996).

*Cagney & Lacey* debuted in 1982, originally based on a made-for-television film (Thompson, 1996). The show used traditional cop show techniques, using a small cast, self-contained stories, two principal characters, and dramatic plot lines. It did, however, have two female leads, setting it apart from the other male-dominated police series of the time (Thompson, 1996). It was a great success in its first year; however it began to have trouble in the ratings when competing against *Magnum, P.I.*, and made-for-television movies. CBS eventually cancelled it in 1983, but not for long. The show was nominated for four Emmy Awards and won best actress in a dramatic series, and it had much success in its summer reruns. CBS finally decided to air the series for four more seasons, airing until 1988. It won the Best Drama Emmy of the 1984-1985 and 1985-1986 seasons, ending *Hill Street Blue's* four-year winning streak. In 1994, the series returned for one year with two made-for-TV movies, *Cagney & Lacey: The Return* and *Cagney & Lacey: Together Again*.

In the 1990s, there was a renewed interest in law-based television programs, with reality shows such as *Court TV* and *Cops*. The crime and police programs of the nineties were different from their counterparts in the eighties and earlier (Sumser, 1996). In earlier programs, the audience followed the detectives in their search for the guilty party.

However, in the nineties, the shows did not focus on the search; instead they tried to focus on complex issues of morality. Sumser states, “In the 1990s we are once again in a period of deep self-examination about what is fair, what it means to be an American, and who is to blame for the problems we face. And it is this, I think, the ambiguity in the target of the blame, that forces marketers and creators of mass audience products to create programs in which blame is shared or undetermined or in which it alternates” (Sumser, 196, p. 160). The early nineties saw the competing crime dramas *The Trials of Rosie O’Neill* and *Law & Order*. *Law & Order* beat *Rosie O’Neill* in the ratings, and has been on television for more than fifteen years (Rapping, 2003). *NYPD Blue* emerged in 1993 as one of the most popular shows on television, after being rejected from countless networks for its nudity and language (Thompson, 1996).

Today’s programs have evolved considerably from the police and courtroom dramas of years ago.

From the early years of the genre when the cop reigned supreme as a macho authority figure and the distinction between good and evil always remained clear, the police show has evolved into a form in which good and bad have a far more complex relationship. The police force has been integrated by both blacks and women; it is no longer an exclusively male genre. The absolute authority of the police no longer goes unquestioned. Television has humanized the police by making the audience privy to their personal lives. The genre has come of age, attempting at times to explore the intricate, interrelated nature of good and evil. (Robards, 1985, p. 12)

One program standing out from the many crime shows of the past is *CSI*. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* premiered in 2000 and continues today in its 7<sup>th</sup> season (“*CSI TV Show*,” 1996). Instead of a traditional crime or police drama where the detectives investigate witnesses and suspects and then bring them to trial, *CSI* uses forensic tools to

examine evidence and solve the case (“CSI TV Show,” 1996). The show, set in Las Vegas, currently has two spin-offs, *CSI: Miami*, and *CSI: NY*. Like many other crime shows, it has been criticized for its excessive amounts of graphic violence and sexual images. It has also been criticized, however, for its lack of realism in depicting the forensic procedures. This has caused problems in the criminal justice system of real life, as jurors expect to see all the forensic evidence now in real trials as they do on *CSI* (Willing, 2004). Because of the cultivation effect, those watching the television show begin to see what happens on the show as real. The criminal justice process and forensic procedures become part of what they believe to be normal, just as Gerbner postulates. This worries attorneys, as more often jurors are looking for concrete DNA evidence to convict criminals.

Some defense lawyers say *CSI* and similar shows make jurors rely too heavily on scientific findings and unwilling to accept that those findings can be compromised by human or technical errors. Prosecutors also have complaints: They say the shows can make it more difficult for them to win convictions in the large majority of cases in which scientific evidence is irrelevant or absent. (Willing, 2004, p. 3)

Juries selected are expecting to see hard science, as *CSI* constantly offers, not to study human behavior and determine guilt (Hayes, 2005).

### *NYPD Blue*

*NYPD Blue* is a significant crime drama that aired from September 1993 to March 2005 (Sepinwall, 2005). *NYPD Blue* is one of the longest-running police dramas, airing for twelve seasons. Set in New York City, it explores the day-to-day struggles of the fictional 15<sup>th</sup> precinct of Manhattan. The show prides itself also as being a realistic

representation of crime in New York City. Bill Clark, a retired NYPD detective, served as a technical advisor and executive producer on the show, and helped to create many of the cases that are based on real-life events (Sepinwall, 2005).

Before airing on ABC, the show received much publicity for its use of nudity and profanity. In fact, on *NYPD Blue*, the word “asshole” and depictions of men’s buttocks and women’s breasts appeared for the first time on an American prime-time series (Sepinwall, 2005). Despite almost not being put on the air, the series was nominated for twenty-seven Emmy nominations in its first season and won Outstanding Drama Series after its second season. In its twelve years on the air, it received eighty-two Emmy nominations and won twenty (“NYPD Blue,” 2005). Thanks to its often risky content, *NYPD Blue* was able to break many nudity and obscenity barriers on network television (Thompson, 1996).

### *Law & Order*

*Law & Order* is one of the most influential and important crime dramas on television today, known at times as the “Daddy” of all of today’s crime drama (Rapping, 2003). Out of all the crime dramas that are shown on television, it continues to remain one of the most popular, and is consistently at the top of the Nielsen ratings (*Law & Order*, 2006). Starting in 1990, it is the longest running crime series in the history of television, with two sister shows, *Law & Order: Special Victim’s Unit* and *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*.

The show portrays the complete investigation of crimes as it “looks at crime and justice from a dual perspective” (*Law & Order*, from NBC.com, 2006), as the New York City police department and the DA’s office work together for arrest and conviction of the perpetrator (Castleman & Podrazik, 2003). In doing so, it “mixes two reliable old genres, the police show and the legal drama” (Thompson 1996, p. 185). The show portrays the jobs of a small team of New York City homicide detectives and a small team of lawyers from the Manhattan District Attorney’s office. The first half hour of the show depicts the detectives’ criminal investigation and apprehension of suspects, while the second half focuses on the prosecution and defending of the suspects under the criminal justice system. Set in New York City, and filmed entirely on location, it is worth analyzing the portrayal of the city in the program.

The show follows a common format throughout most of its episodes, beginning with a murder or other serious crime. Two detectives (with reoccurring roles) are called in to investigate the case, which is rarely a simple murder with many helpful clues and an easily identified victim and suspect. At the halfway point in the show, the police work with the prosecutors to make an arrest, showing the arraignment at the beginning of the next half hour. The second half of the show focuses on the courtroom and the assistant District Attorneys become the major characters (Rapping, 2003).

When *Law & Order* first debuted, it did not have the success that it does today. In 1990, ratings were low. Four years later, during the 1994-1995 season, however, the show became one of the top twenty-five on the air, and NBC decided to renew the show for two more seasons (Thompson, 1996). As others have noted, *Law & Order* is distinct

from other crime dramas that are shown today. It provides “the most thorough, systematic picture of the workings of the criminal justice system,” (Rapping, 2003, p. 51) from the criminal act to investigation to trial- as they are typically present on “network television’s class quality crime series” (Rapping, 2003, p. 51). If, *Law & Order* is known for its being ripped from the headlines and thorough portrayal of the criminal justice system, what messages does it leave to its viewers? Because of its immense popularity and professed accurate portrayals, the effects of the cultivation theory on viewers of *Law & Order* are especially important to look at. It is possible even, that audiences watching this program, aware of its reputation, may forget that what they are watching is *fictional* television programming, not a complete accurate portrayal of real life. *Law & Order* undoubtedly is one of the educational programming that the FCC’s Johnson warned about and its effects on viewers are important to investigate.

#### RESEARCH QUESTION

This research investigated portrayals of race in New York City based television crime and police programming, in order to find out whether or not these representations are accurate. This should help us to understand how these portrayals have affected viewers.

#### RATIONALE

Traditional research is constantly being conducted investigating the representations of race on television news. While undoubtedly this research has much

merit, as many Americans receive most of their information from television news, crime and police programs are nonetheless also a significant source of information for many individuals.

Because of the aforementioned communication theories, it is evident that television programs undoubtedly greatly influence individuals' perceptions of reality. As Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli stated (1994):

Television is the source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history. It is the mainstream of the common symbolic environment into which our children are born and in which we all live out our lives. Its mass ritual shows no signs of weaken and its consequences are increasingly felt around the globe...Transcending historic barriers of literacy and mobility, television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of otherwise heterogeneous populations. Many of those who now live with television have never before been part of a shared national culture. (in Morgan, 2002, p. 193).

For many, what is shown on television becomes part of what is believed to be true, a "mirror" of reality (Robards, 1985, p. 25). Crime and police drama, though fictional works, become real in the minds of many viewers. It is important therefore, to see how races are portrayed on television these shows, in order to determine if this portrayal is affecting viewers of all races. Both minorities and non-minorities watching the television program may believe the stereotypes that are shown. If a member of a minority group sees inaccurate portrayals on television, he may begin to perceive himself by this stereotype instead of seeing himself for his personal attributes. This in turn only leads to self-perpetuation of the stereotype shown on television (Mastro, 2003). Truly all television, even crime and police programs, is educational television.

The genre of the police and crime drama is especially important to look at on television. Representations of crime on television can have various effects on viewers, from individuals becoming more afraid of the world, as in Gerbner's mean world syndrome, to individuals becoming afraid of being victimized by certain races (Mastro 2003). Crime and police programs on television today are also increasingly more and more realistic, priding themselves on "ripped from the headlines" plots (as in the case with *Law & Order*) and realistic story lines. The more credible or real the information is perceived to be, the more likely it will influence people's perceptions (Surette, 1998).

When effects do occur, the most common are increased belief in the prevalence and spread of crime, victimization, and violence, and increasingly cynical, distrustful social attitudes. If nothing else, the research indicates a strong, if not understood interplay between media coverage of crime and public perceptions of it. The media provide both a knowledge foundation and the bricks in the form of individual events and claims about crime and justice for the public's crime and justice construction- plus the attitudinal mortar with which the public binds together its social reality. (Surette, 1998, p. 212)

Therefore, it is important to look at how crime and police drama shows crime on television, and as they show the various individuals of different races involved in crimes. Television is a very influential source of information and what information it reveals must be studied.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Much research has been conducted investigating the effects of television on viewers. This section will look at some of this research on television effects, specifically the research of my three theoretical lenses, the agenda setting theory, social construction of reality, and the cultivation theory.

### *Agenda Setting Theory*

The agenda setting theory suggests that the media not only influences the way viewers see a topic but also affects what viewers are exposed to. By giving prominent attention to some topics while ignoring others, the media is setting the agenda of what is important for viewers (Butler, 2002).

Hill (1985) looked at the agenda setting theory and factors that strengthen or weaken its effects in relationship to news viewing. Hill hypothesized that a variety of factors (presence of a color television, watching television for information rather than relaxation, prior awareness of news topics) strengthen the agenda setting theory for television news viewing. They found that when viewers are already aware of a topic through education or prior media exposure, they are more likely to be affected by the agenda-setting theory.

The study used 1204 respondents, who were interviewed and asked to create a journal listing two weeks worth of television viewing. They were told to take notes on their television viewing, including using a rank system to rate their interest on news topics and their viewing at the time. Using the ratings of viewers' interests on the various

news topics, the researchers came up with a personal agenda ranking scale. This personal agenda ranking scale was compared with the issues given most attention by the media. Of the top ten issues with the most media coverage, only three (national economy, national unemployment, sources and uses of energy) were found in the top half of the public's agenda. Therefore, the study found that among news viewers as a whole, the agenda setting was not completely confirmed (nor denied). However, the study also found that the agenda setting was much more evident among news viewers with specific characteristics (Hill, 1985).

The study found that when viewers were already aware of a topic through education or prior print media exposure, they are more likely to be affected by the agenda setting theory. Viewers watching the news program in color were more likely to see the issues as realistic and pertinent. Furthermore, attentive viewers who were watching the news for information seeking purposes were also more likely to be affected by the agenda setting theory (Hill, 1985).

