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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE HYPERREAL: AN EXAMINATION
OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN "REAL LIFE" POLICE DRAMA

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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1992

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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Doctor of Philosophy

Examination Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

Domestic Violence in the Hyperreal: An Examination of Race and Ethnicity in "Real Life" Police Drama

by

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This project investigates public representations of domestic violence by highlighting televised reality-based police dramas (e.g., COPS, L.A.P.D.: Life on the Beat, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, etc.). Specifically, it focuses on the intersection of race, class, and gender in the portrayal of police treatment of victims and suspects of domestic violence. The data for this research were gathered through the use of latent and manifest content analysis. Seventy-two hours (including commercials) of reality based programing were recorded for analysis, making 144 total individual shows and 48 episodes of each program.

In general, police officers were portrayed as treating domestic violence cases with lower levels of seriousness than other types of crime. Officers were more likely to express frustration with crime victims and greater levels of futility in their efforts to stop domestic assaults from reoccurring than other types of crime. And they were more likely
to express the opinion that domestic violence was the result of individual dysfunction
(alcohol, nature of love, culture of poverty, masochism), than they were to express the
opinion that there were contributing structural economic factors.

On average, crime committed by Non-White suspects was taken more seriously
by police than crime committed by White suspects. When controlling for domestic
violence, quantitative differences in police treatment between White and Non-white
suspects and victims disappeared. Few race differences emerged in latent content
analysis of police dialogue and lectures in domestic violence scenarios. However,
important distinctions were present. People of Color were portrayed as being more out
of control and belligerent toward police officers than were White suspects and victims.
Police were shown lecturing non-whites on U.S. law and exhibited greater amounts of
frustration and less patience with those that spoke little or no English.
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May the Television Gods forgive me for what I am about to write....
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Each year, at least fifteen hundred women\(^1\) are killed by a current or former husband or boyfriend. Four to five women a day are murdered by a male partner. Over thirty percent (some estimate over fifty percent) of all murders of women in America are committed by intimate partners . . . Up to 6 million women are believed to be beaten in their homes each year” (Berry 1995:6)\(^2\).

While the pervasive nature of domestic violence has been well established, much remains to be learned about this social enigma. Systematic inquiry into domestic violence has remained largely on the micro level of analysis, focusing on interpersonal power, individual characteristics of abusers and victims, psychological consequences of abuse, and situational factors contributing to battery. Even those factors which are indicators of a more systemic, widespread problem, such as unemployment, are analyzed on the level of individual rather than structural cause. That is, unemployment is seen as an individual characteristic which determines an individual’s likelihood to abuse his or her partner, rather than as an institutionalized social problem that profoundly influences the lives of all people in a class based society. Micro level analysis evades questions of how our very social structure endorses violence. It blurs the lines of inequality and fails to recognize differential life chances and experiences based on social location.
While feminist theory has made progress in asserting the connection between personal troubles and public issues with respect to domestic violence, much remains to be done. "Most feminist research in the area of wife abuse is consistent with a radical feminist position because it focuses exclusively on the patriarchy as the explanation for wife abuse" (Lenton 1995: 567). Such explanations fail to appreciate the intricacies of social inequality by ignoring differences between women (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc.).

This study seeks to move the debate on domestic violence beyond the essentialist politics of radical feminism, toward a more inclusive approach, whereby the intersectionality of various systems of institutionalized oppression converge to maintain unequal power relations amongst all peoples. While it is true that all women are disadvantaged under the ethos of patriarchy, the form which that oppression takes is largely influenced by our relationship to other systems of inequality. Therefore, it is critical in our attempt to explore the dynamics of domestic violence that we link interpersonal relations with a structural analysis that circumvents the single issue practices of radical feminist inquiry.

One arena in which the radical feminist failure to incorporate a multiple systems view of inequality becomes obvious is within the context of the mass media where public/private dichotomies are blurred. This is particularly true of one of the newest television genres, reality programing. Here, cameras give viewers a voyeuristic look inside the private lives of those involved in illicit and/or criminal activity. Such home intrusions become particularly relevant when examining domestic violence. Radical feminist theory suggests it is the protections afforded in the private sphere which serve as
a barrier to the eradication of domestic assault. However, reality based crime programs offers no such safeguard. Coupled with research suggesting that reality programming focuses on the lives of the impoverished and racial/ethnic minorities far more often than on the wealthy, middle class, or white members of society (Oliver 1994), we see that not only is one’s home no longer one’s protective castle but that it is a particular segment of society which is singled out for such invasions of privacy.

Reality-based police dramas provide the general population with the unique opportunity to experience the world of crime and punishment from the perspective of police officers. The television program “COPS” for example is, “clearly a new step towards involved reality television: a production team follows actual cops on their rounds” (Bondejerg 1996: 33) simulating a police ride-along that few would ever have the actual opportunity to participate in. Filmed as live-action documentary overlaid with the commentary of police officers, viewers are given the impression that they are on scene witnessing real-life crime as it occurs.

However, these programs do not provide us with an unaltered view of reality. We see only what the camera allows us to see, we hear only what the microphones allow us to hear, we enter the crime scene in the middle of the act, we learn very little about the background of the perpetrators and the victims, it is the words of the police officers that provide narrative voice.

“Reality” TV specifically, and the media in general, have depicted urban crime as incomprehensible, a world apart that makes less and less sense to the public it engages—so heinous a crime, so senseless a death. The dark, stark urban images present drugs, violence, and criminality at the level of a deep, associational subtext, while the causal links among them have been broken A broader narrative discourse examining the multiple components of the drug problem--one intended to explain the socio-
The symbolic meaning of crime and criminal activity is filtered to produce a particular version of reality, one heavily entrenched in cultural bias and individualistic, a-structural analysis. In this context, “Civil disturbances erupt because people are dealing drugs, or getting drunk and disorderly, in bars, in their homes, or on the streets” (Rapping 1994: 38), because the people themselves are portrayed as “scum, degenerate, (and) morally depraved” (38). “The language, the brutality, the tackiness of the social scene, the bad hair, the filthy, crying children, the untidy lawns, dirty sidewalks are a turn-off” (Rapping 1994:38) to the viewing audience.

The cops arrive and shove the more unruly or disrespectful around a bit as they steer the more powerless and confused - women, children, and the elderly - towards temporary safety. All this takes place amid a welter of harangues, insults, and demeaning “advice” about how one should live....They deserve rough treatment, because they are scum, degenerate, morally depraved.” (Rapping 1994: 38).

What is strikingly absent from this frame of reference is an examination of the social conditions of poverty or of reactions to racism, sexism, classism, and other structures of inequality.

This project will investigate public representations of domestic violence by highlighting televised reality-based police dramas (e.g., COPS, L.A.P.D.: Life on the Beat, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, etc.). The benefit of using such reality-based programs is two fold. The first benefit of exploring domestic violence via reality based
police drama lies in the target population. The police in these shows primarily engage individuals from the lower-classes and/or racial/ethnic minorities, thereby providing the researcher with a viable sample for examining treatment based on structural inequality. Specifically, by focusing on police treatment and investigation outcomes it allows the exploration of institutionalized discrimination in those spaces where gender and race intersect. The second, and most important benefit in terms of this research lies the potential for deconstructing the messages such shows present and their role in maintaining and perpetuating hegemonic ideology by portraying victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in individualistic, a-structural terms.

Beginning with a review of the literature on domestic assault, the media, and reality television, this study will explore the intersection of race/ethnicity, class, and gender in the portrayal of domestic violence on real life police dramas. Content analysis will be the methodological approach employed by this study. Seventy-two hours of three reality based police dramas will be recorded for study: COPS, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, and LA: P.D. Life on the Beat. Manifest content analysis techniques will be utilized primarily for purposes of enumeration and comparison of domestic violence scenarios with other types of criminal activity depicted on real life police dramas. Latent content will be examined to supplement and expound upon manifest findings.

The data analysis chapter will be organized in three major categories, each specifically, addressing differences in the perceived level of crime seriousness, police frustration, expressions of futility in solving and/or curbing future criminal involvement, officer attribution of the cause and solution of domestic violence, and messages.
imbedded in police lectures of suspects and victims of domestic violence. The first
category will focus on domestic violence and it’s portrayal on real life police drama in
comparison to other types of crime. The second category will focus on the portrayal of
race differences in general. The third category will explore the intersection of race and
class in domestic violence scenarios.

The final section of this research paper is a discussion of the larger theoretical
and practical implications of the research findings. The potential influence of skewed
media images and messages in shaping attitudes about domestic violence is addressed.
Special attention is given to intersectionality and the potential to further illuminate the
multiplicity of structural influences on the causes of domestic violence.
ENDNOTES

1. While men are also victims of domestic assault, current research estimates that ninety-five percent of the victims of battering are female (Berry 1995).

2. See also Brock-Utne 1989; Browne and Williams 1993; French 1992; Roberts 1993; Straus & Gelles 1990; Walker 1989).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of the literature addressing race, class, gender, and domestic violence on real life police dramas. It provides a theoretical framework for data analysis and a larger discussion of the importance of structural intersections in the images and messages regarding domestic violence which are sent out to the public via mass media. The first section is an over-view of the radical feminist perspective on domestic violence and it’s limitations. This section also includes a discussion of the concept of intersectionality and its potential for advancing a more praxis oriented research. The second section is a summary of current domestic violence research which specifically addresses issues of race and class. Section three addresses police response to domestic violence. In the fourth section, attention specifically turns toward television programing and it’s role in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of it’s viewers. The final segment addresses the new television genre of reality programing and the portrayal of crime, race, class, gender, and domestic violence.
RADICAL FEMINISM AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A "radical" feminist approach to domestic assault on women focuses on the sociopolitical context of male power and control in society, i.e., patriarchy. Here, violence is merely one of the methods by which men oppress and subjugate women. Violence against women is thought to be sanctioned and maintained by political, social, and economic factors within our society. Radical feminists seek to understand and explain why men, as a class, use physical force against women and how this serves a function to a particular society, rather than why a particular man uses violence against a particular woman (Yllö and Bogard 1988; Schechter 1982; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Walker 1979). In this perspective, individual men are not only trained and reinforced to be violent against women, but the patriarchal social structure and men in general are rewarded by women being restricted and limited by their fear of men's violence. As evidence of the widespread acceptance of violence against women, radical feminists cite national surveys which report that nearly 25% of women and 30% of men regard violence as a normal and even positive part of marriage (Straus 1977; Gelles 1987; Hampton et. al. 1993; Jones 1994). Further, seventy percent of college men in one study reported some likelihood that they would hit a hypothetical wife (Briere 1987). Wife battering will continue until the sexist society that maintains it is challenged and changes, even if individual men cease their violence toward their partners. Legal reforms will never end wife battery so long as the institutions of society themselves remain fundamentally sexist.

According to radical feminists one of the major contributors to the safeguarding of male privilege is the ideology of separate spheres. "The connection between individual
and the private sphere to be a sanctuary from political and state control (Jagger 1988).

Radical feminists uncover the male bias in this sentiment by exposing the home as a sanctuary of male violence, "the cutting edge of patriarchal oppression where many women face male power in its crudest and most aggressive form" (Bryson 1992: 200). Liberal rhetoric allows state officials not to protect women from bodily harm, while publicly congratulating themselves on preserving the sanctity of family rights, in essence, maintaining the illusion of benevolent patriarchy while allowing thousands of women to be victimized under the veil of privacy.

A defining characteristic of most radical feminist thought is that it prefers to ignore differences between women in favor of focusing on the ways in which we are the same. That is, it looks at women as a unified class and attempts to posit an essential being common to all women. Patriarchy is believed to dominate and oppresses all women equally, with all men being the unqualified benefactors. Radical feminists attempt to rally women around their common "otherness" toward the goal of cultural revolution--the overthrow of patriarchy. "Sisterhood is powerful!"

**Limitations of Radical Feminism**

While undoubtably a lovely sentiment, what this view fails to consider is the multiplicity of dimensions upon which people are oppressed. Not all men benefit equally from patriarchy. The intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality create multiple systems of inequality, some of which we are subjugated under and others of which we are privileged. Historically, sisterhood has not eliminated race and class bias. When feminists
which we are privileged. Historically, sisterhood has not eliminated race and class bias.