In 2003, Gross and Aday tested the agenda setting theory by comparing the effects of watching local television news with the effects of direct crime experience. They investigated whether or not watching local news and/or personal experience with crime would make viewers more likely to name crime an important problem (Gross & Aday, 2003).

The study used telephone surveys of Washington, DC and metropolitan area residents of white and African American males or females eighteen and older. To test the effects of the agenda setting theory, respondents were asked a series of questions to judge

their television news viewing habits, along with what they thought were the most important problems facing Washington, DC (Gross & Aday, 2003).

The study found that watching local television news had large, significant effects on agenda setting. Of all the respondents watching local DC news, women, African Americans, those with less education and younger respondents were all most likely to mention crime as an important problem. Personal experience with crime did not influence agenda setting. While individuals who had been victims of crime saw themselves at greater risk from crime, their victimization did not make them more likely to list crime as an important issue facing Washington; DC. The study concluded that watching crime laden local news programs, not direct experience, helped to create agenda setting effects (Gross & Aday, 2003).

Holbrook and Hill (2005) looked at the agenda setting theory and its relation to crime drama on television. They hypothesized that viewers of crime drama are most likely to see the important topics on crime drama to be the prominent problems facing the nation (Holbrook & Hill, 2005).

The study used both controlled laboratory experiments looking at the agenda-setting effects of crime dramas, along with cross-sectional survey data. The agenda-setting effects of the crime dramas *Third Watch*, *Robbery Homicide Division*, and *Without a Trace* were studied. The study also used the 1995 National Election Study (NES) Pilot data that had examined agenda-setting with the crime drama *NYPD Blue* (Holbrook & Hill, 2005).

The first experiment was held in 2000 and had viewers watch two episodes of either the political drama *The West Wing* or the crime drama *Third Watch*. After viewing the program, respondents were asked to list what they believed the most important problem facing the nation. Only 11.5% of *West Wing* viewers stated crime as most important, whereas 27% of *Third Watch* viewers mentioned so (Holbrook & Hill, 2005). Holbrook and Hill (2005) concluded that these results suggest that viewing crime dramas causes perceptions of a crime-filled world that needs political action.

In the second experiment, participants were assigned to watch an episode of either the family dramas *Everwood* or *American Dreams* or the crime dramas *Without a Trace* or *Robbery Homicide Division*. After watching their assigned program, respondents answered a variety of questions; however, on this survey, their views on the most important problems facing the country were asked more than once. Crime drama viewers were significantly more likely to list crime as one of the most important problems facing the country and often mentioned it more than once. Only 10.26% of viewers watching family drama mentioned crime at least once, while 30.26% of those watching crime did. The viewers were also asked to rate the importance of the issues of crime, education, foreign relations, and the economy. There was a significant difference between crime importance ratings of those who were exposed to crime drama and those who were exposed to family drama: those exposed to crime drama most often chose crime as the most important issue facing the country.

The study also used the NES Pilot study's data for their purposes. It found that viewing *NYPD Blue* was an important factor in determining whether or not participants

viewed crime as an important problem facing the nation. Weekly viewers of the program were about twice as likely to report crime as being the most important problem facing the nation, while occasional viewers and nonviewers were less than 25% likely to name crime as the most important (Holbrook & Hill, 2005).

Holbrook and Hill concluded that their study, by using two different experiments, confirmed the agenda-setting theory and that watching crime drama does, indeed, cause viewers to be more likely to cite crime as an important problem facing our nation (Holbrook & Hill, 2005).

In the three above research studies, the agenda setting effects were found to be prominent in relationship to television viewing. I intend to take this theory into consideration when looking at race representations on crime and police drama.

### *Social Construction of Reality*

The social construction of reality theory is also an important theoretical lens to consider when looking at television watching. This theory postulates that because television's pictures seem authentic to viewers, television programming is constructing reality, not just presenting reality" (Tuchman, 1978, as cited in Lipschultz & Hilt, 1999, p. 12). Television creates a sense of familiarity with its viewers, so much so that it becomes part of what makes of the viewers' image of reality (Lipschultz & Hilt, 1999).

A 1991 study looks at the social construction of reality theory to determine if it causes viewers to form imaginary relationships with celebrities on television (Alperstein, 1991). The study utilized ethnographic interviews and reports from sixty men and

women, ages 18-55, to look at their relationships with celebrities on television advertising.

Twenty-one informants from Maryland took part in ethnographic interviews that consisted of mainly open-ended questions about advertising and celebrities. The respondents were asked to name celebrities who are significant to them, including those who appear on commercials. They were also asked to describe their relationship with these celebrities and explain how the appearance in the commercial affected the relationship. Respondents also discussed the facts and gossip that they knew about the celebrities' lives (Alperstein, 1991).

Thirty-nine other individuals were asked to create a 2-week self-reflective report, similar to a journal, which included reactions to and interactions with celebrities while watching television. Once again, open-ended questions were presented that had respondents name the celebrities who were significant to them and to describe the experience of a celebrity's appearance in a commercial (Alperstein, 1991).

The respondents were able to name a large number of celebrities who appear in commercials, and they stated some familiarity with the fictional characters in these commercials. Informants used different words to describe their relationships with celebrities, most of the time they were words used to describe actual, not fictional, intimate relationships. Respondents noted having respect for some celebrities and their characters, such as Bill Cosby, and feeling strong hatred towards others. "One informant described the relationship as safe and predictable—one that had grown over a number of years" (Alperstein, 1991, p. 48). The informant went on to say "I regard Joan Lunden as

a trusted friend...When she happens to be sick or on vacation I miss her” (Alperstein, 1991, p. 48).

The study determined that because of the social construction of reality theory: it does not matter that the relationships between the viewer and the celebrity are not actual relationships; the relationships are still viewed and experienced in the same way that real relationships are. These relationships with celebrities parallel real life relationships and viewers can feel positive and negative feelings toward celebrities in the same way they would with real individuals. As Alperstein stated, “In a sense, viewers’ actual social situations are interconnected to multiple realities; advertising [and what is shown on television] is just one of them... Interactions with celebrities are complex, as indicated by the variety and range of relationships described in this study” (Alperstein, 1991, pp. 55-56).

A 1992 study by Myers and Biocca investigated the validity of the social construction of reality theory in looking at television program and women. A woman’s internalized ideal body and what is shown as an ideal body on television are two different things and this can lead to vacillations in her own body image (Myers & Biocca, 1992). They believed that because of the social construction of reality theory, these media messages that emphasize the ideal body can “aggravate this fluctuation in the perceptions of her own body” (Myers & Biocca, 1992, p. 11). They hypothesized that because of this theory, college women consistently see themselves with a distorted body image. An increased in exposure to what they call BIC and BIP, or body image commercials and

body image programming, should lead to a greater tension between a viewer's internalized ideal body and her objective body image.

In their study, seventy-six female students watched select programming from a two-week period that included 15 BIC and 16 neutral commercials, along with program segments that contained various combinations of body image (some neutral, some not). Each group of students watched the tapes and filled out a questionnaire about their mood before and after watching the tapes. After finishing the video, the viewers' bodies were measured and their own body image was analyzed (Myers & Biocca, 1992). One control group did not watch the programming and instead simply had the body measurements and body image analyzing.

The results showed that viewing body image commercials affected subjects' perception of their waist and hips. In general, the females exposed to body image programming and commercials tended to overestimate their body size, consistent with previous studies looking at the social construction of reality and body image (Myers & Biocca, 1992; Birtchnell et al., 1987; Casper et al., 1979, Thompson, 1986). It is because of this social construction of reality and thus our selves, that Myers and Biocca contend that their study proved that "body shape perception can be changed by watching less than 30 minutes of television" (1992, p. 19).

Because of the above studies and prior research mentioned, the social construction of reality continues to be an important theory to be studied. I plan to use it as part of my theoretical lens when looking at my research, race and ethnicity on television crime and police drama.

### *Cultivation Theory*

According to George Gerbner's cultivation theory, when individuals watch television, they absorb this information along with the information they take in during everyday situations (Peterson & Peters, David F., 1983; Austin & Meili 1994, in Gerbner et al., 1986). According to this theory, the media cultivates a certain false image of reality and circulates it, causing those watching television to believe in the reality of fictional media. Gerbner attributes this cultivation to the stereotypical and repetitive nature of the television content and the nature of the audience watching. Various studies have looked at this theory.

Rouner (1984) found that cultivation is different among active and non-active television viewers. She looked at how active television viewing may affect viewing behavior. The study hypothesized that active television viewing would cause a person to be less likely to be affected by the cultivation theory and see a "mean world" (Rouner, 1984). The study looked at Piongree et al.'s study of soap opera viewers and found that those who considered themselves soap opera fans were less likely to be affected by the cultivation theory than general viewers. From this, Rouner concludes that low-involvement viewing by fans may cause an increase in the effects of cultivation. Active viewing may instead mitigate television's influence on the viewers' perceptions of reality (Ogles, 1987). The study also used telephone interviews, asking individuals about their television viewing habits (if they were active viewers and paid much attention to the program and its characters) and if they spoke with others about the programs they

watched. The individuals surveyed were then asked questions to determine their perception of a mean world. Rouner found that inactive viewers, even those watching the same amount of television as the active viewers, were more likely to see the world as meaner than its (Rouner, 1984).

Carveth and Alexander (1985) looked at the cultivation process in its relationship to soap operas. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether or not the amount of soap opera exposure influenced the effects of the cultivation theory. The research also looked at whether or not individual differences in viewing motives played a part in these effects. The study hypothesized that the amount and length of soap opera viewing would be positively related to overestimations of certain demographic groups' populations and the occurrence of certain behaviors in the real world. The study did not create a formal hypothesis for the second part of their investigation, whether individual differences affected the cultivation theory's effects.

In their study, they had communication students answer questions about their soap opera exposure and amount of television they watched daily. To determine the effect of cultivation on their views of American men and females, they were asked to estimate the number of American females of various professions or qualities (i.e. women who are doctors, women who are divorced, women who have illegitimate children, women who are housewives). They were also asked to estimate the number of American men who possessed various characteristics (i.e. men who are policemen, men who are lawyers, men who are divorced, men who have illegitimate children). The respondents were also asked

how many marriages end in divorce and how many people have committed a serious crime (Carveth & Alexander, 1985).

The study found that the amount of soap opera viewing did, indeed, cause overestimations of populations of certain occupations and behaviors in the world. Viewers tended to believe that there were more mothers with illegitimate children, and divorced parents, and housewives (characteristics shown prominently on soap operas) in the real world, than there really were. Regardless of characteristics of the viewers, the cultivation effects were the same throughout. The more years the respondents had watched soap operas, the more likely they were to experience the effects of cultivation and believe that there were more of these certain populations than there really are. In the end, Carveth and Alexander determined that the study confirmed the cultivation theory.

In 1981, Carveth, Bryant, and Brown looked at the relationship between television viewing and audience anxiety (Ogles, 1987). Two groups of people were studied, one who were exposed to light television viewing, the other exposed to heavy television viewing over six weeks. The heavy viewers were then divided further into two other groups: those watching action-adventure programs where justice prevailed, and those watching action-adventure programs where crimes went unpunished or other injustices occurred. At the end of the six weeks, viewers' anxiety levels were measured. Also, viewers were asked how likely they would be to watch further action-adventure programming. The results showed that both heavy viewing and the depiction of justice affected viewers' levels of anxiety. Those who watched more television were more likely to have high levels of anxiety. They found that viewers who were exposed to many

action-adventure programs where crimes went unpunished were more likely to have high levels of anxiety than viewers who watched many programs where justice reigned. A third, light-viewing, group was also researched and found to have less anxiety than both groups. Carveth, Bryant, and Brown concluded that their data supported Gerbner's cultivation theory (Ogles, 1987).

Potter (1986) conducted a study to test the cultivation theory with a more psychological variable, the perceived reality or degree of reality seen in the program. The study had two groups of respondents: an adolescent group and a college group. These volunteers supplied information about their television viewed (in hours watched of different TV genres per week) and their perceptions of television reality. Two weeks after supplying this information, viewers provided information about their perceptions of the world by responding to questions asking about the likelihood of an average person being murdered, raped, assaulted, and reasons for death for people in the United States.

The study tested the cultivation hypothesis by looking at the relationship between amount of viewing and the respondents' beliefs about the world. It found that most subjects who viewed television daily, overestimated their chances of victimization and had false perceptions about of the world. High school students had higher estimations of victimization than the college student group. While this violent-world belief is clearly cultivated, the data in the study found that the amount of television viewing played a little role in this belief (Potter, 1986).

Morgan and Shanahan's 1996 study looked at the cultivation theory to determine if it was still applicable in today's society, more than 20 years after Gerbner tested it in

the 1970s. To do so, they conducted a meta-analysis of twenty years of cultivation research. They began with survey-type cultivation studies published in 1976 and looked at whether or not their findings had supported the cultivation hypothesis. After conducting this meta-analysis, they found an average cultivation effect of 0.91, almost entirely accurate. They found that the cultivation effect was most found in programs involving violence or sex roles, and slightly higher with females. The cultivation effect also was found to be more of an influence on young and middle-aged adults, not so much with young children (Morgan & Shanahan, 1996).

In Brown's (2001) comparison of fictional television crime and crime index statistics, he found that there was a significant statistical difference between what television portrays and what happens in real life. Brown conducted a content analysis of the 1999-2000 seasons of *Law & Order*, *NYPD Blue*, and *Homicide: Life on the Streets*. The study looked at the criminals, victims, types of crimes. The study found that crime on television is much different than real life: on television, women commit more crimes than men, criminals are employed individuals with high socio-economic status. He concluded that this difference in portrayals contributes greatly to the cultivation of crime: the repeated similar messages on television crime drama strengthen impressions on viewers that are simply not true (Brown, 2001).

Hendriks (2002) looked at the cultivation analysis in relation to portrayals of female bodies on television. The study looked at all violent, pornographic, and sexual portrayals of women to see how they affect women's beliefs about their own body satisfaction. These televised depictions of female bodies were found to greatly affect

women's own body satisfaction. Hendriks looked at what women feel about their own bodies (how satisfied they were, if they felt the need to conform to what they saw on television, what they believed the ideal body type was) and at the portrayals of women on television at the time, from programs like *Ally McBeal* to the *Miss America Pageant*. The study cited the cultivation effect as one of the reasons for this body image and ended with a call for more cultivation theory research (Hendriks, 2002).

Many studies have looked at the effects of the cultivation effect and television news. Romer, Jamieson, and Aday (2003) studied the relationship of viewers' perceived fear of crime and their exposure to television news. They used a survey of Philadelphia residents, conducted by telephone in 1997 with 1,204 respondents. Interviewees were asked to assess their risk of environmental risks (floods, car crashes, crime, etc) and public risks (air travel, cigarette smoking, etc). Respondents were also asked their news-viewing habits. Crime was rated as the highest risk, also the most portrayed risk on television news. They found that in most of the population, viewing local television news was related to this increased concern about and fear of crime. Their results supported the cultivation theory's predicted effects on television viewers.

In 2003, a sample of parents and college freshmen were surveyed to determine how their television viewing habits influenced their perceptions about crime (Busselle, 2003). It was hypothesized that exposure to television violence in both the form of news and fictional programming would influence viewer's estimate of crime prevalence and their fear for the safety of themselves and their family. Students and parents completed surveys that measured their estimate of crime prevalence, their fear of victimization by

violence, and their television viewing habits (how many hours watched per week, different genres watched). The study found that viewing crime related television content, especially news programs, increased parents' estimates of prevalence of violent crime. Parents were more likely than their children to fear for the safety of other family members. Overall, the results of the study supported the cultivation theory's hypothesis that watching violent programming on television causes viewers to believe in a mean, violent world (Busselle, 2003).

A 2004 study tested the cultivation effect on college students (Lett, DiPietro, & Johnson, 2004). The study investigated whether or not the amount of television news viewing after September 11<sup>th</sup> influenced college students' perceptions of their Islamic peers. Much of the television news broadcast on and after September 11<sup>th</sup> showed violent and horrifying images that can cause animosity towards foreigners for many viewers (Lett, DiPietro, & Johnson, 2004). In the study, college students completed questionnaires six weeks after the attacks. The study found that greater television news viewing was related to increased negativity toward Islamic peers, supporting the cultivation theory.

The cultivation theory continues to be an important theory to be studied. For my research, it will be important to keep viewers' cultivation of crime and race in mind as I look at ethnicity and its representations on crime and police drama.

*Race on Crime and Police Programs*

In televised police and crime drama, though minorities have been shown to be underrepresented, they are often the focus of these programs (Huston et al., 1992). Often, they are the criminals and the whites are the figures of authority. “The polarization of criminal and victim is unmistakable. It is emotionally appealing to represent crime as an epic battle between forces of darkness and light, with victims as the lambs and criminals the wolves, with victims as innocent and criminals guilty, with victims as women and children and criminals as dark-skinned men (Madriz, 1997, as cited in Munro, 1999, p. 79). Blacks are generally underrepresented; however, when they are shown, they are shown as the perpetrator of a crime. For many American television viewers, “crime has a Black face...Black Americans are portrayed by the media with a number of criminal personas that have accumulated over the years, from the Black man who rapes white women, to Black gang members involved in violence, to Black drug dealers on street corners” (Munro, 1999, p. 18). According to Eschholz et al. (2004), New York City offenders or suspects for a crime (violent or not) on television more than half the time are black. Non-whites have been found to have a greater likelihood of being portrayed as the perpetrator than do whites (Chiricos and Eschholz, 2002; in Eschholz, Mallard, and Flynn, 2004). When whites are shown on crime drama, they are most likely to be in a position of honor. They are generally more likely to be represented as policemen or other criminal justice personnel than Hispanics or blacks (Entman and Rojecki, 2000; Klite et al., 1997). In Tamborini’s content-analysis (2000), 80% of court officers of the court on crime drama were white, while only 24% were black or Latino. Glascock’s 2003

research found that only 5.7% of law enforcement figures on prime-time television are black, and only 4.3% of lawyers are black as well.

This does not mean minorities are always overrepresented as the criminals on crime drama. In fact, other studies have shown opposing views. “In TV’s [fictional] station houses, racism is practically extinct, black officers are well-represented in the upper ranks, and a multi-racial camaraderie prevails” (Moss, 1996, as cited in Munro, 1999, p. 12). According to Munro, in actual police departments, blacks rarely have command-level jobs and are not always well-respected. Crime drama, instead, sometimes show a more favorable representation of blacks on the police force. One study found that blacks are most often underrepresented as criminals in comparison to the FBI Uniform Crime Reports (Eschholz et al., 2000; Eschholz, 1998). Another study found that minorities were most often depicted committing less serious crimes than whites, who were more likely to be the perpetrators of the most violent crimes (Eschholz et al., 2000, Potter & Ware, 1987).

In 2000, Entman and Rojecki conducted a study on racial hierarchies. They analyzed interracial interactions and black characters in a two month long sample of the most highly rated programs from April to May 1996, the same time as the “sweeps.” They analyzed whether characters were equal in roles in their hierarchical relationships. They found it hard to look at the interracial relationships on sitcoms, as most of them rarely featured any black characters (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). On most drama, when blacks and whites were in hierarchical relationships, the blacks were of a higher status.

The study cites the specific example of Arthur Fancy, a black lieutenant on *NYPD Blue*, dealing with his white charges (Entman & Rojecki, 2000).

Some research also has shown that recently Caucasians are depicted as criminal suspects more often than other ethnicities. Tamborini (2000) found that in his sample, 76% of criminal suspects on crime drama were white, while only 20% were black or Latino. “It has been suggested that this...demonstrates a variation of tokenism in that the small roles do not have much more impact in changing the ‘White-Black’ status quo” (Tamborini et al., 2000, 643). Perhaps, because these roles are small and not of major re-occurring characters, they do not offend white viewers and “pose no threat to the world of the White man on television” (Tamborini et al., 2000, 643).

While many of these studies look specifically at race representations on crime and police dramas, there is still a lack of research looking specifically at two of the most popular programs, *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue*.

#### *Law & Order, NYPD Blue*

There have been few prior studies looking specifically at *Law & Order* or *NYPD Blue*. Soulliere (2003) conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to obtain an accurate picture of how crime, especially murder, is presented on television justice programs. The study looked at all justice-based entertainment programs (programs that focused on some aspect of the criminal justice system, including law enforcement, courts, correctional system, and criminal prosecution) on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, and UPN as part of the 1999-2000 television season. Three programs, *NYPD Blue*,

*Law & Order*, and *The Practice* were selected purposely for special analysis because of their critical acclaim and constant high ratings on the Nielsen scale. A content analysis of these programs was conducted, looking at type of crime, type of murder and gender and race/ethnicity of offender and victim.

Soulliere's study found that violent crimes were depicted as occurring at a much higher rate than in real life. According to Uniform Crime Reports, violent crime, especially murder, is less common than property crime. She also discovered that it did not matter which race was the victim or the murderer; instead, murder was predominantly intraracial in real life and on these programs (Soulliere, 2003). The majority of the times, whites were killed by other whites, and blacks were killed by other blacks. There were only five murders in both *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue* that went against this rule (Soulliere, 2003; Hewitt, 1988; Miethe & McCorkle, 1998; Zawitz & Fox, 2000).

Eschholz, Mallard and Flynn conducted a content analysis of the 2001 seasons of *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue*. They discovered that the majority of characters on the two programs were white. On *Law & Order*, 75% of the characters were white, while only 18% were black. Of these characters, 65% of the offenders were white, and only 16% were black. Seventy-five percent of violent offenders were white, and 14% were blacks. The victim was overwhelmingly white (76%) and only 3% of the time black. On *NYPD Blue*, blacks were more represented in each category. Two-thirds of the characters were white, and about one-quarter were black. Blacks made up 38% of offenders (whites were 50%) and 43% of violent offenders (46% were white). The victim was more likely to be black on *NYPD Blue* than in *Law & Order*, as 19% of the victims were

black, and 50% were white. In both content analyses, criminal justice personnel and law enforcement officers were predominantly white. When looking at the attorneys on both shows, there was a striking difference. On *Law & Order*, only 6% of attorneys were black; however, on *NYPD Blue*, 78% of attorneys were black. On both programs, Hispanics and other races were somewhat represented as offenders and victims; however, they were barely portrayed as criminal justice personnel, law enforcement officers, or attorneys (less than 5% of these figures were other minorities in both programs).

## METHODOLOGY

For my primary research, I am using what Vande Berg calls a narrative criticism: “Narrative analyses of events, their importance, the characters that make them go, and the lessons we are asked to draw from the stories all make narrative criticism a highly valued kind of textual study” (Vande Berg et al., 1998, p. 104). A narrative criticism looks directly at the story told on television and its major players (Allen, 1987). Interested in looking at the stories portrayed and the effects on its viewers, I used the narrative theory to analyze the episodes. “Narrative theory concentrates on the text itself, it leaves other critical methods questions about where the story comes from...and the myriad effects...that the narrative has upon its audience” (Allen, 1987, 43). Police and crime drama use narrative to inform viewers of its message; they tell a story enriched with certain images and symbols. For the purposes of my study, I watched the episodes specifically looking for the narrative about the characters and their ethnicity.

I especially looked at narratives on these programs because of my theoretical lens, the cultivation theory. Gerbner et al. (1969) discuss the need to look at narratives on television when studying the cultivation theory, not on specific elements (Potter, 1993). “The characteristics of a message system are not necessarily the characteristics of individual units composing the system” (Gerbner, 1969, 143, as cited in Potter, 1993). For Gerbner et al., (1986), the narrative structure is revealed in the “setting, casting, social typing, actions, and related outcomes that ... defines the world of television” (19, as cited in Potter, 1993, 571). Narratives are also important for the other aforementioned theories, social construction of reality, and agenda setting, because it is the narratives that

are often the most memorable and the narratives that create the images in viewers' minds. If a narrative is powerful enough, it can change viewers' sense of reality and of what is important.