When feminists fail to account for differential oppression, they become active
participants in the oppression of their sisters. Beyond sisterhood is still racism.

One area this failure becomes apparent is in the analysis of the public/private
division as the major contributing factor to the lack of legal protection. A common
feminist critique of U.S. law is its reluctance “to intrude upon the privacy of family
life” (Tong 1984:126). This public/private split is often cited as a barrier to the
protection of battered women. Such sweeping decrees however, fail to recognize that not
all groups have been afforded the privileged sanctity of legal privacy. Aida Hurtado
(1989) puts it this way:

“The contemporary notion that “the personal is political” identifies and
rejects the public/private distinction as a tool by which women are
excluded from public participation while the daily tyrannies of men are
protected from private scrutiny. Yet the public/private distinction is
relevant only for the white middle and upper classes since historically the
American state has intervened constantly in the private lives and domestic
arrangements of the working class. Women of Color have not had the
benefit of the economic conditions that underlie the public/private
distinction. Instead the political consciousness of women of Color stems
from an awareness that the public is personally political” (cited in Clough
1994:84, original emphasis).

Reiterating the privilege inherent in public/private distinctions, Mary Eaton
(1994) questions its legitimacy in the context of lesbian relationships:

“What of the idea that the sanctity of the private sphere insulates batters
and entraps abused women? To put it bluntly, the notion that a lesbian’s
home is her castle, so to speak, and consequently, that the state respect for
lesbian privacy instills or reinforces battering lesbians’ sense of
entitlement to abuse their partners, is fanciful at best” (214).

A second problem arises when addressing the radical feminist implication that the
home is not a sanctuary for women. Here there is no recognition that the private sphere
is often regarded as the one arena where people of color, the poor, and/or lesbians are allotted temporary relief from the social pressures of racism, classism, heterosexism, and perhaps in the case of the latter (and single women), sexism. In this regard the home does serve as a sanctuary, albeit temporary, for non-privileged women.

This raises questions about the usefulness of the public/private split as an analytic tool: Is it only useful in explaining the situation of privileged women? Is it even relevant in the lives of privileged women, or has the ideology only served as a smoke screen to mask a greater problem? If the rules of privacy do not apply to the underclass, and the state feels no qualms about intruding, what then explains the allowance of the continuation of violence against women in these households?

When the state does enact assertive campaigns against male violence, it is in lower class and/or ethnic neighborhoods. Male violence is often targeted as a lower class, culture of poverty or biological, problem. War has been waged on underclass males, in the form of scientific genocide (sterilization, etc.), mass imprisonment, and disproportionate police patrol (Anderson 1983; Parenti 1988; Stordeur and Stille 1989). Radical feminist analysis fails to take this differential targeting of men into account. While they often critique legal and scientific explanations of men who batter for diverting attention away from the sociopolitical structure which promotes and condones male violence against women, by blaming individual “bad” men (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1988; Stordeur and Stille 1989), these theorists fail to tell us which men in particular are being disproportionally scapegoated. And in so doing they avoid having to engage in any meaningful discussion of intersectionality and differential oppression.
Intersectionality: Linking Race, Class, and Gender

No one is simply a man or a woman. Each of us embodies intersecting statuses and identities, empowered and disempowered, including physical and demographical traits, chosen and unchosen. In any discussion of gender, serious students of the social order need to be prepared to ask, Which men? Which women? (Disch 1997:1).

A growing body of literature supports these remarks by Disch and suggests that social theorists need to shift their attention away from essentialist arguments of identity toward one that embraces a multitude of intersecting statuses and identities (Anzaldúa 1987a, 1987b; Collins 1991; Du Bois 1989; Lorde 1984, 1988; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Walker 1995). According to these theorists, we do not live single-issue lives, rather we occupy several social positions simultaneously, with each position affecting our experience of the other positions. For instance, there is no generic Asian, devoid of class and gender. Likewise, there is no generic male, devoid of race and class. To carry the argument further, how a man experiences masculinity is dependent upon his race and social class status. An upper class, African American male will have very different experiences in regards to his masculinity than would a lower class, African American male, as would an upper class Hispanic male, or a lower class White male. “Individuals may feel the salience of one or another category at a given time, but their life experiences are shaped by the confluence of all three” (Anderson 1997:14).

Part of this shaping of experience takes place within the realm of socio-economic power structures and systems of inequality. In this regard, race, class, and gender form a matrix of domination (Collins 1991), in which one form of discrimination is entwined within a complex matrix of others forms of discrimination. One’s experience of classism, is filtered through their unique experience of racism and sexism. Likewise,
one’s experience of sexism, is filtered through classism and racism. In order to develop a more complete understanding of various systems of oppression we must analyze them they relate to one another, and not merely as separate independent systems.

Developing inclusive thinking reminds us that women’s experiences vary by race, class, age, and other social factors. Although women as a group share many common experiences, recognizing and understanding the diversity of those experiences are equally important in the construction of descriptions and theories about women’s lives (Anderson 1997:13).

This research project seeks to address such issues by going beyond current radical feminist analysis of domestic violence by incorporating issues of race and class.

A Dearth in the Field

This section elaborates on the need for further exploration of the intersections of race, class, and gender in domestic violence research by pointing to the current dearth in scientific investigation. Domestic violence literature focusing on non-Anglo women is scarce. With a few notable exceptions (Richie 1996; Scarf 1988; Song 1996; White 1995) there are virtually no books which address the specific concerns of women of color. Both Richie and White focus on African American victims of domestic violence. Richie (1996) explores the relationship between being a victim of spousal abuse, succumbing to socially defined gender roles, and participating in criminal activity among African American women in currently in jail, a phenomena she identifies as gender entrapment. White’s (1995) work is best described as a self-help guide, outlining several different concerns specific to black women who are being battered, including dealing with police, the courts, social services, and psychologists in light of institutionalized racism. Scarf (1988) focuses on the special concerns of Jewish women who are being

There is also a marked lack of research published in academic journals which is specific to the concerns of women of color. What little there is, tends to focus on domestic violence in African American families, while ignoring Latino and Asian families.

Review of the literature indicates four factors which help to contribute to the lack of research exploring issues of race/ethnicity in domestic violence. First, is the radical feminist strategy of mainstreaming domestic violence awareness. Mainstreaming is an attempt to legitimize concern over domestic violence and emphasize its pervasive nature by labeling it a problem which affects all social classes and ethnic groups equally. While it is important to recognize that male violence against women is not something cultivated by the underclass, we must recognize the racist issues at play when we say this problem deserves attention because white and upper class women are affected too. Mary Jan Cronin (Pleck 1987:193-4), a member of a group in federal government that met regularly to coordinate federal efforts regarding domestic violence claimed that “there was a federal response because the problem cuts across class and race. If domestic violence affected only poor women, it would have been dismissed.” Questions of why this distinction is so important and why radical feminists were so readily willing to use it must not be averted.

A second factor contributing to the lack of research on the domestic violence against women of color is the resistance of antiracist groups in acknowledging internal conflict. Some argue that feminism has no place in antiracist politics as it creates
divisions amongst people of color (Collins 1991; Crenshaw 1994; Lorde 1984; hooks 1981, 1984). Extremists have even gone so far as to say that it is the loss of the right to physically chastise women which has led to the erosion of patriarchy in Black families, and thus the perpetuation of racism (Ali 1989; Crenshaw 1994; hooks 1981). Others merely regard domestic violence as an offshoot of racism, believing that once racial equality is achieved violence against women will dissipate (Crenshaw 1994). And finally there is the fear, based upon centuries of experience with institutionalized discrimination, that any call of attention to spousal abuse within an ethnic community will be used by the dominate group to perpetuate racist stereotypes of men of color as inherently violent and/or culturally deficient (Crenshaw 1994).

The third factor contributing to the lack of research is the low esteem in which women of color are held. To be blunt, because women of color are not valued, it is of little social significance whether they are abused or not. A literature review by Hawkins (1987) produced much evidence in the criminal justice system to support this claim. Police, prosecutors, judges, and health care workers respond with less vigor in Black communities than in white communities. Black men convicted of murder are consistently given heavier sentences, while convicted murders of black men are penalized less harshly. As the captain of police detectives in a southern town during World War I puts it; “In this town there are three classes of homicide. If a nigger kills a white man, that’s murder. If a white man kills a nigger, that’s justifiable homicide. If a nigger kills a nigger, that’s one less nigger” (quoted in Hawkins 1987:194).

The fourth and final factor is the stereotypic portrayal of non-white groups, especially African Americans and Latinos, as being inherently more violent than white
families. Again Hawkins (1987) demonstrates the truthfulness of this statement with respect to black men by reviewing criminal justice literature. Because these groups are seen as naturally more violent fewer resources may be allotted for the study of domestic assault within ethnic communities as any attempts to alter violent conditions may be viewed futile.

RESEARCH IN THE MARGINS

As stated above there is a marked lack of published research focusing on the specific concerns of women of color as victims of domestic violence. The majority of what is available centers on Black women. Asbury (1987) and Hampton et. al. (1991) report that the literature on spousal abuse typically addresses ethnicity in one of three ways; it either fails to mention the race of the women being studied, it acknowledges that only majority women were included, or it includes some women of color but not in numbers proportional to their national or local population. While not denying the validity of these categories, it is notable that there have been studies, including that of Asbury (1987) and Hampton et. al. (1991) which focus more specifically on ethnicity and spousal abuse. Further, these categories don’t allow us to look substantively at such projects.

Extent and Frequency of Spousal Abuse

There is an on going debate about the level of violence which exists in ethnic minority families as compared to Anglo families. One line of reasoning proclaims that ethnic families, and particularly Black and Latino families, are more violent than Anglo
families. As evidence proponents offer police crime reports and the ethnic make up of battered women’s shelters, in which people of color are over-represented. Critics of this view are quick to point out the effects of race and class bias inherent in such statistics. Society is replete with racist assumptions about the violent nature of ethnic minority men. This view is reflected in police concentration, arrest reports, and judicial proceedings (Feagin and Feagin 1993; Mann 1993; Farrell and Swigert 1988). Further, it has been suggested that women of color may be over-represented in shelters not because they are more likely to be battered but because battered women’s shelters tend to be located in impoverished areas where they are more accessible to the poor and/or women of color than they are to white and/or middle-upper class women. Additionally there is some evidence which suggests Black women in particular are less likely to tolerate abuse than other groups of women (Gondolf et. al 1991). Crenshaw (1994) suggests that women of color are more likely to be forced to rely on shelters due to lack of personal funds or friends and family in a position to provide economic support. However, according to White (1995) and Gondolf, et. al (1991) Black women are more likely to rely on family and friends than on social services due to experiences with racism in such institutions.

There are no official national statistics on wife battering. Most studies of battered women are based on small, nonrepresentative samples drawn from shelters, clinical populations, or advertisements (Asbury 1987) and very few of these focus specifically on the difference between Anglo and non-Anglo families. There has been no research attempting to measure the overall level of domestic violence between Asian, Latino, or Native American intimates. So it is impossible to conclude with any degree
of statistical certainty whether actual differences in violent behavior exist between ethnic
groups. There are two notable exceptions both comparing white families with Black
Families: The first National Family Violence Survey conducted in 1975 (Straus, Gelles,
and Steinmetz 1980) was a Nation wide probability sample of 2,143 respondents.
Researchers concluded that black husbands had higher rates of overall and severe
violence towards their wives than white husbands (113 per 1,000 and 30 per 1,000
respectively). This result was replicated in the second National Family Violence Survey
in 1985 (Hampton et. al 1991). There was a substantial decrease in the rate of violence
by black husbands between the 1975 and 1985 surveys, but no decrease for the rate
inflicted by white husbands (Hampton et. al. 1991). However, both surveys
underrepresented the population of African Americans, making statistical comparisons
difficult. Also the numerical outcome fails to consider differences in social desirability
between various groups of respondents. Those with more invested in the system are less
likely to divulge socially unaccepted practices.

Socioeconomic differences have been implicated creating higher levels of spousal
abuse across ethnic groups\(^2\). When controlling for social class differences, race
differences in violent behavior disappear (Straus et. al 1980; Fagan et. al. 1983).
However other research has found the relationship to hold under certain conditions.
Cazanave and Straus's research (1979) suggests racial differences persist at the lowest
economic levels of society. While McKibben et. al. (1987) found no race differences
with respect to violence in the middle class, but not in the upper or lower classes. The
assumption that poverty leads to greater levels of violence may be as much a reflection of
societal classism (official crime reports) and differential willingness to divulge socially

unacceptable practices as it is a reflection of actual differences in the level of domestic violence between socioeconomic groups. Researchers must discover ways to effectively reveal the extent of spousal abuse in those families which are "protected" by class privilege before such comparisons can be made.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Up until the early 1980s in order for a police officer to make an on sight arrest in a domestic violence case, he or she had to witness the assault take place. If the offense was not directly observed, officers were required to obtain a warrant prior to making an arrest. In light of research evidence which showed it was very unlikely for a man to attack his wife with police present and due to the number of serious injuries incurring before a warrant could be obtained, the U.S. government created special provisions for a warrantless arrest in the case of domestic violence (Ferraro and Pope 1993). A number of lawsuits filed against police departments in the late 1970s and 1980s also served as a catalyst for changing arrest policies (Jaffe, Hastings, Reitzel, and Austion 1993). Namely, police departments started to take a more aggressive official stance on arresting wife batterers. Many departments around the nation have gone one step further by enacting mandatory arrest policies.

There has been some evidence that mandatory arrest policies help detour repeat violence, with cities showing a significant decrease in call backs (Jaffe et. al. 1993). However, two replication studies have not shown significant effects. One study, conducted in Milwaukee (Sherman et al. 1991, reported in Jaffe et. al. 1993) found short-custody arrests had a deterrent effect lasting 30 days, but showed significantly
higher long-term recidivism than no arrest" (87). Demographic differences between the studies supporting and refuting arrest effectiveness might prove to be important. While the studies in support have been primarily middle class with white populations, the Milwaukee study was in a lower class neighborhood with 55 percent of the population being unemployed, 76% Black, and 50% having prior arrest records.

Even policies of mandatory arrest are not a guarantee that charges will be filed. In the Milwaukee study only 5 percent of the arrests resulted in charges, and only 1 percent of those were convicted (Jaffe et. al. 1993). In fact, mandatory arrest, is not even a guarantee that an arrest will be made! In one study of a mandatory arrest policy in Arizona, researchers found that only 18 percent of all domestic violence calls resulted in arrest (Ferraro and Pope 1993).

Many factors continue to affect whether or not an officer will make an arrest. First, is the perceived seriousness of victim injury. Some officers continue to act on an informal “stitch” rule, wherein an arrest is made only if a specific number of surgical sutures are needed (Berry 1995). A second factor is the amount of support police are given from the criminal justice system. As already shown, arrest in domestic violence cases rarely results in charges being filed by prosecutors or convictions in court. Police may not be inclined to arrest when their efforts aren’t paying off.

A third factor inhibiting police is the potential for personal injury. Domestic violence situations are often cited as being amongst the most dangerous of police calls. However, a study released by the National Institute of Justice in 1986 refutes this claim. Prior to 1982, FBI statistics “on officer deaths included domestic disturbances with all other types of disturbances. This meant that ‘family quarrels’ were categorized along
with bar fights, gang calls, and general disruptions" (Jaffe et. al. 1993:66). After reclassifying domestic violence as a separate category, the FBI found that they were responsible for only 5.7% of officer deaths, a number lower than burglary, other disturbances, traffic, and robbery incidents. Yet, these new statistics are often overlooked, and officers continue to perceive domestic violence calls to be amongst the most dangerous.

A fourth factor effecting arrests are the police attitudes toward domestic violence, women, and race, and class. One study found that police were less likely to believe that arrest was the best solution, with only 4% advocating it (Saunders and Size 1986). While finding no attitude differences with respect to the perceived seriousness of the wife assault, when compared to stranger assault, Hilton (1993) found that police were more likely to attribute blame to the victim and less likely to endorse police action as the best solution. Police continue to see women as domineering, controllers, demanding nags, sharp-tonged vipers, with little interest in the welfare of their children (Tong 1984). Men on the other hand, are seen as having their patience pushed to the limit (Tong 1984). Police racism also influences their perceptions about violence. For example, in a police ride-along, Ferraro and Pope (1993) noted:

“One Anglo male officer expressed the belief that Mexicans were taking over Phoenix, noting that certain parts of Phoenix ‘look just like old Mexico.’ Driving by a bar frequented mostly by American Indians, the same officer said, ‘Yah ta hey! Come down from the reservation to get some firewater. Yeah, going to get a little firewater,’ and told several stories about drunken Indians, suggesting they were inferior to non-Indians” (113).
A substantial body of research suggests these comments are reflective of the racial bias of police officers all over the country (Feagin and Feagin 1993; Mann 1993; Farrell and Swigert 1988).

A fifth factor effecting police arrests are the victim’s wishes. Women are often just looking to make the abuse stop, rather than have their abusers sent to jail. Finally, organizational factors contribute to police response. Police dispatchers often designate domestic violence calls as low priority, 911 operators have been known to put victims on hold, or fail to respond to domestic violence (Jaffe, et. al. 1993). Further, some police departments formally or informally discourage police from making arrests, in favor of mediation. But mediation can have deadly effects. A Kansas City study by Stephens revealed 85% of murdered women had previously called the police and 50% had called five or more times (reported in Jaffe et. al. 1993).

Having said all of this, it is important to remember that while the police are often the direct link between law and individual, they do not operate in a vacuum. Police attitudes reflect those of the larger; culture; they do not act independently of it. Police procedure, what is tolerated, and what is expected of them is directly drafted by those higher up in command, and indirectly sanctioned by society at large. As Ferraro and Pope (1993) write, “At the concrete, everyday level of survival, many women require police assistance. For too many women, there is none. When police intervention fails, the larger societal implications are overlooked, attention returning instead to the behavior of police” (99). We must avoid the temptation to scapegoat the police, they should not bare the burnt of this social disease, it must be fought on many levels simultaneously.
MEDIA, HEGEMONY, AND TELEVISED REALITY

Radio, television, film and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of "us" and "them." Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths and resources though which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. (Kellner 1995: 5)

In short, the media not only reflects and reinforces cultural notions of what is and what is not acceptable/normal/right by acting as a socializing agent, it also plays a role in the construction of meaning by providing individuals with symbolic representations of the world at large (Bagdikian 1987; Gitlin 1980; Kellner 1981; Newton and Buck 1985).

The media, and more specifically television, is one of the most pervasive, if not powerful, socializing forces in today's society. According to David Littlejohn (1975):

"Television is the most thoroughly attended to, most pervasive and probably most influential means of propagating ideas in this country today. It can be instantaneous in its reach, intimate in its reception. It can exercise the most extraordinary sensory and emotional appeal. You can find authorities who believe that it molds minds, fixes modes of perception, and determines what is thought of as desirable and even real for hundreds of millions of people" (p. 65).

It has been speculated that television is rapidly becoming the most consistent and common agent of socialization throughout an individual's life span, surpassing even the family (Gerbner 1995; Kalba 1975; Leiss, Klein and Jhally 1986). Present from birth, television helps to shape from the outset the predispositions and the selections that govern the use of other media. Unlike other media, television requires little or no attention; its repetitive patterns are absorbed in the course of living. They become part and parcel of the family's style of life and wants. It is television itself that cultivates the tastes, values and predisposition that guide future selection of other media. (Gerbner 1995: 550).
Children are born into a world where television increasingly saturates their everyday existence offering up an endless barrage of information, misinformation, entertainment, vicarious experience, diversion, and escapism. In the United States, 98.3 percent of households have television sets (about 4 percent more than have telephone service). Seventy-nine percent have videocassette recorders (compared with just 1 percent in 1980), and about 62 percent subscribe to cable television (compared with only about 20 percent in 1980) (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1996). The average household television set is on in excess of 7 hours a day (Biagi 1994, Nielsen 1995).

It is in this regard that many social scientists believe that television serves as a cognitive filter (Condry 1989, Gerbner 1995) operating under the structuring principle of social learning theory (Searing, Schwartz, and Lind 1973). In very basic terms, this principle states, “that what is learned early in life are very general orientations toward authority, rules, etc. and these general orientations “structure” the acquisition of more specific attitudes later in the life cycle” (Carlson 1985: 4). But it is a structuring which is not devoid of value or power relations, rather the messages, the representations, put forth serve a mainstreaming function, whereby the social norms of the dominate group are privileged above all others. As Kellner (1995) puts it: “Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence and who is not. They dramatize and legitimate the power of the forces that be and show the powerless that they must stay in their places or be destroyed” (p. 5). In other words, research shows television reflects, race, class, and gender stereotypes.
Hegemony

It is in this capacity that television can be said to act as a source of hegemonic control. "Embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another" (Postman 1993: 13). Gramsci (1971) defined hegemony as a system of social domination and control achieved through forces that extend beyond brute power or external control into the organization of private life and cultural processes, i.e. ideological or internal control. It is a system whereby,

...dominant groups in society, including, fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups" (Strinati 1995: 165).

Ultimately the goal is for the masses, the dominated groups, to take the position and mind set of the dominant group as their own, as common sense. While hegemonic control has taken many forms and been instigated from a wide variety of social institutions, the mass media, if for no other reason than its ability to instantaneously reach millions of people, is particularly well suited as a medium of ideological dissemination.

Throughout history, once a ruling class has established its rule, the primary function of its cultural media has been the legitimation and maintenance of its authority. Folk tales and other traditional dramatic teaching stories have always reinforced established authority, teaching that when society's rules are broken, retribution is visited upon the violators. The importance of the existing order is always implicit in such stories (Gerbner and Gross 1976: 89-91).
In a sense, television has become a (post)modern storyteller weaving the lessons of society across social lines of race, ethnicity, age, geography, sexuality, gender, and class binding us together under “common” lore. And while its messages, its lore, are not singular, as with any hegemony there is room for counter-messages, there is an incredible amount of consistency running through them. An in depth textual analysis of television programing conducted by Michael Parenti (1992) points to several unifying themes which support the current social order:

1. Individual effort is preferable to collective action.
2. Free enterprise is the best economic system in the world.
3. Private monetary gain is a central and worthy objective of life.
4. Affluent professionals are more interesting than blue-collar or ordinary workers.
5. All Americans are equal, but some (the underprivileged) must prove themselves worthy of equality.
6. Women and ethnic minorities are not really as capable, effective, or interesting as white males.
7. The police and everyone else should be given a freer hand in combating the large criminal element in the United States, using generous applications of force and violence without too much attention to constitutional rights.
8. The ills of society are caused by individuals malefactors and not by anything in the socioeconomic system.
9. There are some unworthy persons in our established institutions, but they usually are dealt with and eventually are deprived of their positions of responsibility.
10. U.S. military force is directed only toward laudable goals, although individuals in the military may sometimes abuse their power.
11. Western industrial and military might, especially that of the United States, has been a civilizing force for the benefit of “backward” peoples throughout the Third World.
12. The United States and the entire West have long been threatened from abroad by foreign aggressors, such as Russians, Communist terrorists, and swarthy hoards of savages, and at home by un-American subversives and conspirators. These threats can be eradicated by vigilant counterintelligence and by sufficient doses of force and violence (2-3).
At this juncture, it is important to note that while television broadcasts the same images and words into people's homes regardless of race, class, gender, sexual identity, age, etc. these very factors play a critical role how the messages of television are interpreted (Comstock 1991; Gross 1991; Press 1991).

Television Reality

The messages transmitted through television are not accurate reflections of reality, nor are they neutral with regard to social and political values. Recent research has made clear that there is a "televised reality" that is quite distinct from the "real world." Television programing does not accurately reflect the real world because those who transmit the images are constrained by a wide variety of factors including societal values, the need to maximize audience size, organizational procedures, and personal values. (Carlson 1985:1-2).