I analyzed six different episodes for my study: one episode from three different seasons each of *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order* were chosen. Because only the first four seasons of *NYPD Blue* are available on DVD for viewing, I was limited in my years of study. I analyzed the early years of both series, and therefore, the sample included 6 one-hour episodes, from 3 different seasons from each show. The pilot episodes, the first episode from the second season, and the first episode from third seasons of both programs were analyzed. Pilot episodes were chosen because these were the first impressions left by these programs on viewers. The second and third seasons were chosen in order to investigate whether the racial depictions had changed over time as the show matured. Also, all chosen for both shows occur between 1990 and 1995 in order to eliminate variations in representations due to current events or society trends. See Appendix I for a listing of episodes analyzed.

Each time main characters were introduced, they were coded into one of the following categories: criminals (guilty of violent crime-GCV, guilty of nonviolent crime-GCN, found innocent of violent crime-ICV, found innocent of nonviolent crime-ICN), representatives of the court (police officers-RCO, defense attorneys-RCD, prosecuting and district attorneys-RCP), and victims (of violent crime-OVC, of nonviolent crime-ONC). See Appendix VI for the coding guide.

As more information became available about the characters, more data was coded. Criminals were further coded for their ethnicity, gender, physical appearance, type of crime committed (violent or non-violent), use of violence (physical or verbal, in instances not involving the crime), guilt status, and overall positive or negative status (whether or not they were a character viewers thought positively of, or negative of). See Appendix III for the criminal coding sheet.

Main representatives of the court also were coded for their ethnicity, gender, and physical appearance. They were also coded for competency (ability to complete their job, qualifications), honesty and impartiality, use of violence (physical or verbal), and overall positive or negative status. See Appendix IV for the coding sheet for the representatives of the court.

Other characters (witness, victim of violent crime, victim of non-violent crime, family of victim, and family of offender) were coded for their ethnicity, gender, physical appearance and overall positive or negative status. See Appendix V for the coding sheet for other main characters.

I then conducted a quantitative analysis using frequency counts to see how many main characters of different races and characteristics were portrayed.

Throughout the analysis, I have compared that data from the US New York City crime statistics, if available. For example, I looked at the percentage of victims on the programs that were white, compared to actual crime victims in New York City. I compared the percentage of criminals of each race in my frequency count to actual New York City crime statistics that were available.

All of the above steps were taken to be able to get a sense for what the depiction of race is on *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*. The preliminary character analysis of all main characters was conducted to get a better understanding of how favorable and what impressions different races leave on their viewers. The latter analysis comparing data to New York City crime data was performed to determine if racial depictions of the characters on the programs are accurate in today's world.

## RESULTS & ANALYSIS

When watching the episodes of both programs, two were three main things I set out to accomplish. First, I wanted to provide a description of the episodes, including the setting and characters, for context when analyzing the race representations. Second, I wanted to look at the characters on the programs, specifically the criminals, representatives of the court, and victims, in respect to their races and how they are portrayed.

### *The Episodes*

Law & Order: Season 1: Episode 6: The Pilot: Everybody's Favorite Bagman

This episode, the sixth in the first season of *Law & Order* is also the pilot episode. The episode made use of its location in New York City; it is shown both in a nighttime and daytime setting, both in very different portrayals. Nighttime New York (East Harlem) opens the episode, with the murder and robbery of a councilman. Nighttime New York City also brings an end to the case, with the murder of another councilman at a mafia dinner. The scenes are filled with shadows, dark streets and alleys, and other daunting images. Daytime New York City offers less intimidating scenes, with sunny skies, tall buildings, gorgeous and immaculately decorated extravagant apartment buildings, yellow cabs in four-lane streets, upscale pubs, and ice-skating in Central Park. The episode tackles and addresses the issues of racism in a city as large as New York at different parts. Most characters are white middle-aged males (as is with the other

episodes), however a there is black assistant DA, two black teenager boys as suspects, and a corrupt black politician (Wolf & Patterson, 1990).

This episode's format is different from the other episodes of *Law & Order*. The other episodes I looked at for this research, as well as the other episodes that I have watched for leisure, all follow a formulaic layout. The first half focuses on the investigation, the second half on the trials and law aspect of the cases. Rarely does the viewer witness the murders or crimes. This episode focuses on mainly the investigation, with the courtroom scenes lasting less than 10 minutes total. Near the end of the episode, we see the murder of another councilman and a very vivid depiction of his bloodied bullet-torn body is shown as he is shot (Wolf & Patterson, 1990).

The case at first seems to involve the mugging and assault of Councilman Charles Halsey by two black teenage boys. As the show continues, however, we learn that he was assaulted and murdered by Anthony Scalisi, a prior "bagman" with mafia connections. What appeared to be a mugging was actually a murder in an attempt to cover up a traffic violation scandal that was occurring all across the city with members of organized crime and public officials. In the end, we only see the beginning of a trial, but white words on the screen indicate that all individuals were found guilty. The words also state that the episode, though fiction, was inspired by an actual corruption scandal that had occurred previously (Wolf & Patterson, 1990).

### Law & Order: Season 2: Episode 1: Confession

In this episode, the image of New York City is not as developed. Most of the scenes are shot indoors in general locations, such as courtrooms, apartments and houses, which could take place in any city. There are two notable outdoor scenes, both taking place at night, and both scenes where a character is assaulted or murdered (Gerber, 1991).

In the episode, the representatives of the court all work together to convict criminals. Though the first part of the episode involves mainly the detectives on the police force, the second half of the program shows the officers interacting with assistant district attorneys in order to charge criminals. The episode opens in the home of Marie Greevey, a wife of the detective Max Greevey, who is wondering the whereabouts of her husband. She hears a noise outside her home, and after Max's car pulls up to the house, a gun shot is heard. He is murdered in front of his own home the night before he is to testify in court and help convict the criminal. The late detective's partner, Detective Mike Logan, seeks out the suspected murderer and assaults him in an alley at night, in order to obtain a confession. He is able to shake the criminal up for a confession, but in doing so he crosses the line and it is suggested that because of his use of force, Assistant District Attorney Stone may not be able to use the confession in court. Despite all this, the hot-tempered and grief-stricken Detective Logan also faces another challenge: training a new partner, Detective Phil Ceretta (Gerber, 1991).

### Law & Order Season 3: Episode 1: Skin Deep

This episode does not make great use of its location in New York City. The outdoors is rarely shown, most of the scenes take place in apartments and courtrooms. There are few daytime scenes that provide viewers with a glimpse of New York City, including the bustling and loud streets, many taxis and cars, and variety of people (Sackheim, 1992).

This episode, unlike the prior two, is dominated by attractive, middle-aged white females. “Skin Deep” begins with an attractive African American woman finding the body of the dead photographer, Julian Decker. As Detectives Logan and Ceretta investigate the case and question Decker’s clients, one beautiful white woman after another, they discover that Decker was not all that he seemed to be. The two detectives, now good friends, discover that Decker’s models were also prostitutes and Decker acted as a pimp for those women who were not getting enough modeling jobs (Sackheim, 1992).

The second half of the episode revolves around the interactions between the main suspect, thirty-eight year old model Angela Brant, her lawyer, and the assistant district attorney Ben Stone. When Angela wants to make a deal as the evidence against her becomes weaker, Stone realizes that the case involves more than simply an angry prostitute and her pimp. Further investigation reveals that Angela’s fourteen-year-old daughter, Tracy Brant, was also sleeping with Julian Decker as he promised her a career in modeling. When Decker told Tracy that he could not make her dreams come true, she angrily stabbed him in the back with his photographic scissors. After conducting a

psychiatric evaluation of Tracy, Stone is reminded of his own teenage daughter and agrees to reduce her sentence time (Sackheim, 1992).

#### NYPD Blue: Season 1: Episode 1: Pilot

This episode, the first of all aired *NYPD Blue* episodes, is simply titled “Pilot” and mainly establishes the characters and their relationships to one another. Daytime New York City is shown in brief segments before different scenes, but few scenes utilize the outdoors as their setting. Nighttime New York City is shown briefly and it is used as the setting for a drunken fight (Hoblit, 1993).

The episode is mainly set in the police station of the 15<sup>th</sup> precinct and its main characters are the detectives and officers that work there. There is a brief opening courtroom scene, but unlike in *Law & Order*, the lawyers do not appear later in the episode as important characters. The episode introduces and chronicles the lives of Detective John Kelly, Detective James Martinez, Lieutenant Arthur Fancy, Officer Janice Licalsi and Detective Andy Sipowicz. Andy, an overweight alcoholic, is the main character in the episode and also the most complex. He is overweight, balding, and constantly smokes cigarettes. He swears, calling the DA a “pissy little bitch” and his New York City accented speech is laden with words such as “scumbag” and “tits.” He is not, however, a truly unfavorable character, as the audience is made aware that “Andy was a great cop, but now he’s a drunk and won’t help himself” by Lieutenant Arthur Fancy (Hoblit, 1993).

The pilot shows Andy from the first case that is against Alfonse Giardella and it is suggested that Andy planted evidence against the mob man and he is acquitted. Andy later drinks away his loss and in a drunken rage he follows Alfonse to a restaurant and beats him up, stuffing the mob man's toupee in his mouth and waving his gun at him. The next day, he is put on modified assignment by the Lieutenant and immediately resorts to a bar to soothe his feelings. After many drinks, he meets up with a prostitute in a hotel where Alfonse breaks into the room and shoots the drunken half-naked Andy multiple times. The episode ends and the audience is left without knowing Andy's fate (Hoblit, 1993).

#### NYPD Blue: Season 2: Episode 1: Trials & Tribulations

This episode also revolves around the lives of the representatives of the courts, mainly detectives and police officers. All the officers from the prior episode are back, this time more developed and much has happened to them. Andy does not swear as much (though he still manages to call one criminal a "lying turd" and "lying sack of crap") and he now attends AA meetings. He is able to complete his job and is about to get romantically involved with the assistant district attorney, Sylvia Costas. Officer Janice Licalsi is on trial for the murder of Alfonse Giardella, a crime that is not shown in this episode. Detective John Kelly has divorced his wife and since has dated Janice Licalsi. Although they have broken up, he is still emotionally involved with her. It is he who is the most violent in this episode, as he roughs up a man in a bar who makes rude accusatory comments about Janice (Hoblit, 1994).

“Trials & Tribulations” also looks also at the criminal Mr. Carlin, in jail for abusing his wife. His wife later bails him out of jail and the audience does not see the criminal until after he is released. Carlin does not have a prominent role, as the main criminal in the episode is Janice Licalsi. John Kelly wants to testify and lie in favor of Janice, but as an honest member of the court, she will not let him because she does not want to implicate him in her crime. Once again, the episode ends without a solution and the fate of Licalsi is not shown (Hoblit, 1994).

#### NYPD Blue: Season 3: Episode 1: E.R.

This episode introduces new characters that were not in the pilot episode. Detective John Kelly and Officer Janice Licalsi are no longer part of the cast. Detective Greg Medavoy, a bumbling nervous man is James Martinez’s new partner. The attractive, sensitive, and charismatic Bobby Simone is Andy Sipowicz’s partner. Detective Diane Russell, also a recovering alcoholic, is dating Bobby. Andy and Assistant District Attorney Sylvia Costas have been dating for a while, and it suggested that she may be pregnant with his child (Tinker, 1995).

Detectives Grey Medavoy and James Martinez are on their way to work when they are interrupted by a woman, Mrs. Hernandez, claiming her husband needs the help of the officers. She brings them back to the bar that they own where the detectives find an undercover officer, Lieutenant Nathan Stackhouse, robbing the bartender at gunpoint. He and his accomplice, Antonio Vargas, run from the scene, but not before Vargas has shot and injured Martinez. The rest of the episode details Martinez’s recovery in the

hospital and the tracking down of Nathan Stackhouse. Stackhouse, as the audience discovers, is a corrections officer that has committed prior crimes but because of his connections with other officials, has never been convicted. He is later found and convicted, but James Martinez's health remains unknown (Tinker, 1995).