What does this televised reality look like? Several research projects have made it their task to answer this very question. It is a world in which the powerful stand out and the powerless are rendered silent via relative invisibility. It is a world where men outnumber women nearly 2:1, where white people account for 84 percent of all prime time characters and only 2 percent are Latino, where young children and the elderly make up only 4 and 8 percent of the population respectively (Gable 1993a, 1993b). It is a world plagued with crime and violence (Gerbner, Morgan, Signorielli 1994; Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1994). By the age of 18, the average viewer will have watched about 18,000 people being strangled, smothered, stabbed, shot, poisoned, blown up, drowned, run over, beaten to death, or otherwise ingeniously done in (Volti 1995) and another 160,000 rapes, armed robberies, and assaults (Comstock and Strasburger 1990). It is a world where ethnic minorities (especially of African and Latino heritage) are
disproportionately depicted as criminals, drug addicts, and the homeless (Parenti 1993), where women are cast in traditional domestic roles, while men (especially men of white European heritage) wield professional influence and prestige (Brunsdon, D’Acci, and Spigel 1997).

It is a world women are disproportionately the victims of violence and/or sexual assaults. Within this socially constructed politicized context, Keller’s words warrant repeating: “Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence and who is not. They dramatize and legitimate the power of the forces that be and show the powerless that they must stay in their places or be destroyed” (p. 5).

Cultural Indicators Approach

In the early days of television analysis it was widely hypothesized that television operated much like a hypodermic needle having a direct causal impact on human behavior (Asamen and Berry 1998; Bryant and Zillmann 1986, 1994). And while this model continues to surface as popular explanation for social violence, it has been widely abandoned within the scientific community for a more tempered correlational model where television is thought to have a general influence via continued exposure to the medium. In a comprehensive review of the literature on the effects of television Signorielli (1991) reports that:

Most of the scientific evidence...reveals a relationship between television and aggressive behaviour. While few would say that there is absolute proof that watching television caused aggressive behaviour, the overall cumulative weight of all the studies gives credence to the position that they are related. Essentially, television violence is one of the things that
may lead to aggressive, antisocial, or criminal behaviour; it does, however, usually work in conjunction with other factors.’ (94-95).

Leading the shift from ‘direct effects’ research to a less causal approach, George Gerbner and his colleagues (1976) proposed a theoretical model for the study of television which would become the standard for current television research: the cultural indicators approach (also commonly referred to as cultivation analysis). According to the assumptions behind this approach,

"Television viewing may not have easily discernible strong direct cause effects on beliefs and opinions, but can “cultivate” a symbolic structure that is used by viewers to interpret reality. A major premise of what has come to be called “cultivation analysis” is the very persistence and pervasiveness of television’s images cultivate the dominant beliefs and values of American society; cultivation contributes to a common, system-supportive perspective.” (Carlson 1985:76)

These studies show that heavy viewing of television ‘cultivates’ attitudes which are more consistent with the world of television programmes than with the everyday world.

Accordingly, one would expect those who watch greater amounts of television to conceptualize of a social reality that looks more like televised reality than actual reality.®

This relationship was found to hold across social characteristics associated with perception reality (race, class, gender, age, sexuality, geographic location, etc.). This homogenizing influence is called mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming means that heavy viewing may absorb or override differences in perspectives and behavior that ordinarily stem from other factors and influences. In other words, differences found in the responses of different groups of viewers, differences that usually are associated with varied cultural, social, and political characteristics of these groups, are diminished in the responses of heavy viewers in these same groups (Gerbner et al. 1994: 28).
Gerbner (1973) proposed this hypothesis be tested using a three stage process. In the first stage, institutional process analysis, the formation of policies directing the massive flow of media messages is investigated. In other words, the socio-political, cultural, and economic influences on the production of television programming are identified. The second stage, message systems analysis, involves a content analysis of television programming with focus on who, does what, to whom. Gerbner and colleagues have been especially interested in violence on television but have expanded their textual analysis to include messages about gender, occupational roles, race, age, and social class. The third and final stage of the cultural indicators approach, cultivation analysis, involves “an examination of responses given to questions about social reality among those with varying amounts of exposure to the world of television” (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli 1994: 22). These responses are then compared with official measures of social reality (see footnote #5).

**Televised Crime and Violence.** Gerbner and his colleagues (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gerbner et al 1977; Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jefferies-Fox, and Signorielli 1978) have clearly shown that the world of television contains much more violence than the real world. These findings remain undisputed and have been replicated by a number of large scale examinations of television content. The bulk of cultural indicators research has focused on television’s influence in the perception that we live in a world riddled with violence and crime. “Surveys showed... that violence laden television not only cultivates aggressive tendencies in a minority but, perhaps more importantly, also generates a pervasive and exaggerated sense of danger and mistrust” (Gerbner and Gross 1980: 98) in a phenomena often referred to as the “mean world syndrome.” “Heavy
viewers revealed a significantly higher sense of personal risk and suspicion than did light
viewers in the same demographic groups who were exposed to the same real risks of life
(Gerbner and Gross 1989: 98). While ample support for this thesis has been found
1978; Shrum 1996; Signorielle 1990), critics claim the correlation is relatively weak
(though still statistically significant) especially when controlling for certain key
demographic characteristics such as age, education, and income (Huges 1980). However,
many researchers continue to find a statistically significant relationship between crime
viewing and perception of the world as "mean and dangerous" which cuts across socio-
cultural and economic lines.

A second important focus of cultivation research with respect to the portrayal of
crime and violence has been on the ideological/hegemonic underpinnings presented in
various forms of televised programing. Rather than encouraging viewers to question the
social order, crime shows (both dramatic and reality based) have been found to uphold
the importance of maintaining the status quo with their a panache for promoting law and
order over due process. In a (television) world where crime runs rampant, the police
serve as the last barrier between chaos and order. Fictional crime drama creates a sharp
distinction between criminals and law enforcement officials, with law breakers generally
being morally bankrupt, corrupt beyond redemption (Carlson 1985). Police, on the other
hand, are largely portrayed as morally sound members of society, just looking to make
the streets safer for the general public. Sometimes police are pushed to their ethical
limits. Occasionally an officer may resort to means which violate the rights of the
criminal, but the over-all message in such cases is that the violation is justifiable if it
takes one more bad guy off the streets (Carlson 1985). In this world of televised crime, it is not only criminal activity that is greatly exaggerated, so too is the level of police effectiveness. It is here that the adage "we always get our man" is the most true. As Zillmann and Wakshlag (1985) noted in their discussion of fictional crime shows, "It is most important to recognize that television's crime drama almost always features the triumph of justice" (original emphasis, 48). In summary, wrongs are righted, victims avenged, and victimizers awarded for just deserts. The timing is the same, the rhythm, the choreography, the cast, the denouement -- everyone has learned just what to expect. On the top of the heap are television's Good Guys, for years mainly mature white males. On the bottom of the heap lie the Victims -- Piled up bodies of children, old people, poor people, non whites, young people, lone women -- all done in by Bad Guys recruited principally from the lower social strata many of the so-called victims come from...Our modern morality plays...point the finger at the social strata from which evil emanates and signal the conditions that make it quite proper to shoot, kill, maim, hurt, rip, smash, slash, crush, tear, burn, bury, excise. What starts out as shocking becomes routine then is converted into ritual. (Goldsen 1977: 223-224)

**Race and Gender.** Cultivating effects have also been linked to views on gender roles and race relations. Those watching more television have been found to favor more traditional gender roles (Comstock 1991) and are more likely to hold negative stereotypes of ethnic minorities (Wober and Gunter 1988). In conjunction with the findings on mean world syndrome, work on gender differences and violence in television has shown women are doubly likely to be victims of television violence. Morgan (1983) measured the differences in fear of victimization between males and females, whites and non-whites, various age groups, the married and non married, and social class groups. He found "those groups who see themselves more often on the loosing end of violent encounters are significantly more likely to be 'cultivated' in the direction of greater
apprehension” (155). And indeed women who watch greater amounts of television tend to be exponentially more fearful of becoming real life victims. Gerbner et al. (1980) describes this phenomena as resonance.

When what people see on television is most congruent with everyday reality (or even perceived reality), the combination may result in a coherent and powerful “double dose” of the television message and significantly boost cultivation. Thus, the congruence of the television world and real life circumstances may “resonate” and lead to markedly amplified cultivation patterns (15).

By this line of thought the closer televised reality reflects one’s life experiences the greater effect it produces (Greenberg and Reeves 1976).

Television content that is perceived by the viewer as real or realistic has been found to have a stronger effect on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors than is television content that is believed to be fictional in nature (Potter 1988; Van Evra 1990).

**Hyperreal**

It is in this context that the notion of the Hyperreal warrants attention. According to postmodern thought, we have entered a time frame in which we have become so saturated with media images, that the line between representation and “reality” is no longer readily distinguishable. In this postmodern era, the potency of the media is intensified and the simulation of reality becomes more real than reality itself in a process Baudrillard (1983, 1994, see also Post 1988) dubbed the hyperreal. According to Baudrillard over-saturation with simulations of reality have rendered “actual” reality impotent, giving models “precedence over thing.” (Simulation over reality). Too much “reality” has resulted in saturation and explosion. Now, we are looking at an implosion -
- reality and meaning are melting into a nebulous mass of self-reproducing simulation. So there is an odd chain reaction, whereby simulations have taken over for reality, but now generate nothing but more simulations. This “fall” into simulations is exacerbated by mass media. The public has come to prefer spectacles to reality. We would rather go to Disneyland than to work. Video games, computers, the Internet, television, billboards, virtual reality, amusement park rides that merely simulate the thrill of an actual roller coaster ride... What else would explain the popularity of an IMAX theater featuring “breath taking footage of the Grand Canyon” when one can view the actual canyon only 4 miles away. When we watch the news, we would rather be entertained than informed. The consequence of this preference is that reality loses its status, and that the effectiveness of simulation is greater than the impact of reality. Taken in conjunction then with the research showing a link between reality and perception, the potential for influence of television becomes even stronger in a postmodern society.

CRIME IN REALITY TELEVISION

Enter reality programing, one of televisions newest genres. These are programs which blur the line between news and entertainment by creating a hybrid form which presents real life situations (be it as re-enactment, situations captured on home video, or on professional video) as entertainment. Designed to inform and titillate all at once, reality programs are fast paced, high energy, montages of action intermixed with official commentary and colorful factoids. As Murray Jordan (1998), producer of one such reality based crime show COPS puts it, the show is successful for “two reasons - one is
inherent voyeuristic interest that most human beings have. [The second is that] unlike a lot of copycat shows on the air, we don’t fake anything, it's just total reality!!!” (3)

While they may not fake anything the version of reality presented on such programs is from a very specific point of view, that of the police officer. Further, it is a viewpoint which is intentionally created. John Langly (1998), executive producer and creator of COPS admits that law enforcement officers are generally cooperative with the show “...because it is THEIR show, about cops. We share their point of view. We try to show what the average cop does, on the beat, on the job, and on patrol. The goal is to put YOU in the passenger seat with them so you can experience what it is like to be a cop” (Original emphasis: 4). Note he does not say we will experience what it is like to be a victim or a criminal, nor does he suggest that we will get a comprehensive view of the legal process.

And yet these shows are presented to the public as unfettered reality. For example, LA: PD Life on the Beat, boldly proclaims in it’s opening voice over “What you’re about to see is real.” COPS informs its viewers that, “COPS is filmed on location with the men and women of law enforcement.” And Real Stories of the Highway Patrol claims in it’s title: “These are the real stories of the Highway Patrol.” The implication being that this official televised version of the events is the only true version. Where the stated goal of many fictional dramas is merely entertainment, real life crime dramas openly seek to privilege the voice of law enforcement above others. Speaking of his goals for COPS, Langley (1998) had this to say:

I sincerely hope it performs a community service by enlightening people about their own environment -- about law and order, good guys and bad guys, and what goes on in your own backyards in the dead of the night.
I'm an old fashioned believer in the basic humanistic notion that the more you know the better off you are. It may sometimes be a painful awareness, but it beats the comforts of ignorance. (Langley 1998:5).

Research on Reality Television

As with most new media genres, research on reality television is in state of infancy. The exploration that has been conducted however, has proven to be consistent in it's examination of the picture of crime and the social environment within which crime occurs.

Law enforcement officials, for example, are portrayed in a positive light, depicted as hard working men and women, intent only on making the streets a little safer for law abiding citizens. Reality-based police shows tend to vastly over-represent the actual number of resolved cases. One study showed that while 61.5 percent of the cases were cleared on COPS, only 18 percent of cases are actually cleared according to official FBI crime statistics (Oliver 1994:185). This representation has lead some to conclude that these shows operate essentially as a public relations bonanza for police departments across the nation (Paisner 1995), leaving audiences with the feeling that something is being done to stop the crime wave (Rapping 1994; Bondebjerg 1996). Real-life cop shows, “air nightly in order to affirm that public funds are being spent in the most productive ways to rid the streets of drugs and crime. They serve to confirm the essential rightness of police actions taken in inner-city communities, including the use of excessive force and questionable search-and-seizure tactics” (Andersen 1994:9).

Social class. Research indicates that reality television programing in general and real life police dramas in particular tend focus on the lower economic sectors of society
(Andersen 1994; Rapping 1994). In one study of the crime shows COPS and Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, filming was conducted exclusively in areas populated by the poor (Carmody 1998). Numerous articles in the edited anthology by Fishman and Cavender (1998) note the impoverished conditions within which crime occurs on reality television.

**Race/ethnicity.** African and/or Latino Americans are over-represented as criminals, while they are under-represented as police officers (Oliver 1994; Oliver and Armstrong 1995; Oliver and Armstrong 1998; Kooistra, Mahoney and Westervelt 1998), giving the impression that men of color are more likely to be involved in illicit activity, than they are to be enforcers of law. Coupled with an over-representation of the prevalence of violent crime (Oliver 1994, Oliver and Armstrong 1995; Kooistra, Mahoney and Westervelt 1998), the picture becomes even more bleak, as men of color become equated with violent, savage, criminals.

**Domestic Violence in Reality Television**

To date there have been only two published studies which specifically address the portrayal of domestic violence in reality based television programs (Carmody 1998; Consalvo 1998). The first of these is a quantitative analysis comparing domestic assault cases with non-domestic assault cases on COPS and Real Stories of the Highway Patrol. The second takes a more qualitative approach in providing a textual analysis of domestic violence cases on COPS.

**Individualizing the problem and supporting stereotypes.** In her study of domestic violence in real life police drama Carmody (1998) found that “Domestic assault vignettes...contain several patterns that do not match current research in the filed, and
may support harmful myths concerning victims of domestic violence.” (170) One of these major myths supported by real life police drama is that of the masochistic woman. According to this thesis, “...victims of spouse assault obtain some gratification or pleasure from their victimization. This approach clearly removes responsibility from the perpetrator and blames the victim. While few publicly support the masochism thesis directly, many do question why battered women hesitate to leave abusive mates” (Carmody 1998: 161).

Another myth/stereotype perpetuated by real life police drama that removes responsibility from the perpetrator was that of the “drunken bum” or the idea that spousal abuse is the direct result of alcohol consumption. Perpetrators of domestic assault were more likely to be intoxicated than those involved in non domestic assault cases. Consalvo (1998) reiterated this finding in her research. Textual analysis carried the “drunken bum” theme a bit further by recognizing that “when the police do make appeals to the men to stop their behavior, it is usually because the officers determine the men to be drunk” (Consalvo 1998: 68). So while victims (all female apparently female in Consalvo’s study) were lectured for staying in abusive relationships, perpetrators (men) were lectured for drinking rather than specifically for abusing.

In step with Carmody, Consalvo’s research (1998) reports on several emerging themes in domestic assault vignettes. According to the lore weaved in the world of COPS, domestic violence is found in epidemic proportions among the uneducated poor. (As is all crime depicted on real life police drama). In her sample, all domestic violence cases were filmed in impoverished areas and involved victims and perpetrators who were poor.
A second theme is that domestic violence is easily solvable. By this, Consalvo is referring to the solution of simply leaving. Leaving an abusive relationship being the one most often proposed by the police. Victims must take responsibility for the problem, in so much as they stay in the abusive situation in spite of the advice of the officers. Police seem most frustrated with the victims unwillingness to do as they say, rather than with any actual injury inflicted upon the victims - after-all that is their own fault for staying or choosing an abusive mate.

**Level of crime seriousness and police effectiveness.** According to Carmody (1998), domestic assault cases were taken less seriously by law enforcement officials. They were less likely to involve a weapon and less likely to result in serious bodily injury to the victim than non-domestic assault cases. Further police were more likely to “race to the scene” in non-domestic assault cases than domestic assault cases.

And in keeping with the arrest rate of crime shows in general, these shows greatly over represented the number of cases resulting in an arrest. Seventy percent of domestic assault cases resulted in arrest, compared to Uniform Crime Reports which claims that only fifty-five percent of all assaults known to the police are cleared by arrest (my emphasis, 168).

**Futility, Frustration, and Lectures.** While not statistically significant, police officers in Carmody’s study were substantively more likely to identify a situation as a repeat call in domestic as opposed to non-domestic violence cases. More importantly, in such cases the officers strongly reiterated the message with long and frequent monologues to the camera (viewing audience) regarding the number of times they had been on scene. And police were statistically more likely to indicate frustration at having
been called to a domestic assault than a non domestic assault, as well as more likely to express displeasure with victims who are unwilling to cooperate. The implication here being that the victim must somehow “enjoy” the abuse otherwise they would cooperate with the police or leave the situation after the first assault.

**Intersectionality.** Significantly neither of these studies attempts to integrate race into their analysis in spite of the fact that prior research focusing on real life police drama as a whole as made race and ethnicity a key factor. This absence goes along with prior feminist discourse on domestic violence where issues of race, class, sexuality, and other structural factors remain relatively unexplored.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

This section provides a brief summary of the research and variables that will be specifically examined in the following chapters of this project. This project seeks to replicate key findings of Carmody (1998) and Consalvo (1998) with respect to their studies of domestic violence in real life police dramas. In particular, the findings that domestic assault is taken less seriously than other types of crime will be explored. However, rather than merely using the single indicators of whether a weapon was used or not, whether the crime resulted in serious injury, and whether an arrest was made or not, a scale of additional indicators drawn from Oliver’s (1994, 1998) research on reality television will be employed. This project will also create a quantitative measure for Carmody’s assertion that police are more likely to express futility in domestic violence situations. As well as determine whether police lecture victims and suspects more often in domestic violence cases than in cases depicting other types of crime. This project
also seeks to address those instances where police are portrayed as either supporting or negating common stereotypes about domestic violence and/or relegating it to individualistic factors. Finally, this project will elaborate on Carmody (1998) and Consalvo (1998) by introducing an analysis of race and its intersection with social class on real life police dramas.
ENDNOTES

1. This trend is consistent with a more general trend within academia to dichotomize ethnic or race relations and research into duel categories of Black and White. While there is a growing body of literature on ethnic groups other than African Americans, comparatively it remains quite small, especially in light of recent projections that Latino Americans will become the largest ethnic group in the United States around the year 2010 (Kalish 1995).

2. In Spite of the fact that little to no domestic violence research has been conducted on minority groups other than African Americans, researchers continue to assume that all non-Anglo ethnic groups are more violent either by nature, culture, or socioeconomic status.

3. It is notable that social learning theorists more heavily influenced by psychoanalytic thought advocate a priming principle rather than a structuring principle. According to this principle, "what is learned early in life is learned best; the orientations that are developed in childhood endure and are relatively unchanged as individuals mature" (Searing, Schwartz, and Lind 1973:418) The priming principle offers less opportunity for individual change throughout the life course and is essentially a more deterministic model in terms of the process of socialization.

4. In reality, women account for 51% of the US population, 76% is white, 9% are Latino, 19% are under the age of 13 and 17% over the age of 60. (Gable 1993a, 1993b).

5. For example, the film The Program, in which several drunken college football players lie in the middle of a busy road to prove their toughness, was indicated as the cause for a similar attempt by two teenagers in Pennsylvania and another in New York. And when a
4 year old set his bedroom on fire, MTV’s *Beavis and Butthead* were cited as the cause.

6. It is recognized that there is much historical and philosophical debate over the existence of a singular social reality and current social scientific sensibilities (in particular those of social constructionalist and/or postmodern backgrounds) suggest that social reality is largely, if not all, in the interpretation of one’s environment. I do not profess to resolve that issue here. Rather, because in this case, Gerbner et al. (1973) assessed social reality as a series of “objective” measurements (i.e., FBI crime statistics, U.S. Census data, U.S. department of Labor statistical abstracts, etc.) the use of the term suggests that there is an actual social reality common to us all, in so much as we can say official statistics reflect that unified reality.

7. See the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Baker & Ball, 1969); Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (1972); the report on children and television drama by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (1982); National Institute of Mental Health, Television and Behavior Report (NIMH, 1982; Pearl, Bouthilet, & Lazar, 1982); National Research Council (1993), violence report; and reports from the American Psychological Association's "Task Force on Television and Society" (Huston, et al., 1992) and "Commission on Violence and Youth" (American Psychological Association, 1992; Donnerstein, Slaby, & Eron, 1992).

8. See Cavender; Kooistra, Mahoney and Westervelt; Donovan; Oliver and Armstrong in Fishman and Cavender (1998).

9. While research does suggest that alcohol plays a role in one out of every four instances of domestic violence (Kantor and Straus 1990), the exact nature of that role remains...
unclear. However, according to research by Zubretsky and Digirolomo (1994) alcohol is not the root cause of such assaults, but rather a symptom of a deeper problem. Browne (1997) notes that abusive individuals are typically abusive whether sober or drunk, and Kantor and Straus (1990) remind us that the majority of men and women who drink do not hit their partners.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This Chapter describes the methodological procedures utilized in this study of domestic violence on reality television. The first section is a general over-view of the methodological assumptions of content analysis as well as a presentation of it’s strengths and weaknesses as a research tool. The second section lays out the research hypotheses and questions that will be addressed. The third section turns specifically to the research design and procedures employed, by addressing issues of sampling, units of analysis, categorization and operationalization of concepts, reliability, and validity.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this research were gathered through the use of content analysis, “a research technique for the objective, systematic description of the manifest and latent content of communication, which can be quantitative or qualitative” (Collins 1993: 54). Here objective refers to the strict adherence to a pre-determined set of comprehensive operational definitions and rules for classification by which to measure social phenomena. In other words, the methodological procedures and coding scheme ought to be specific and comprehensive enough to yield the same result when implemented by a
second researcher. Content analysis provided the most appropriate tools for this media
analysis, as it is a study of the content of television programs themselves, rather than a
study of the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors of live human subjects.

As stated, content analysis may be either quantitative or qualitative. Typically, the
goal of quantitative analysis is to determine the frequency or duration of events. This is
accomplished by coding the visible or audible manifest content of the text. This type of
coding has the benefit of being highly reliable as key phrases, words, and visual cues are
either there or not there. Validity, however is more difficult to ascertain. Manifest
coding does not take connotation into account, a word’s subjective meaning might be lost
or altered. This is where qualitative inquiry comes in to play. The goal of qualitative
content analysis is to understand the subjective content of a text. Latent meaning is
analyzed within a given social framework for underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes. In
stressing themes over simple enumeration, qualitative analysis has the benefit of
strengthened validity, however latent coding tends to be less reliable than manifest
coding as it bears a greater dependency on a individual coder’s subjective understanding
of language and social meaning. The present project utilized qualitative procedures to
supplement quantitative analysis, thereby strengthening validity, while maintaining
measures of reliability.