*The Characters:*

A critical component of this research was analyzing the characters on the programs. I look at specifically the criminals, representatives of the court, and victims, in respect to their races and how they are portrayed. See Appendix VI for further explanation of the characters coded and Figure 1 (below) for a coding reference.

Guilty criminal violent	GCV
Guilty criminal nonviolent	GCN
Innocent criminal violent	ICV
Innocent criminal nonviolent	ICN
Police officer or detective	RCO
Defense attorney	RCD
Prosecuting or district attorney	RCP
Victim of violent crime	OVC
Victim of nonviolent crime	ONC
Family/friend of victim	OFV
Family of offender	OFO

*Figure 1.* Roles of characters coding document.

In most instances, different character roles and races were very similar on both programs. There were few significant differences in data results when looking at the programs individually, and these will be mentioned below. For the most part, the data for both programs is combined for my results.

Out of all the main characters on the episodes watched of both programs, whites made up the majority. Seventy percent of main characters were white, followed by 16% black, and 14% Hispanic. While there were few Asian American characters featured, none of them had a significant role. No Native Americans were featured. *Law & Order* had a less racially diverse character makeup than *NYPD Blue*, as the three episodes watched contained no main Hispanic characters. The episodes were made of 77% whites and 23% blacks. *NYPD Blue* was made up of 61% white, 10% black, and 29% Hispanic main characters.

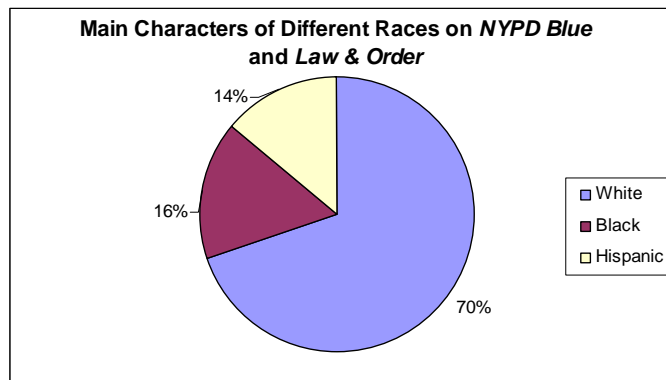


Figure 2. Percentage of white, black, and Hispanic characters on the pilot episodes and first episodes of the second and third seasons of *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue*.

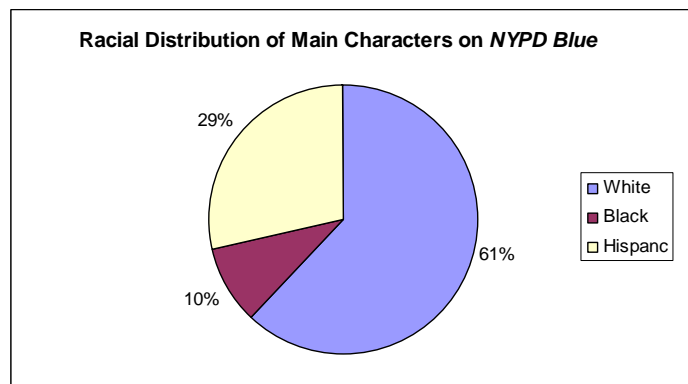


Figure 3. Percentage of white, black and Hispanic characters on the pilot episode and first episodes of the second and third seasons of *NYPD Blue*.

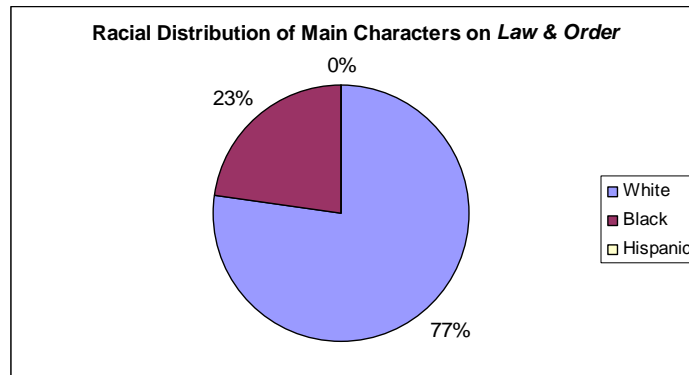


Figure 4. Percentage of white, black and Hispanic characters on the pilot episode and first episodes of the second and third seasons of *Law & Order*.

While viewing the episodes, characters were coded for being positive or negative characters. The majority of white characters were considered positive, while black characters more than half the time were negative. Hispanics also had a larger percentage of negative characters.

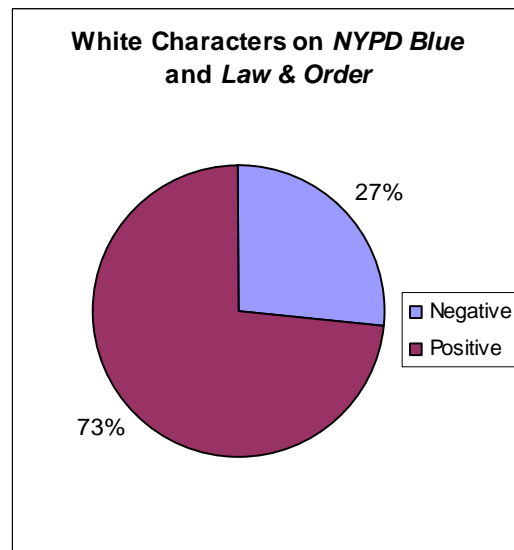


Figure 5. Percentage of positive and negative white characters on *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*, from the six episodes viewed in the study.

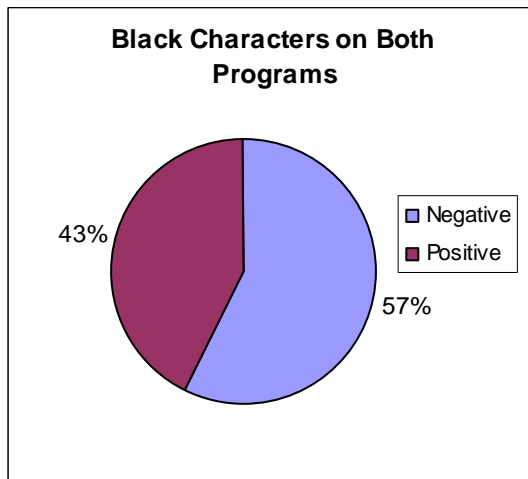


Figure 6. Percentage of positive and negative black characters on both programs.

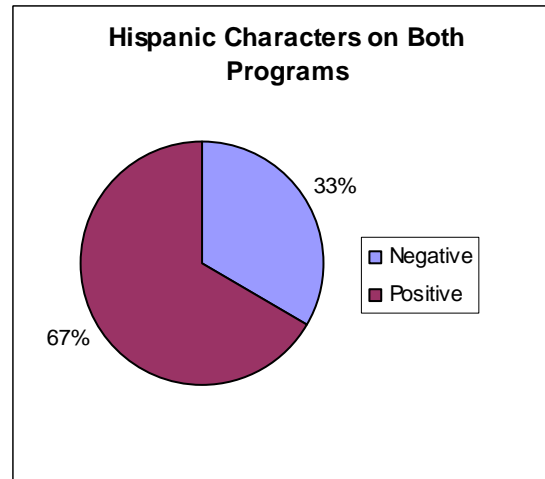


Figure 7. Percentage of positive and negative Hispanic characters on both programs.

#### Roles of Characters:

The three main roles studied were criminals (guilty of violent crime-GCV, guilty of nonviolent crime-GCN, found innocent of violent crime-ICV, found innocent of nonviolent crime-ICN), representatives of the court (police officers-RCO, defense attorneys-RCD, prosecuting and district attorneys-RCP), and victims (of violent crime-OVC, of nonviolent crime-ONC). This left out a few other main characters, so for coding purposes, family members of victims and criminals were included also when looking at what roles the different races portrayed. Family members generally did not have a very large role, therefore they will only be shown in the following chart, and not be described in detail below with the rest of the roles. As shown in the chart, "Racial Composition of Roles," because whites made up the majority of characters on the programs, they also made up the majority of all the roles. It is interesting to note, however, that none of the victims were black characters while three of the six were Hispanic. Also, the majority of

the black roles were representatives of the court. These details will be explained further in the next section.

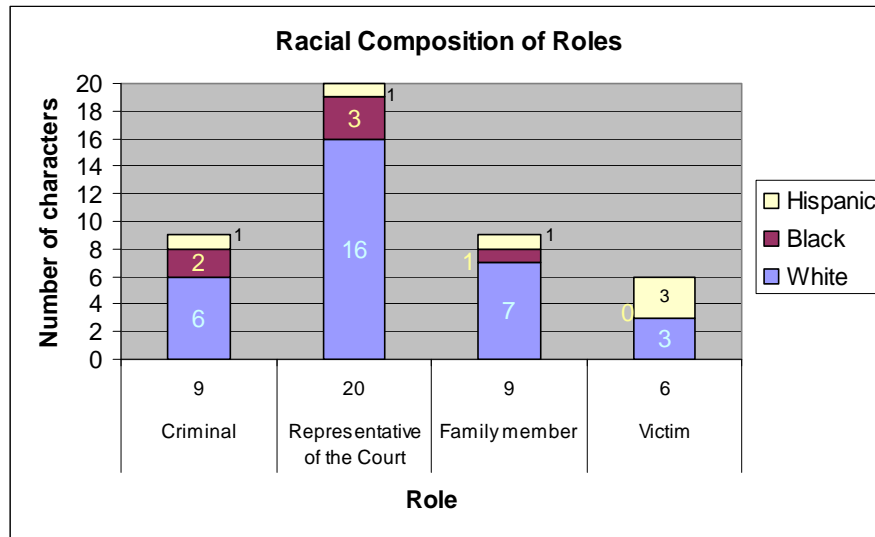


Figure 8. Racial composition of character roles on the six episodes viewed of both programs.

### Criminals (C)

In the six hours of programming viewed, there were nine different criminals portrayed: three guilty of nonviolent crimes (GCN) and seven guilty of violent crimes (GCV). None of the criminals was innocent. Aside from the criminal Tracy Brant in Season 3 of *Law & Order*, the criminals were not very developed characters and were just shown and portrayed in scenes related to the crimes they committed. All criminals were judged as negative characters.

In *Law & Order*, Tremaine Lewis and Simon Jackson were the only black criminals and both were teenagers from low-income families with poor grammar and prior trouble with the police. Of the white criminals, only one, Vince, is from a low-income background. The other three white criminals, Tony Scalisi, Daniel Magadan, and Tracy Brant are well-off New Yorkers, as the audience learns from the image of Tony's door-man operated apartment and Tracy's large home and private school. In *NYPD Blue*,

aside from Alfonse Giardella, the criminals play less important roles. Both of the white criminals, Alfonse Giardella and Mr. Carlin, are well-dressed and relatively well-off. Antonio Vargas, a Hispanic man, has an unkempt appearance and casual clothing. The more complex criminal, Nathan Stackhouse, is a black corrections officer involved in the robbery of the Hernandezes that eventually leads to the shooting of Detective Martinez. He is also shown in casual clothing but with a more put-together appearance.

Of these criminals, six were white, three were Black, and one was Hispanic. The majority of criminals were white, as are the majority of characters but the majority of nonviolent criminals are black. The only Hispanic criminals shown were violent, committing homicide.