**Methodological Benefits**

The major benefit of content analysis in general lies in its unobtrusive nature.
That is, the examination itself has no influence on the actions or interactions of the
characters involved. Program content remains unchanged by the process of scientific
investigation. Well documented content analysis also have the potential benefit of being precisely replicated. Replicators have the exact same parameters to work with that the original researchers did assuming the actual text utilized in the study remains in existence (i.e., books, films, historical documents), unlike observational studies where once the situation is past there is no record of it other than field notes or recordings. Content analysis also offers researchers the unique ability to code and recode data for consistency, reliability, in measuring techniques.

Methodological Limitations

While content analysis extends built in reliability checks, it doesn’t offer the same such system for validity. Validity largely relies on the researchers understanding of textual readings. However, with a solid literature review and implementation of qualitative measures, validity can be boosted. Another limitation of content analysis is that it is limited to the framework of the categories and definitions used by a particular researcher. This is particularly problematic in quantitative analysis, as unanticipated categories are not allowed to emerge during the research process and may go unaccounted for. Finally, content analysis doesn’t allow researchers to draw direct conclusions on the influence a text might have on it’s audience. Secondary measures, such as audience survey, would be necessary to decisively make such inferences.
RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND QUESTIONS

Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis were born out of the previous literature on crime, domestic violence, gender, and race in real life police drama.

1. Violent crime is expected to be the largest category of crime depicted on real life police dramas.

2. People of color will make up the majority of criminal suspects on real life police dramas.

3. People of color will be over-represented as suspects in all categories of crime on real life police dramas.

4. Men will be over-represented as suspects in all categories of crime on real life police dramas.

5. Most crime on real life police dramas will be committed by the poor.

6. Domestic violence cases will be taken less seriously by police officers than other types of crime on real life police dramas.

7. On average, police will express higher levels of futility in domestic violence scenarios than they will in other types of crime committed on real life police dramas.

8. Crimes committed by Non-White suspects on real life police dramas will be taken more seriously by police than crimes committed by White suspects.

Research Questions

1. Which groups of people are most likely to be involved in domestic violence scenarios on real life police dramas?

2. Are police more likely to lecture suspects and/or victims in domestic violence cases than in other types of crime portrayed on real life police dramas?
3. Do police officers on real life police dramas express greater levels of futility when the primary suspect is Non-White than when the primary suspect is White?

4. Are police more likely to lecture White or Non-White suspects? Are police more likely to lecture White or Non-White victims?

5. What influence does the type of crime have on the relationship between race, crime seriousness, and the likelihood to receive a lecture?

6. How does the intersection between race, class, and gender influence police treatment of suspects and victims on real life police dramas?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Universe

This study considers three real life police dramas (Cops, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, and LA: P.D. Life on the Beat) broadcast between September 5, 1998 and November 13, 1998.

The Sample

Three programs will be recorded for analysis in this study: Cops, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, and LA: P.D. Life on the Beat. These programs were selected over other reality based police dramas, such as Americas Most Wanted, Top Cops, and The Untold Story, because they are primarily comprised of live action video taped footage as opposed to criminal reenactment segments where actors play pre-scripted roles. Live action footage has the benefit of being a closer approximation of reality than criminal reenactment which relies on secondhand accounts. But more importantly, live action
video gives the viewer the impression that what one is watching is in fact, unfettered reality (Bondebjerg 1996).

Beginning with the 1998-99 Fall season premiere of Cops (Sept 7 1998), seventy-two hours (including commercials) of reality based programing was recorded for analysis, making 144 total individual shows and 48 episodes of each program. Cops is the only of the three shows affiliated with a network (FOX), Real Stories and LA: PD run in continual syndication.

**Unit of Analysis**

The units of analysis for this study will be the alleged victims and perpetrators of criminal activities, as well as the dispatched police officers. Following Oliver (1994) only those officers “directly involved in the arrest or questioning of a criminal suspect” and victim shall be considered for data analysis and coding. “Back up police officers (e.g., those who stand outside of a house with their guns drawn) or officers who were shown only at the police station or at the scene of the crime were not coded” (181).

**Categorization**

**Crime Types.** Crime was broken down into three categories. The first two were drawn from FBI uniform crime reports, and constitute crime index offenses (FBI 1995). Crime index offenses include violent crime and property crime. By this definition violent crime consists homicide, forcible rape, aggravated assault and robbery. Property crime includes burglary, larceny-theft, arson, and motor vehicle theft. The third category “other” served as a catch all for those crimes which did not fit into FBI uniform crime
Index definitions, i.e., traffic violations, juvenile status offenses, prostitution, misdemeanors.

**Identifying Domestic Violence.** Domestic violence were defined as violence (physical and/or emotional) between intimates. This included not only couples who are legally married but those who are co-habituating or identified as being or having been intimately involved but living in separate residents. This definition included heterosexual as well gay and lesbian couples. Additionally, couples currently not intimately involved but involved in the past were included (e.g., divorced couples).

Intimate couples were identified through background descriptions given by program narrators, the victims, police dispatch, and/or the police officers. Some cases which are identified explicitly by the programers as domestic disputes shall not be considered as such due to the non-intimate nature of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (siblings, in-laws, parent-child, etc.)

**Identifying race and ethnicity.** Race and/or ethnic background will be classified broadly in five categories: Black/African American, White/Anglo, Latino, Asian, and other/unknown. For the purposes of statistical analysis, it was deemed necessary to collapse these five categories into two, white and non-white. Identification of the race/ethnicity of police officers, perpetrators, and victims was made in one of four ways. One, the police officers on scene or dispatch officers will identify the racial background of those involved. This would be the ideal case, as it is the officers perception of an individuals race, rather than their actual racial/ethnic identity, which may lead to differential treatment of perpetrators and/or victims. A second method of racial identification is self identification by the alleged perpetrator and the victim. Third and
less commonly, identification by third parties or witnesses on scene was made. The 
fourth method of identification was based on the researchers identification of subjects. In 
cases, where there is significant disagreement participants were classified as 
unknown/other.

Gender and language. The gender (male/female)^2 and language (English/other) 
will be coded for each character. Those cases where there is ambiguity in identification 
will not be considered for analysis.

Crime Seriousness. An overall measure of crime seriousness was constructed by 
creating a composite variable that combined the results of six distinct but related 
categories pulled from a review of the literature.

1. Was the suspect placed in handcuffs or leg shackles? (Oliver 1994, 1998) 
2. Was the victim asked if they wished to press charges? (Consalvo 1998) 
3. Did the police enter the situation with their weapons drawn? (Oliver 1994, 
   1998) 
4. Was the suspect arrested? (Carmody 1998; Consalvo 1998; Oliver 1994, 
   1998) 
5. Were police shown racing to the scene of the crime? (Carmody 1998) 
6. Was the victim visibly injured? (Carmody 1998) 

Questions were coded 1 and 2, for yes and no respectively. Response categories were 
then recoded such that high scores indicated higher levels of seriousness and low scores 
indicated lower levels of seriousness. Individual missing items were assigned a neutral 
value of 1.5. The scores for each of the six items indicating crime seriousness were then 
added together to create an index which ranged from 7.50 (low) to 11.50 (high).

Lectures. Lectures to victims and respondents will be identified as those speeches 
by officers which advise subjects on life style choices, how to maintain their house hold, 
child rearing, or any other suggestions on how they should be living their lives outside of
those suggestions aimed directly at the prevention of the crime in question (i.e., comments about living on welfare, rather than comments on staying off drugs.)

**Level of Futility.** An overall measure of police offer frustration was constructed by creating a composite variable that combined the results of three distinct but related categories

1. Did the officer comment on prior record of the suspect? (Carmody 1998)
2. Did the officer make optimistic comments in regards to efforts to stop the criminal activity in question from reoccurring?
3. Did the officer make comments on the futility of police efforts in stopping the crime in question from reoccurring?

Questions were coded 1 and 2, for yes and no respectively. Response categories were then recoded such that high scores indicated higher levels of futility and low scores indicated lower levels of futility. Individual missing items were assigned a neutral value of 1.5. The scores for each of the three items indicating crime seriousness were then added together to create an index which ranged from 3.00 (low) to 6.00 (high)

Officer dialogue was coded separately for expressions of futility or optimism with regard to their perceived role in eradicating crime. That is, do the officers express the opinion that they are having a positive impact on stopping criminal behavior or do they see their response as temporary bandages to an out of control problem. Expressions of futility are exemplified by the following:

Voice over: In domestic violence cases, police are often called again and again. Officers Jones and Wiley return to a familiar address.

Officer: “You’ll be back, you’ll be back and we’ll play this game again.”

Officer: [sigh] “We’ll be back.”

Officer: “I’m sure we haven’t seen the last of them.”
Officer: "Yeah, we've been there before."

Officer: "Round two, coming up."

While expressions of optimism are exemplified by the following:

Officer: "I think we had a real impact here tonight."

Officer: "She's fine, the house is fine, and we cleared the call with no problems."

Officer: "We have really depleted cocaine activity in this area."

Officer: "Definitely lives were saved. Lives of innocent people. Lives of police officers. And that's what it's all about, saving lives, protecting."

Officer: "The sheriff's office here takes a zero tolerance police on drunks and he realized after arrested him that he was in fact drunk and actually thanked us for getting him off the road, for making him safe. So it worked out alright."

**Coding Issues**

**Operationalization and pretesting.** Variables were operationalized in three stages. Stage one occurred following an extensive review of the literature addressing real life police drama and literature addressing police response to domestic violence. In the second stage, tentative categories based on the literature review were pretested against actual episodes of COPS, Real Stories, and LA: PD. Using pretest results to supplement and reshape the categories, the third stage involved yet another pretesting of categories, where the categories were placed on a standardized sheet to facilitate coding (See Appendix A). The code sheet was then pretested on a separate sample of previously recorded real life police dramas. Using the code sheet, manifest data could be classified by simply placing check marks in predetermined spaces.
Reliability and Validity. No outside coders were used for this project. All coding was done by the myself, the researcher. While extending the length of the project, this duel role as coder/researcher allowed for a firmer grasp of operational definitions and category schemes thereby increasing both the validity and reliability of coding decisions. Further, while inter-coder reliability was not an issue (being as there was only one coder), an additional coder was used to spot check the reliability of coding. That is, she was asked to 5 code random episodes using the standardized code sheet and the results were compared against the originally obtained results. Using Holstí’s (1969) formula for reliability of nominal data:

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}
\]

Average Reliability = .86 Suggesting a coding scheme which produces reliable results between different coders. Further a measure of intracoder reliability was taken wherein I recoded 5 random episodes and compared the results against the originals. This produced an average reliability score of .88, indicating high test-retest reliability.

Content analysis largely relies upon face validity as its measure of theoretical soundness. This study was no different in that regard. Categories were constructed following an extensive review of the literature and previous construction of similar schemes. While reliability and validity are indeed mutually exclusive, high reliability suggests a certain degree of validity.
Analysis

Comparing Between Case Types. Comparisons between domestic violence cases and non-domestic violence cases were accomplished through manifest content analysis wherein the actions and language of police officers and other on scene persons (victim, perpetrator) was coded into appropriate categories and analyzed using appropriate statistical procedures for significant differences (Chi-Square for individual indicators, and t-test for composite measures).

Comparisons Within Domestic Violence Cases. Manifest content analysis was also utilized to make comparisons within domestic violence cases with regard to differential treatment by race and ethnicity. Again a Chi-square test of statistical significance was used to determine actual difference.

Domestic violence cases were further explored using latent content analysis techniques, wherein the language and actions of those on scene was explored in depth for underlying and/or symbolic meaning. Special attention was given to gendered or racial messages, as well as those interactions which served to convey and/or reinforce structural power differences.
ENDNOTES

1. Those identified in more specific race/ethnic terms, such as Irish American, Mexican American, Chinese American, will be reclassified by the researcher into corresponding broader inclusive categories (in this case White, Latino, and Asian respectively).