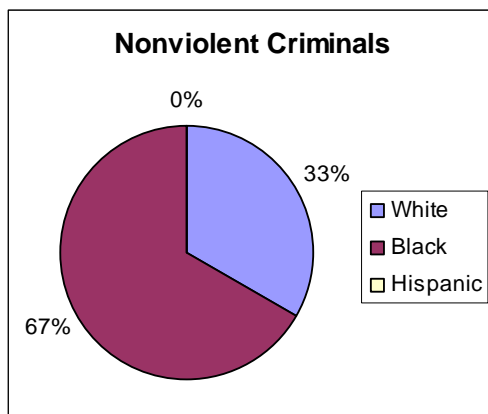


Figure 9. Nonviolent criminals as related to race on the six episodes watched of *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*.

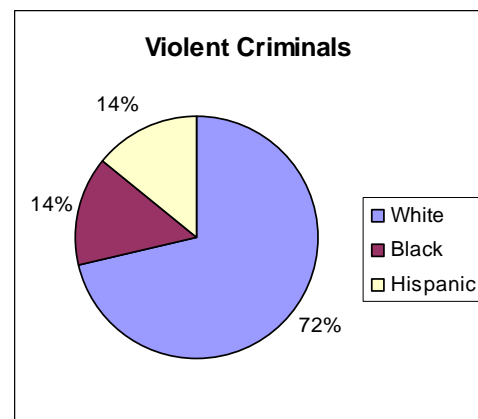


Figure 10. Violent criminals as related to race on the episodes watched of both programs.

It is difficult to draw up a completely accurate comparison between this information and real life statistics from this time period, because the data available from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (2007) looks at the arrests from the time period, not necessarily the guilty criminals. All criminals on the programs, though arrested, were also found guilty. It is possible that out of the arrests from 1990-1995, many of those individuals were innocent. It is, however, still important to compare

what is shown on the programs to what data is available. In comparison to real life statistics from 1990-1995, when the programs were aired, both programs overrepresent the number of white criminals, while under-representing the number of black and Hispanic criminals. Whites made up 60% of the criminals on the six episodes, while in real life they made up 36% of the arrests in New York City. Hispanics made up 21% of the arrests at that time, more than twice the amount of Hispanics shown as criminals on the programs.

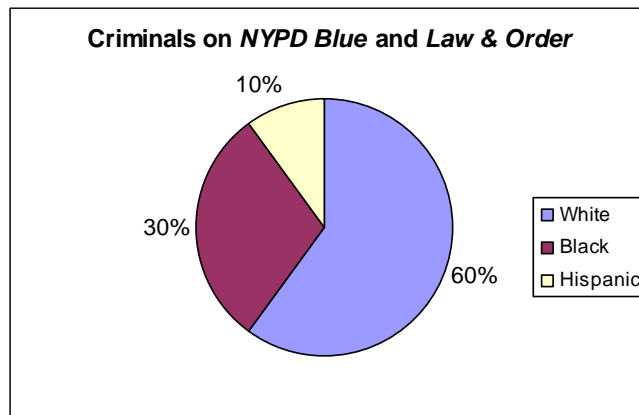


Figure 11. Races of criminals in the six episodes watched if *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*.

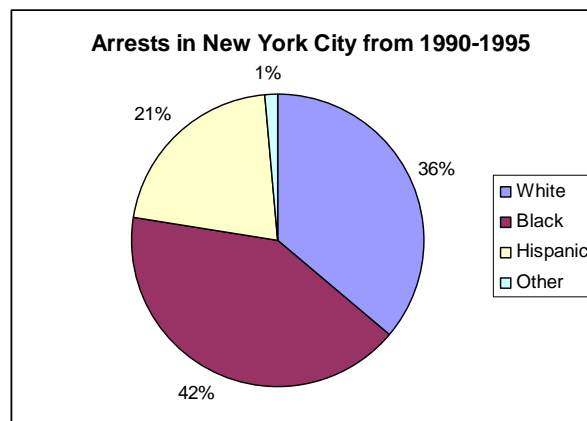


Figure 12. Arrests in New York City by race from 1990-1995, as taken from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.

### Representatives of the Court (RCO, RCD, RCP)

In all six episodes, representatives of the court made up the majority of characters and the most developed characters on the programs. There were nineteen total representatives of the court that were main characters, including one defense attorney (RCD), 15 police officers or detectives (RCO), and three prosecuting or assistant district attorneys (RCP).

In both television programs, the representatives of the court were the main characters and their personal, as well as their professional, lives were portrayed. The only characters with reoccurring roles are the court representatives, four of them being in two of the episodes, and eight of them being in all three of the episodes of the program. Only one of the representatives, William Jefferson, is a negative character, as he is involved in the crime committed by the criminal in the pilot episode of *Law & Order*.

The other representatives of the court in *Law & Order* are well-liked and positive characters. Assistant District Attorney Paul Robinette, Executive A.D.A. Ben Stone, and Detective Mike Logan are all characters shown on all three episodes. Paul Robinette is a black male who is first introduced as being the “new guy” but because of his ultimate competency, he is able to stay at this position for all episodes. He is the epitome of professional; he always wears a suit and tie, is clean shaven, and his perfect language is void of poor grammar or cursing. Ben Stone is another professional competent assistant district attorney. He is Caucasian and also always dresses in a suit and tie. Detective Mike Logan is the “tough guy” on the squad and always plays the bad cop and threatens criminals at times. His hotheaded and passionate behavior gets him into trouble when he bullies a confession out of a criminal in the second season. Captain Donald Cragen also is

professional, always wearing a tie and suspenders. He is stern white man and is a recovering alcoholic. He was one of the detectives', Max Greevey's, partner, before becoming captain.

Sergeants Max Greevey and Phil Ceretta are two white detectives on two of the three episodes of *Law & Order*. Max Greevey is an overweight well-dressed white man who is often shown smoking a cigar. He is married with three children, and plays the "good cop" in his partnership with Mike Logan, until he is killed in the second season. Phil Ceretta, another white sergeant, is hired as Max's replacement and Mike's new partner. He is competent, always wears a suit and tie, and although he known as the "new whip" to this job, the audience is made aware that he was very successful at his last law enforcement job.

The two main representatives of the court without recurring roles in the episodes viewed are William Jefferson and Ms. Green. William Jefferson, as previously stated, is a corrupt public official. He is the highest ranking black cop in New York City, is well dressed and very put together. He is, however, a negative character, as he has committed various crimes including perjury, tampering of evidence, and we later learn that he is behind the parking ticket scandal that is the focus of the pilot episode. Shambala Green is a black public defender and the attorney for Angela Brant who is on trial (but later found innocent) for the murder of Julian Decker. She is more casually dressed than the other lawyers, as she does not wear suits but brightly colored shirts, but she is still professional and competent. Her character only appears in the first episode of season 3 of *Law & Order* of the episodes I watched, yet she was also featured in six other episodes total during her time on the program ("Law & Order" from *IMDB*, 2006).

In *NYPD Blue*, all of the representatives of the court are positive and they also make up the majority of the main characters. Three of them are shown in all episodes. Detective Andy Sipowicz's character changes dramatically from the last episode viewed to the first. In the beginning he is a crude drunk who constantly swears and cannot get the job done. Although he still plays the "tough cop" and uses vulgar language at times, by the last episode he is one of the most competent men on the force and no longer an alcoholic. James Martinez is a Hispanic detective who is competent and although he is not as well dressed as the other characters in the first two episodes (his brightly colored loud patterned polo shirts stand out sharply from the other detectives' dark suits), he is always shown doing his job and wears a tie in the third episode viewed. Arthur Fancy is the black Lieutenant and is very professional. He always wears a button down shirt and tie and his language is impeccable.

Some of the representatives were shown in two of the seasons. Detective John Kelly is a white male who is very put-together and professional. He is honest and hard-working, as is shown by the fact that he became detective at the young age of 28. He is dating Janice Licalsi, a white police officer who is later put on trial for the murder of Alfonse Giardella. Sylvia Costas is an assistant district attorney who works hard and is very competent. Her high ranking job is thanks to her constant devotion to her work. She is dating Andy and at the end of the third episode the audience learns she may be pregnant with his child.

Bobby Simone, Diane Russell, Greg Medavoy are officers only shown in the third episode viewed. Detective Bobby Simone is a good looking white male and quieter and more sensitive than the other men at his office. In the one episode he is featured, he is

pursued by multiple women. He is only interested, however, in Diane Russell, a recovering alcoholic. She is a white detective who is competent and also interested in dating Bobby. Greg Medavoy is a white, bumbling detective. He is Martinez's partner in the third episode and although he is nervous and awkward, he is professional and well dressed.

Out of the representatives of the court, as previously stated, whites make up the majority of the main characters. Fifteen representatives are white, while four are black and only one is Hispanic. While my data for representatives of the court looked at the New York City police department as well as few attorneys, the only information available for representatives of the court looked at full time sworn employees of the New York City Police Department and not attorneys or other figures. On *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue*, there were eight white employees of the New York City police department, two black, and one Hispanic. This is similar to real life 1993 data from the United States Department of Justice, where white's make up 72.9% of the police force, blacks 12%, and Hispanics 14% (Reaves & Smith, 1995). On the programs, Hispanics are significantly underrepresented and other races such as Native Americans and Asians are completely forgotten.

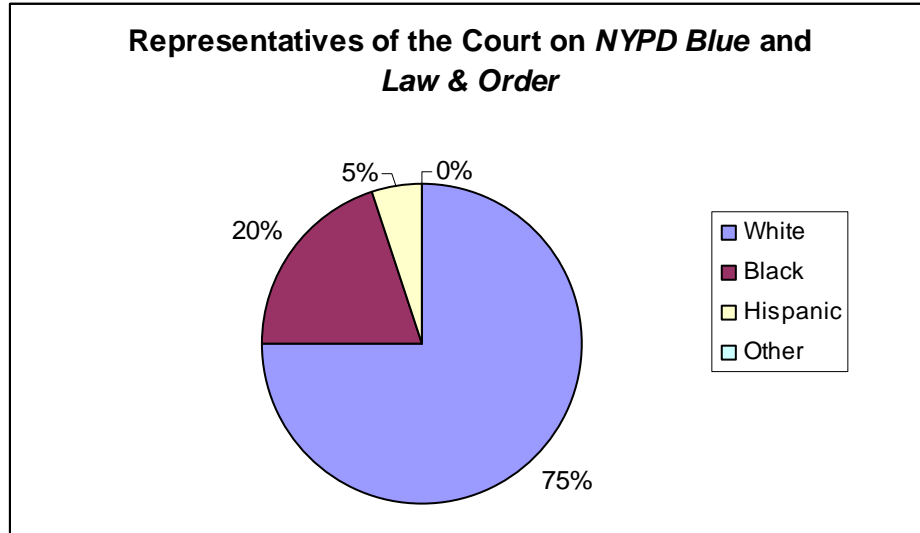


Figure 13. Races of representatives of the court on the six episodes viewed of *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*.

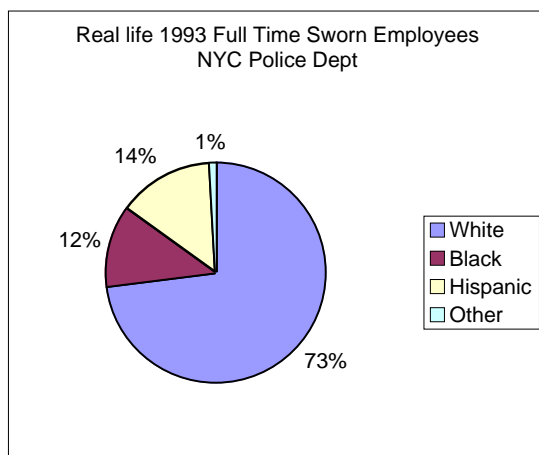


Figure 14. Races of New York City Police Department from 1993 United States Department of Justice data.