2. It is recognized that gender is not a bi-polar category, that individuals are not all masculine or all feminine, but rather hold masculine and feminine qualities simultaneously. The precise nature of gender remains open to academic debate (Bornstein 1994, Ekins and King 1996, Lorber 1994), with the majority of said debate defining gender along an ever-changing continuum. With the addition of postmodern sensibilities one begins to question the validity of conventional gendered distinctions altogether (Butler 1994). However, at present the majority of people do in fact define themselves and others in conventional gendered terms. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, where subject perception of gender is critical, the bi-polar gender categories of male and female will be used.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSES

This chapter will present descriptive data gathered from latent and manifest content analysis of three real life police dramas (COPS, Real Stories of the Highway Patrol, and L.A. P.D.: Life on the Beat), a discussion of the major variables and their interrelationships, and an analysis of statistical tests utilized to test research hypotheses. The first section draws on 'the mean world syndrome' (see Chapter Two) and is a general overview of the types of crime and criminal suspects depicted on real life police drama. The second section addresses the portrayal of domestic violence in comparison with other types of crime on real life police drama by exploring demographic differences, level of crime seriousness, expression of futility in crime fighting, and the frequency of lectures delivered by officers to suspects and victims of criminal activities. This section also elaborates on manifest differences between domestic violence and other types of crime by more fully exploring latent content of domestic violence cases. The third section addresses race/ethnic differences in the portrayal of crime on real life police drama. Differences in level of seriousness with which criminal activities are taken by law enforcement, expressions of futility, and frequency of lectures will be investigated, as will emergent racial messages. The fourth section is a discussion of the effect crime
type (domestic violence) has upon the relationship between criminal portrayal and race.
The final section specifically addresses the convergence of race, gender, and social class in real life police drama.

CRIME IN GENERAL: MEAN WORLD HEGEMONY

Hypothesis #1: Violent Crime

Violent crime is expected to be the largest category of crime depicted on real life police dramas.

Table 1 is a summary of the frequency and types of crime on real life police dramas broken down by race. As hypothesized violent crime made up the single largest category of crime shown (39.8%), while property crime only accounted for only 20 percent of all criminal activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Types</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crimes</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X² = 10.83, p = .004

Hypothesis #2: Color of Crime

People of color will make up the majority of criminal suspects on real life police dramas.
Table 1 also demonstrates that in conjunction with the second research hypothesis, people of color made up the majority of criminal suspects with approximately 64 percent of all crime being committed by non-white suspects and only 36 percent by white suspects.

**Hypothesis #3: Color of Crime**

People of color will be over-represented as suspects in all categories of crime on real life police dramas.

Table 1 further shows that people of color were over-represented across all categories of crime ($X^2 = 10.83, p < .01$). Approximately 55 percent of all violent crimes, 77 percent of all property crimes, and 65 percent of all other crimes had non-white primary suspects, whereas only 45 percent of all violent crimes, 23 percent of all property crimes, and 36 percent of all other crimes had white suspects.

**Hypothesis #4: Gendered Crime**

Men will be over-represented as suspects in all categories of crime on real life police dramas.

Table 2 breaks down crime type by the percentage of men and women involved in each. As hypothesized men account for the vast majority of all crime committed on real life police dramas, with approximately 92 percent of all crime having a primary suspect who was male and only 8 percent having a female primary suspect. Further, men accounted for most criminal activity across all categories of crime, committing 90 percent of violent crime, 95 percent of property crime, and 92 percent of all other crimes. However, statistically speaking men were no more likely than women to commit any...
particular type of crime, chi-square tests determined no significant differences ($X^2 = 2.91, p = .334$).

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Crimes in Real Life Police Drama by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crimes</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 2.91, p = .334$

Hypothesis #5: Social Class

Most crime on real life police dramas will be committed by the poor.

While there were no direct objective measures of social class (i.e., income, education, occupation), subjective gauges indicated extensive and endemic poverty. We are confronted with a montage of unkept houses, dirty and often naked children, animals running around, discarded beer cans, heavily intoxicated people. Urban poverty is marked by crowded living conditions in apartments, dilapidated housing developments, or small rundown houses. On the roadways, suspects are commonly portrayed as driving older, inexpensive vehicles, many of which are missing parts, rusting, or heavily dented. In rural areas it is common for video cameras to focus in on small farm animals both inside and outside of homes, bare feet, overgrown and heavily weeded yards, and abandoned vehicles.
Of the 407 scenarios coded in this study, only two depicted people who could be classified as wealthy. One instance was a murder case in Beverly Hills, California. It is notable however that the leg work for this case started in the North Hollywood district of Los Angeles County with the discovery of the victim outside a local gay bar. The second case was one in which a woman’s Jaguar (tm) was stolen. The case ended in the discovery of a “chop shop” in a lower income district of the same city.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Research Question: Demographics

Which groups of people are most likely to be involved in domestic violence scenarios on real life police dramas?

Table 3a. Race/Ethnicity by Type of Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of Primary Suspect</th>
<th>Type Of Crime</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>Non-Domestic</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 7.27, p < .01$

Race. Approximately 12 percent of all crimes in this sample of real life police dramas were classified as domestic violence (see Table 3a). Of those, we find that the majority were committed by white suspects. Fifty-four percent of domestic violence
scenarios involved a primary suspect who was white, while only 46 percent involved non-white primary suspects. Turning our attention to Table 3b we find that white suspects were significantly ($X^2 = 7.27, p < .01$) more likely to be shown engaging in domestic violence (18.1% of all crime committed by white suspects was domestic violence) than non-white suspects (8.7% of all crime committed by non-white suspects) were.

Table 3b. Frequency and Percentage of Type of Crime by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of Primary Suspect</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Crime</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Domestic</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 7.27, p < .01$

Gender. Men made up the vast numerical majority of domestic violence suspects ($n = 41$), approximately ninety-three percent of domestic violence cases had a male as the primary suspect, while only seven percent of primary suspects were female (see table 4a). However, men were statistically no more likely to commit domestic violence (accounting for 93.2% of all domestic violence suspects) than they were to commit other types of crime (92.2%). Likewise women were no more likely to be primary suspects in domestic violence scenarios (accounting for 6.8% of domestic violence cases) than they were to be primary suspects in other types of crime (7.8%).
Table 4a. Gender by Type of Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Domestic Violence</th>
<th>Non-Domestic</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 1.36$, $p > .05$

While men accounted for the vast majority of criminal suspects on real life police drama, they were statistically no more likely ($X^2 = 1.36$, $p > .05$) to be the primary suspects in domestic violence scenarios than women were (see Table 4b). In fact, substantively speaking, women were more likely to be primary suspects in domestic violence cases (18.1% of crimes committed by women were domestic assaults) than men (11.3% of crimes were domestic assaults) were.

Table 4b. Frequency and Percentage of Type of Crime by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Domestic</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 1.36$, $p > .05$
Social Class. As with crime in general, domestic violence cases were fraught with suspects and victims living in poverty. In fact, all of the domestic violence scenarios in this sample featured the poor or those who bore classic stereotypical signs of poverty.

Level of Crime Seriousness

Crime seriousness index. Recall from discussion in Chapter Three that level of crime seriousness was measured by creating an index of six factors:

1. Was the suspect placed in handcuffs or leg shackles?
2. Was the victim asked if they wished to press charges?
3. Did the police enter the situation with their weapons drawn?
4. Was the suspect arrested?
5. Were police shown racing to the scene of the crime?
6. Was the victim visibly injured?

Table 5. Frequency and Percentages for Level of Crime Seriousness Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Seriousness</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean = 9.68, S = .8343
Table 5 is a summary of the scores produced. Over-all scores are clustered toward the higher end of the scale with a mean of 9.68 and a range of 7.50 and 11.50.

**Hypothesis #6: Domestic Violence and Crime Seriousness.**

Domestic violence cases will be taken less seriously by police officers than other types of crime committed on real life police dramas.

When testing for significant differences in mean scores of the level of seriousness with which a crime is taken with respect to the type of crime committed (see Table 6), domestic violence was on average taken less seriously (mean score = 9.42) than other crimes (mean score = 9.72). This difference was found to be statistically significant ($t = -2.356, p < .05$), thereby supporting the research hypothesis.

### Table 6. Crime Type Differences in Level of Seriousness of Criminal Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic Violence</th>
<th>Non-Domestic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Crime Seriousness</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>.7962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$t = -2.356, p = .019$

Qualitative analysis of the expressed attitudes of police officers on real life police dramas, added further support for the research hypothesis. The choice of words used by police officers indicated domestic violence was not taken as seriously as more public crimes. For example, the addition of clarifying adjectives in front of domestic violence which trivialized the seriousness of the offense were common. (Emphasis below is mine).
Officer: “It’s just a domestic.”

Officer: “But it was only a domestic assault.”

Officer: “Is this going to be like a domestic thing?”

Officer: “They had an argument and got kind of carried away. It was just a dispute only.”

Officer: “It’s just a husband and wife fighting it out again.”

Officer: “It was only an argument. Mostly they just yelled. She threw something, it happens.”

In some instances the trivialization was expressed through a subtle comparison of domestic violence to “real” fighting, in others it was in a presumed innocence of suspects which was not reflected in non-domestic violence scenarios.

Dispatch: “Are they fighting each other or is he beating her?”

Officer: “Is it a fight or a domestic?”

Officer: “Did he punch her? Or was it just a little pushing, a domestic thing?”

Officer: “This guy we got here is the suspect. Supposedly he’s beat on the lady.”

Officer: “We don’t know if he started it or what...but that’s what dispatch says so we got to go with that.”

In other cases, the relative lack of seriousness with which domestic violence was taken came through as officers questioned their role or even the need for police intervention into domestic violence situations.

Officer: “We can come out and play referee like we are doing right now.”

Officer: “We’ll go, but these things usually have a way of working themselves out.”

Officer: “This is not my thing. I stop crime. Unfortunately, this is how we spend most of our time. They can’t seem to solve their own problems. So we have to.”

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And in three cases violence was overtly discussed in joking terms, soliciting the laughter of police officers. In one such instance, two officers, one male and one female attempted to determine if a kidnaping call might in fact have been “just” a family dispute.

Female Officer: “We need to see if it’s a good kidnaping or maybe its just a family dispute where he told her, you know, get in the car, we’re leaving.”

Male Officer: “She’s not looking too hysterical so...”

Female Officer: [laughing] “She’s got use to him.”

Male Officer: “It’s a family thing.”

Female Officer: [laughing] “yeah, Honey get in the car. <with fake gruff voice> Honey get in the car. Well maybe they’ll get a domestic violence out of this.”

Male Officer: [laughing] “yeah.”

The female officer goes on to explain to the viewing audience:

“A lot of people, don’t pay attention but we have somebody that has a phone and it looks unusual to them so they call but its the type of call we don’t really get that many of. Like not as many as shootings. But most of all they turn out to be domestic violence - <again in fake gruff voice> honey get in the car.”

In the second case a male officer comments on a domestic violence scene by comparing it with a popular 1970s situation comedy. “This is ‘All in the Family’ here, Archie Bunker¹ never had it so good with all his family going to jail.”

The third case where domestic violence was joked about was one in which a domesticated potbelly pig had gotten loose and was reportedly attacking the neighborhood dogs. The situation itself elicited the laughter of officers and bystanders,
the mood was jovial. Police conducted a mock investigation of the incident using questioning techniques associated with a domestic violence investigation.

Officer 1: [laughing] “Ma’am do you wish to press charges?”

Officer 2: <mock seriousness> “Apparently the pig has had a rough day. He’d been drinking. She was out all night. The kids were crying. Things got out of control.”

Officer 1: “The pig has a history of domestic abuse. He really should get some help. But she says she love him. So we’ll be back.”

Officer 2: “Neighborhood is safe for now.”

And finally, at times, low prioritization was built into standard operating procedure. For instance, one squad car turned around mid-way to a domestic violence case when a call came across that two teenagers were being apprehended for shoplifting.

The officer explained how he saw standard procedures:

Well, everything has a different priority. A domestic is pretty high priority, something that we would break a routine call for. And, the hold up call definitely takes priority over a domestic. So, that’s why I broke from the domestic to head to the hold up alarm. But once the hold alarm was confirmed false, then we broke back and headed toward the domestic.