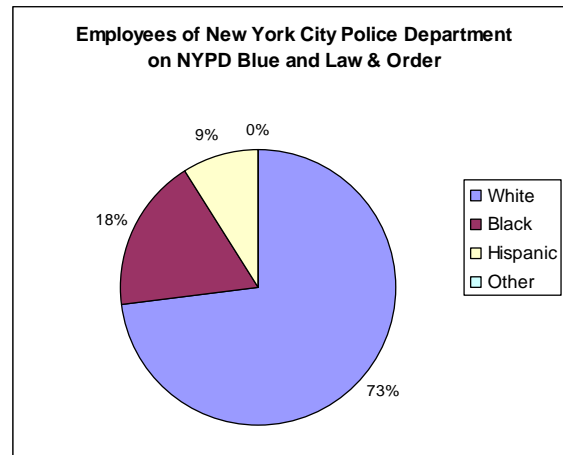


Figure 15. Races of employees of New York City Police Department as viewed on the television episodes.

### Victim (OVC, ONC)

The victims play a minor role in both of the television programs, with only two victims being a main character and having a repeating role in the series. At times, even, the victims are only shown after their death, and they thus have no speaking roles. In *Law & Order*, there is only one victim per episode, while in *NYPD Blue*, there are

multiple victims in all but one episode. There were eight different victims in total, with 3 of them being negative characters, and five positive.

In *Law & Order*, two of the three victims are never seen except for the appearance of their dead bodies. They are also negative characters. These two white men are Charles Halsey (Season 1) and Julian Decker (Season 3). Councilman Charles Halsey's bloodied dead body is shown wearing a suit and tie at the time of his murder. Although a public figure, he is involved with multiple scandals and is known as a "bagman." He is also involved in a parking meter scandal that helped to pay off other city officials. Julian Decker's body is found stabbed with scissors while he is in his pajamas. He is also a highly unfavorable figure, as the audience learns when the police question those he knew. He is a photographer and, as previously stated, he is also involved with arranging his models to become prostitutes. He is sleeping with the teenager Tracy Brant, promising her a future career in modeling. It is Tracy who later kills him when she realizes his promises are hollow lies. Max Greevey, the favorable detective from the first season of *Law & Order*, becomes the victim in the first episode of season two. He is a well-liked father and also a skilled detective. He is described further in the above representatives of the court section.

In *NYPD Blue*, there are multiple victims but they are less described. Ramon is a Hispanic man in the first season of the series who is the injured and the victim of a mugging in his apartment's laundry room. It is interesting to note, however, that when a white male is a later victim of mugging (but not injured), the police and medics are called to investigate. When Ramon is the victim, the crime is not reported. Andy Sipowicz, a main character, is also a victim of an attempt at his life in this episode. He is also

described in further detail previously. Mr. Ramos is a Hispanic victim of a robbery in the first episode of the second season. Although it is understood that he is involved with drug dealing, he is a positive character because he helps the police officers in their investigation and is very cooperative. Mrs. Carlin is a victim of spousal abuse. She is a white female with a kempt appearance despite her bruising on her face and body. Mr. Martinez is another victim in the third season of the series. He is a Hispanic victim of a robbery at his bar.

Out of all the crimes committed, whites were most often the victim on the programs. Hispanics, however, made up 38% of the victims shown on the programs while blacks were not shown as victims of any type of crime in any of the episodes. Real life data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics reveals the percentage of homicide victims by race from 1990-1995 (when the programs were broadcast) as very different from the programs' homicide victims ("Bureau of Justice Statistics," 2006). From 1990-1995, blacks made up over 50% of homicide victims, while whites were 46%. The data did not include specifically Hispanic victims, but the "other" category made up 2% of homicide victims. On the episodes studied, whites made up 100% of the homicide victims: blacks were never victims and Hispanics were only victims of non-deadly crimes.

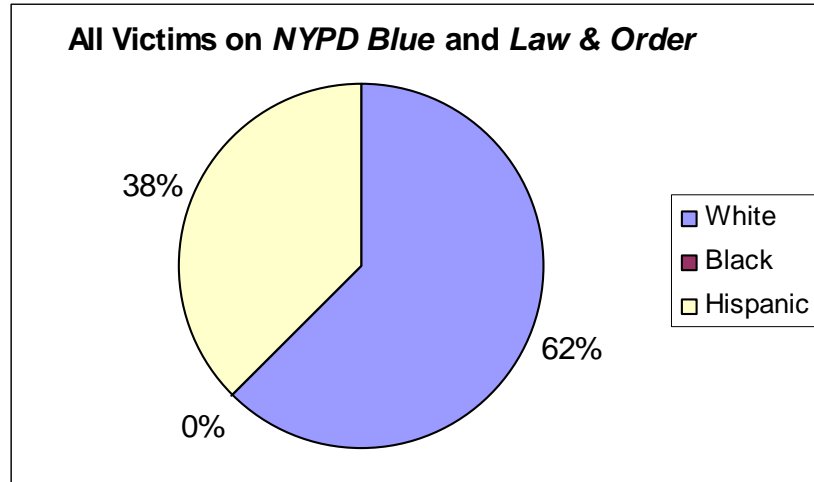


Figure 16. Races of victims on the six episodes viewed of *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*.

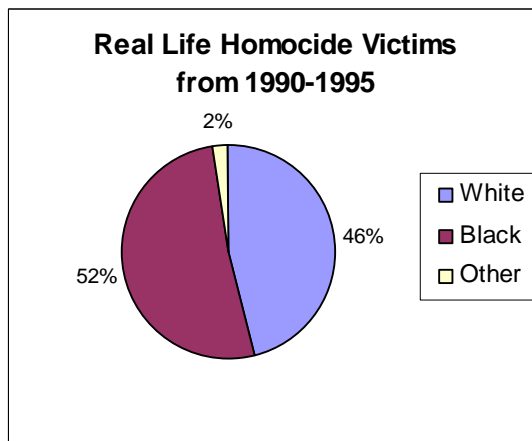


Figure 17. Races of New York City homicide victims (1990-1995) from United States Bureau of Justice data.

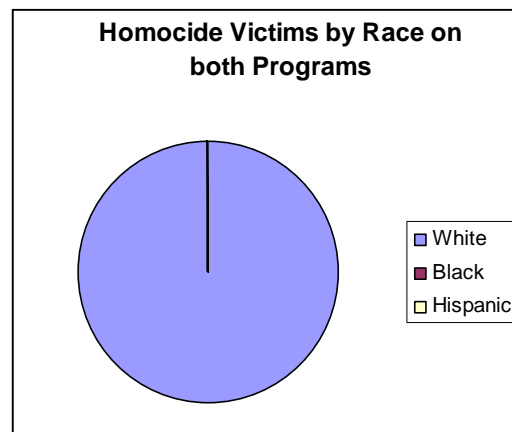


Figure 18. Races of New York City homicide victims as viewed on the television episodes.

## CONCLUSION

Television programs have a great effect on Americans' perceptions of the world in which they live. The image of a city is a powerful one, stemming from what it represents: power, success, and liberty. It has been the fuel for many accounts (written or televised) over time, as a setting that often plays a pivotal role in the story. Race representation in media accounts of the city are equally as important in shaping viewers' perceptions of the city and all those that live there.

### *Returning To My Theoretical Lenses*

The agenda setting theory postulates that media can set the agenda of what is important for viewers, by placing emphasis on certain topics while ignoring others. Because of this theory, and looking at my research, it can be suggested that because of this theory, watching these programs can influence the way viewers see the city. Because of the prevalence of crime on these episodes (there was at least one crime per episode), viewers watching these programs may believe New York City has a tremendous crime problem. Because of what prior studies have proven, these viewers may then in turn believe crime is an important problem to be fixed. When voting on issues of problems to fix in New York City, these viewers may vote as crime as the most important problem, as opposed to other issues, because of the lack of other problems showcased on these programs. Similar to the 2003 Gross and Aday study that compared effects of watching television news and direct crime experience, viewers of crime drama may be more likely to name crime an important problem.

The social construction of reality theory suggests that because of the vividness and realness of television's images, programs can often become part of viewers' sense of reality. Because the characters on both programs were very developed and almost lifelike, viewers may begin to form relationships with these characters. When characters of a certain race are negative, because the viewers have formed relationships with these characters, they may forget that they are not actually interacting with these people and believe that this race is negative in real life. Consequently, viewers of such programs like these, where the majority of black characters are negative, may foster a dislike or negative feelings towards these characters.

According to the cultivation theory, viewers take in information from television along with information from everyday life and both become part of viewers' sense of reality. This theory, combined with the violent and scary world of crime dramas, may cause viewers to believe that the world they live in is a lot more violent than it is in reality. As found in Carveth and Alexander's 1985 study, cultivation theory can often cause viewers to form certain beliefs about specific demographic groups. From my study, this effect on viewers can be alarming for my study. Certain races were shown falsely, and viewers may believe these false representations and make them part of their reality. Other races, such as Asians and Native Americans, were not shown at all, and this could cause viewers to forget their existence or deny their importance in cities. Because these programs are so realistic, the images and characters on the programs may begin to make up what viewers believe is real.

### *Placing My Results Among Other Studies*

My results were similar to what other studies have found. Minorities have constantly been shown to be underrepresented in the news and crime stories, although the focus of these programs is often based on them. They are rarely portrayed, yet when they are it is often in a negative light (Huston, et. al, 1992). In my study, the majority of black characters were shown to be negative characters. In other studies, it has been shown that whites are more likely to be shown as policemen or other criminal justice personnel than Hispanics or blacks (Entman and Rojecki, 2000; Klite et. al, 1997). The majority of the representatives of the court in my study were white, and only one Hispanic character was in this category. In *Law & Order* specifically, there were no Hispanic policemen or criminal justice personnel. Though Hispanics and other races, such as Asians and Native Americans, make up nearly a third of New York City population, they make up only an average of 7% of the population on *Law & Order* (Eschholz, Mallard, and Flynn, 2004). Therefore, there is not an accurate representation of races on such a crime drama.

My results did stand out some from other studies. Other studies I looked at concluded that when blacks or other minorities were shown, it was usually in a lower position (Huston, et.. al, 1992), however my research revealed that the majority of black characters were representatives of the court and had well-respected jobs such as detective or Assistant District Attorney. Out of the lowest characters, the criminals, whites made up 60% of the characters, a much larger percentage than they do in real life. Blacks made up 30% of criminal characters on the programs, whereas in real life they made up 42% of the arrests of the time. Non-whites have been found to have a greater likelihood of being portrayed as the perpetrator than do whites (Chiricos and Eschholz, 2002; in

Eschholz, Mallard, and Flynn, 2004). Despite the fact that blacks are underrepresented on television and crime drama in general, when they are shown, they are shown as the offender (Entman, 1992; in Eschholz, Mallard, and Flynn, 2004). My study, however, found that whites made up the majority of criminals (60%), and blacks made up only one-third of criminals on the shows. Previous studies have also shown that crime drama tend to underrepresent the amount of minorities on the program. A previous study found that though Hispanics and other races, such as Asians and Native Americans, make up nearly a third of New York City population, they make up only an average of 7% of the population on *Law & Order* (Eschholz, Mallard, and Flynn, 2004). My study, however, found that non-white characters made up 30% of the main characters on both of the programs, concluding that they are somewhat accurate. Where they do lack, however, is their representation of other minorities, such as Native Americans and Asians, whose appearances were nearly nonexistent on the programs. White characters were the majority by far on both programs. However, it is not surprising, as Caucasians tended to be the main characters on all television programs in the early nineties (and to some extent today), and by having less minorities on the programs, *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue* are simply being consistent with other shows in this media.

### *Qualifications*

I was interested in looking at the representations of race on television crime and police drama, to determine its potential effects on viewers. The cultivation effect, as previously stated, and other communication theories suggest that the portrayal of

ethnicity on *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue* would greatly influence the way viewers believe race is in real life.

There are, however, some qualifications to this argument. The effects of the cultivation theory are questionable. The theory says that after watching television over time, what is watched begins to make up one's reality (Shrum and Bischak, 2001; in Gerbner et al., 1980). Clearly, there are other influences besides the media that form one's sense of reality. Perhaps individuals who watch television with others and discuss what is happening may be less likely to believe what they are watching. Maybe those who study media effects in school would similarly be less influenced. Television is only part of what makes up our realities, our education and real-life experiences are also very important (Shrum and Bischak, 2001). Furthermore, the effects of the cultivation theory are not always proven. A study by Wober (1990) found that although the more Americans watched crime drama, the more they had a greater amount of fear for cities and the criminals who lived there, there was no significant relationship between the viewing of British crime drama and fear for cities by those in Great Britain (Kolbiens, 2004). Also, a study by Comstock, Chaffee, et al. discovered that there was an increase in fear from those who watched more television, however those that watched more television were women, the elderly, the less educated, and less wealthy, which are the individuals who traditionally have a greater fear of the world (Heath and Petraitis, 1987). The less educated and less wealthy tend to live in cities or other areas with high crime rates, and television is not influencing the prior beliefs they already espouse (Doob and Macdonald, 1979; in Heath and Petraitis, 1987). Television viewing of crime and police

drama may certainly lead to skewed views about the city, but one behavior is not necessarily related to the other.

### *Limitations*

The research conducted for this study was not perfect. I was limited by the materials I found on the computer library catalogues of a large university in the northeast and the Communication Abstracts and Dissertation and Theses Proquest database. While there was a good amount of research on viewing police crime reality shows (such as *Cops*) and news programs, there was little new research available on the effects of viewing television crime and police dramas.

I also am only looking at what I judged to be the main characters on the six episodes watched. Before starting the study, I included judges in my coding scheme, but after watching the programs and concluding that they were not main characters, I took them out. Perhaps including judges and all other characters would lead to different conclusions.

In addition, by no means am I suggesting that if by watching *Law & Order* or *NYPD Blue* reruns, your perception of New York City will be skewed in that you will see many inaccurate representations of the different races in the city. However, judging from my research, *Law & Order* and *NYPD Blue* may perhaps provide a more accurate perception of New York City than other crime dramas, in that it doesn't overly misrepresent the victim or perpetrator. My study, however, can only suggest just that: that the six episodes had somewhat accurate perceptions of New York City. I cannot conclude that all episodes of *NYPD Blue*, *Law & Order*, or the episodes of the sister

shows, *Special Victims Unit*, or *Criminal Intent*, provide accurate portrayals of murders in the city, only that the episodes that I watched did. Perhaps the later episodes of *NYPD Blue* and the episodes of *Law & Order* today, seventeen years later, provide a more accurate depiction of New York as a safe city, with a more accurate representation of the minorities living there. My study is limited in that I only analyzed six episodes over two semesters and I did not have a skilled team of analysts or a large amount of time by my side.

### *Implications*

We receive a large amount of our information from television, and as previously stated, this information is not just taken in and ignored. We process what we watch and we look to it, along with our life experiences to form our views and beliefs about the world we live in. The city is an important icon, which like other symbols, is shown often on television. What we know and feel about the city is influenced by what we watch on television programs. What happens, then, when the programs are incorrect? If people have no personal experience with New York and were to simply view these programs, such as *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*, what impressions would they have? Perhaps, they may think that the city is a dangerous, violent place to live. Because the characters on the programs are well-depicted and thoroughly described, they become life-like and it can be easy to forget that they are simply actors. Individuals may believe the stories and roles these characters portray, factual or not. People watching the programs may also believe that New York City is mostly made up of white middle-class men, the individuals prevalent on all episodes, a statement very far from the truth. While *NYPD Blue* and *Law*

*& Order* are commendable for not just showing African American male perpetrators (as other programs have done throughout the years), they rarely shows these individuals at all.

It is clear from this study that more research needs to be done. It would be beneficial to perhaps conduct a similar study, looking at more recent episodes to see if much has changed in the portrayals of the races on television. It would also be interesting to see if different shows of *Law & Order*, such as *Criminal Intent* or *Special Victim's Unit* offer different views of New York City. Yet another thing interesting to look at would be whether the race representations on the programs changed specifically after the occurrence of September 11<sup>th</sup> or if they've changed much since the show's first season.

My study only confirms the fact that we, as Americans need to become more media literate. We need to be able to identify such false images on television and realize that although a powerful influence, it does not always offer perfect portrayals of life as it is. We need to become educated in the ways of media such as television, to understand what benefits it has and determine its other effects on society. More than twenty years ago, Rice, Huston, and Wright (1982) wrote,

Future generations of Americans will do much of their information processing...and receive most of their entertainment and much of their education via television, then the development of "media literacy" may become almost as important as that of basic reading skills, whether or not we are ready to acknowledge it. (Rice, Huston, & Wright, p. 1982)

It seems as if today the time has arrived where we *do* receive most of our education and entertainment from television. Yet, we as a society still have not yet stressed the importance of media literacy and understanding television. Until we do, however, we

cannot completely know what effects it can have on society. We need to continue watching television, researching, and conducting studies, not just on *Law & Order* and on *NYPD Blue*, but on other popular television shows. Only then will we be able to recognize the media as a potential source of information, and thus a significant influence on our society.

*Appendix I.* Listing of episodes viewed for this study.

### Law & Order

<b>Season</b>	<b>Episode of Season</b>	<b>Episode Number</b>	<b>Original Air Date</b>	<b>Episode Name</b>
1	6	6 (Pilot)	10.30.1990	Everybody's Favorite Bagman
2	1	23	9.17.1991	Confession
3	1	45	9.23.1992	Skin Deep

### NYPD Blue

<b>Season</b>	<b>Episode of Season</b>	<b>Episode Number</b>	<b>Original Air Date</b>	<b>Episode Name</b>
1	1	1	9.21.1993	Pilot
2	1	23	10.11.1994	Trials & Tribulations
3	1	45	10.24.1995	E.R.

## Appendix II. Master coding document sorted by episode.

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>+/-</b>	<b>Other Episodes</b>
NYPD 1:1	Alfonse Giardella	M	White	GCV	-	
NYPD 1:1	Andy Sipowicz	M	White	RCO	+	2:1, 3:1
NYPD 1:1	John Kelly	M	White	RCO	+	2:1, 3:1
NYPD 1:1	James Martinez	M	Hispanic	RCO	+	2:1, 3:1
NYPD 1:1	Arthur Fancy	M	Black	RCO	+	2:1, 3:1
NYPD 1:1	Janice Licalsi	F	White	RCO	+	2:01
NYPD 1:1	Josh Goldstein	M	White	OFV	+	
NYPD 1:1	Ramon	M	Hispanic	OVC	+	
NYPD 2:1	Mr. Carlin	M	White	GCV	-	
NYPD 2:1	Mrs. Carlin	F	White	OVC, OFO	+	
NYPD 2:1	Mr. Ramos	M	Hispanic	ONC	-	
NYPD 2:1	Sylvia Costas	F	White	RCP	+	3:01
NYPD 2:1	Dan Breen	M	White	RCO, GCN	+	
NYPD 3:1	Nathan Stackhouse	M	Black	GCN	-	
NYPD 3:1	Antonio Vargas	M	Hispanic	GCV	-	
NYPD 3:1	Bobby Simone	M	White	RCO	+	
NYPD 3:1	Greg Medavoy	M	White	RCO	+	
NYPD 3:1	Diane Russell	F	White	RCO	+	
NYPD 3:1	Inspector Hampton	M	White	RCO	+	
NYPD 3:1	Mr. Martinez	M	Hispanic	ONC	+	
NYPD 3:1	Mrs. Martinez	F	Hispanic	OFV	+	
L&O 1:6	Tremaine Lewis	M	Black	GCN	-	
L&O 1:6	Simon Jackson	M	Black	GCN	-	
L&O 1:6	Tony Scalisi	M	White	GVC	-	
L&O 1:6	Max Greevey	M	White	RCO	+	
L&O 1:6	Mike Logan	M	White	RCO	+	2:01
L&O 1:6	Paul Robinette	M	White	RCP	+	2:01
L&O 1:6	Ben Stone	M	White	RCP	+	2:01
L&O 1:6	William Jefferson	M	Black	RCO	-	
L&O 1:6	Charles Halsey	M	White	OVC	-	
L&O 1:6	Mrs. Halsey	F	White	OFV	+	
L&O 1:6	Mrs. Jackson	F	Black	OFO	+	
L&O 2:1	Vince	M	White	GCN	-	
L&O 2:1	Daniel Magadan Jr.	M	White	GCV	-	
L&O 2:1	Phil Cerreta	M	White	RCO	+	
L&O 2:1	Donald Cragen	M	White	RCO	+	
L&O 2:1	Daniel Magadan Sr.	M	White	OFV	+	
L&O 3:1	Tracey Brant	F	White	GCV	-	
L&O 3:1	Ms. Green	F	Black	RCD	+	
L&O 3:1	Julian Decker	M	White	OVC	-	
L&O 3:1	Angela Brant	F	White	OFO	+	
L&O 3:1	Celeste Fox	F	White	OFV	+	
L&O 3:1	Betty Anne Carter	F	White	OFV	+	

Appendix III. Detailed coding document for criminal main characters.

**Criminal**

Circle one: GCV, GCN, ICV, ICN

TV Show:	
Episode # and Name:	

Date Coded:

Ethnicity:	
White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Indian, Native American. More specific if known	

Gender:	
Male or Female	

Physical Appearance	
Include information here about how the character dresses, their facial hair, unkempt appearance, good-looking	

Personal Habits	
Include info about the characters' flaws, habits, hobbies, etc.	

Type of Crime(s)	
Violent or non violent	

Violence In Other Instances	
Instances of verbal & physical violence, not involving the crime	

Guilt Status	
As determined by court and as shown to viewers (if different)	

Family and Relationship Status	

Overall Positive or Negative Status	

Appendix IV. Detailed coding document for main representatives of the court.

Representative of the Court	
Circle one: RCO, RCD, RCP	
TV Show:	
Episode # and Name:	
Date Coded:	
Ethnicity: White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Indian, Native American. More specific if known	
Gender: Male or Female	
Physical Appearance Include information here about how the character dresses, their facial hair, unkempt appearance, good- looking	
Personal Habits Include info about the characters' flaws, habits, hobbies, etc.	
Competency Include information here about the job qualifications, ability to complete their job	
Honesty/Impartiality Include information here about their truthfulness and honesty, also include whether or not they are impartial and unbiased	
Use of Violence Include here instances of verbal and physical violence	
Family and Relationship Status	
Overall Positive or Negative Status	

Appendix V. Detailed coding documents for other main characters.

Chart V: Other

Circle one: OVC, ONC, OFO, OFV

TV Show:	
Episode # and Name:	
Date Coded:	
Ethnicity:	
Write here: White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Indian, Native American. Can be more specific if info is available	
Gender:	
Male or Female	
Physical Appearance	
Include information here about how the character dresses, their facial hair, unkempt appearance, good-looking	
Personal Habits	
Include information here about the characters' flaws, habits, hobbies, etc.	
Family and Relationship Status	
Overall Positive or Negative Status	

## Appendix VI . Roles of characters coding document.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Further characterization</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Description of Role</b>
Criminal	Guilty violent criminal	GCV	An individual who commits a violent crime and is to be judged by a court of law
Criminal	Guilty nonviolent criminal	GCN	An individual who commits a nonviolent crime and is to be judged by a court of law
Criminal	Innocent violent criminal	ICV	An individual who is determined to be innocent of a violent crime, either by a court of law or by what the program viewers
Criminal	Innocent nonviolent criminal	ICN	An individual who is determined to be innocent of a nonviolent crime, either by a court of law or by what the program viewers
Representative of the Court	Police Officer or Detective	RCO	A law enforcement official
Representative of the Court	Defense Attorney	RCD	The lawyer(s) representing the criminal and/or non-criminal suspect
Representative of the Court	District or Prosecuting Attorney	RCP	The lawyer(s) representing the legal district or the victim of violent and/or non-violent crime or the
Other	Victim of Violent Crime	OVC	The character(s) suffering from violent abuses
Other	Victim of Nonviolent Crime	ONC	The character(s) suffering from nonviolent crime
Other	Family/friend of Victim	OFV	The relatives and friends of the victim of violent and/or non-violent crime
Other	Family/friend of offender	OFO	The relatives and friends of the criminal and/or non-criminal suspect

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