While in this case the officer says that domestic violence is “high priority,” it was not as high as a hold up. The officer did not discuss whether or not assessing physical danger was to be a priority. He had no information in the call regarding physical threat on either case, including whether or not weapons were involved. The priority was, as he saw it, on the theft of property.
Personal Troubles or Public Issues: Officer Attribution of Cause and Suggested Solutions

Officers expressed the belief that domestic violence is the outcome of individual dysfunction, rather than stressors caused by or contributed to by structural inequality. This omission is particularly significant when one considers that the target population of real life police dramas tend to be economically impoverished.

**Cause.** While officers may have personally recognized structural causes of domestic violence, they were overwhelmingly portrayed as relegating cause to individual personal problems or dysfunctions. Three categories emerged. The first and most frequently cited cause of domestic violence was drug and alcohol consumption (72.3% of cases, n = 34). The second, tended to implicate the victim in the creation of the situation (34.0%, n = 16). While the third suggested violence was the outcome of love, obsessive perhaps unhealthy love, but love never the less (12.8%, n = 6). There was some overlap in these cases where domestic violence was attributed to more than one cause.

Police officers made frequent mention of the role of intoxicants in escalating violence.

Officer: “One thing that obviously doesn’t help, everyone’s been drinking here.”

Officer: “Tonight they’d been drinking, doing drugs. They had an argument got kind of carried away.”

Officer: “This is your brain on drugs. This is your wife’s face on drugs.” <camera focuses on the victims blackened eye>

Officer: “She’s a little hell cat when she’s been drinking. He never had a chance.”

Officer: “If he’s got a drinking problem. We need to probably get him some help.”
Officer: “He’s been drinking that’s his problem. He’s just not thinking right. I talked to him at the station and when he’s settled down he’s a pretty easy guy.”

This last example more explicitly draws the link between violence and alcohol by suggesting that without the liquor the violence would disappear. There is no mention of factors which lead the man to drink in the first place or how to alleviate them. Knowing nothing else about the perpetrator other than the fact that he had just blackened his wife’s eye, one policeman deduced: “He seemed like a pretty nice guy, except when he’s drinking.” Another officer went as far as placing blame directly on the victim, “you see she’s the problem, she’s been providing him with these drugs and he put his hand through their back window tonight.” No mention is made of what consequences could have awaited her had she not provided the intoxicant, nor is responsibility given to the perpetrator for controlling his own drug habit.

Related to this is the insinuation that if she stays and continues to feed his addiction (i.e., the cause of the violence) she must somehow like the abuse or at the very least deserve it for going back. Hence, it is the victim’s masochistic tendencies which ultimately allow the violence to continue. One police officer explains:

“She’s always getting beat up. And she’s always coming back. So she hasn’t learned from the last time, she just keeps taking the beatings and going home. You see it all the time, people you know, getting in a domestic, leaving, we tell them to get a restraining order or, you know, leave. Next day you go back there and its the same thing over and over again. They don’t take our advice they think its going to get better but it doesn’t.”

Expressing a similar view, another police officer more bluntly states:

“I don’t know what’s wrong with her, maybe she likes it, maybe she doesn’t, but she keeps going back for more.”

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Still another cop had this to say of a woman that had her nose broken:

“It sure isn’t the first time it’s happened. Maybe they are just trying to get it right, skip the nose job bill [laughing].”

Male victims were also blamed for bringing the violence on themselves by provoking their partners. These cases elicited more bemusement on the part of officers than those with female victims.

Officer: “You just got to know when to stop pushing her.” [verbal “pushing”]

Officer: “Oh man, she popped you a good one. Next time you’ll know.”

Officer: “You have to watch out for flying pans. What did you say to her?”

Finally some officers expressed the idea that it is the very nature of love which leads to violence. Or at the very least there was no attempt to separate the idea that violence precluded love. As one female officer said of a male perpetrator with a restraining order filed against him, “And even on crutches he’s still determined to make contact with his ex-girlfriend. So I guess maybe he’s still in love, but unfortunately he went to jail because of it.” Similar comments made by officers included:

Officer: “He cares so much about her. I guess the thought of her messing around, just was too much.”

Officer: “Love will do that. [He is] an otherwise normal guy. It’s too bad.”

Officer: “That’s love, you know. For most people it works, for others it’s a disaster waiting to happen.”

Solution. If the causes of domestic violence seem one-dimensional the solution is even more simple, namely officers suggest that the victim should simply walk away. Again there is no mention of socio-economic factors which might preclude victims from leaving. The following exchanges exemplify this attitude:
Officer: Have you ever thought about going somewhere else and leaving him and getting on with your life?
Victim: I told him to leave but -
Officer: Have YOU ever thought about leaving?
Victim: Yes I -
Officer: You know that there’s programs at the Spring that can help YOU get out? So that you don’t have to worry about what he’s doing.

Victim: “[Crying] And he come at me today he was jumping and everything and he came at me and to stop him from coming at me I put my arm out and I hit him and he threw me into the ground and I got a big lump and threw my knee out of joint.”
Officer: “And if it gets that bad just go up stairs with your parents.”

In the first example, officers explicitly put responsibility on the victim to leave the situation. She should leave her home and find another place, rather than try to force the abuser from their/his home. In the second example, even as the woman is telling the police about the violent nature of her husband and that he comes after her, the solution given is to “go up stairs.” No recognition is given to the possibility that he might follow her up the stairs.

Other suggestions made by officers including counseling (for both victims and offenders), restraining orders, and divorces, were given out in the same non-empathetic fashion.

Officer: “You need to file a restraining order.”
Victim: “I got one. He still comes over anyways.”
Officer: “Are you divorced?”
Victim: “We’re not married.”
Officer: “Were you?”
Victim: “No.”
Officer: “Then leave.”
Lectures. Futility, and Frustration

"Basically this is a typical domestic violence scenario, husband gets in an argument with his wife, he hits her and then we get here and find out what happens. She’s got physical injuries. California state law mandates any visible injuries on a domestic violence mandatory felony - he goes to jail.”

(Latino, Male Police Officer, L.A.P.D.: Life On the Beat)

While in fact the case may be typical, in that domestic violence is a fairly common occurrence on real life police dramas, analysis shows that the handling of such cases does not follow the above formula nearly as closely as the officer suggests. Tempers flare, moral judgements are made, lectures are given, decrees are handed down, blame is assessed, and scuffles ensue.

Research Question: Lectures

Are police more likely to lecture suspects and/or victims in domestic violence cases than in other types of crime portrayed on real life police dramas?

Table 7. Frequency and Percentage of Who Received Lectures by Type of Crime Committed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiver of Lecture</th>
<th>Domestic Violence</th>
<th>Non-Domestic Violence</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N percent</td>
<td>N percent</td>
<td>N percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect</td>
<td>15 31.9</td>
<td>93 26.6</td>
<td>108 27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>12 25.5</td>
<td>52 14.9</td>
<td>64 16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect and Victim</td>
<td>13 27.7</td>
<td>96 27.4</td>
<td>109 27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Lecture</td>
<td>7 14.9</td>
<td>109 31.1</td>
<td>116 29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>47 11.8</td>
<td>350 88.2</td>
<td>397 100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 7.103, p > .05$
In order to determine if police were more likely to be portrayed as lecturing suspects and/or victims in domestic violence cases than in other in types of crime on real life police dramas, cross tabulations were constructed for the bivariate relationship between type of crime committed and who received a lecture (see table 7). Lectures, be they to victims or suspects, were given in the vast majority of the cases in this sample, 71 percent of all cases elicited a lecture from police, while only 29 percent produced no lectures. Suspects were more often the receivers of lectures than victims were, 27 percent of suspects and 16 percent of victims received a lecture. When considering differences in likelihood to receive a lecture by the type of crime committed, those involved in non-domestic violence cases were more likely to receive no lecture (31.1%), than were those involved in domestic violence cases (14.9%). Victims of domestic violence were more likely to receive lectures (25.5%) than were victims of other crimes (14.9%). Suspects in domestic violence scenarios were also more likely to receive lectures (31.9%), than primary suspects in other types of crime (26.6%). However, none of these differences were found to be statistically significant ($X^2 = 7.103, p > .05$).

While statistically, police were no more likely to lecture perpetrators or victims of domestic violence than they were to lecture those involved in other crimes, the content of the lectures was different. One thing that becomes abundantly clear after only watching a few domestic violence scenarios, the lectures are not so much about helpful suggestions as they are about expressing frustration. In some cases this frustration was with the perpetrators of domestic violence.

Officer: “You went to jail before for this?”
Suspect: “yeah”
Officer: “When are you going to learn? You can’t be doing this kind of stuff man.”

Officer: “I’m getting tired of this.”
Suspect: “So am I.”
Officer: “Then stop.”

Officer: “Do you like jail?”
Suspect: <shrug>
Officer: “Well you’re going again.”

In other cases was with their perceived role as social worker,

Officer: [sigh] “Every time something goes wrong its the police job to clean it up.”

Officer: “We can come out and play referee like we are doing right now.”

Officer: <scoffing> “Just keeping the peace.”

More often however, frustration was expressed at the seeming futility of their efforts in curbing or preventing domestic violence from reoccurring.

**Level of futility.** Recall from discussion in Chapter Three that level of expressed futility was measured by creating an index of three factors:

1. Did the officer comment on prior record of the suspect?
2. Did the officer make optimistic comments in regards to efforts to stop the criminal activity in question from reoccurring?
3. Did the officer make comments on the futility of police efforts in stopping the crime in question from reoccurring?

Table 8 is a summary of the scores produced. Over-all scores are clustered in the middle of the scale, with peaks at the lower and higher ends. The scale had a mean of 4.07 and a range of 3.00 and 6.00.
Hypothesis #7: Futility and Domestic Violence

On average, police will express higher levels of futility in domestic violence scenarios than they will in other types of crime.

In order to determine whether officers on real life police dramas were more likely to express futility in their ability to stop domestic violence than other types of crime, data was grouped by crime type and a t-test for significant difference in means was conducted (see Table 9). Domestic violence scenarios did in fact produce a significantly (t = 4.676, p < .01) higher mean futility score (4.53), than other types of crime (4.01).

Table 9. Crime Type Differences in Level of Futility Expressed by Police

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic Violence</th>
<th>Non-Domestic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Futility</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>.8236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In part this difference in level of futility can be accounted for by statements made to the victims of domestic violence. Here, more than in other types of crime (65% as opposed to 15%), police expressed frustration with the victims whom they viewed as unwilling to cooperate and take their advise to simply leave the situation.

Officer: “What did I say last time? I said you needed to leave him, didn’t I?”

Officer: “After she bonds him out of jail he hits her.”

Officer: “You do it yourself hun, you got to get rid of these guys.”

Officer: “She gets hit in the face and she doesn’t want to tell us the story about what’s going on. And finally whenever they are both going to jail she wants to go ahead and tell us her side of the story. Same with him, he wants to tell us what’s going on too. So domestic violence they are both being arrested and transported.”

Officer: “If you don’t tell me what happened, I can’t...the truth now. I can’t help you.”

Frustration with the victims often turned into lectures about getting out of the situation and following police directives.

Frustration expressed with the perpetrators of domestic violence is of another type, rather than being over the crime committed, it is largely the result of how the suspect responds to officers on scene. In the example below the officer becomes short tempered with the suspect only after he lies to the cop about striking the woman, not after he actually witnesses him strike her.

Officer: “What’s your problem man?”
Suspect: “Nothing.”
Officer: “What are you doing hitting women?”
Suspect: “I’m not hitting her.”
Officer: [raising his voice] “I saw you hit her.”
In fact, the attitude or demeanor the perpetrator of domestic violence took with the officers had much to do with whether or not an arrest would be made. Those seen as “showing disrespect,” “lying” or otherwise threatening the police increased their chance of arrest as much as the actual level of damage inflicted upon the victim.

A QUESTION OF COLOR: THE INFLUENCE OF RACE/ETHNICITY

Thus far, we have seen that domestic violence is portrayed differently than other crimes on real life police dramas, in that domestic violence is generally treated less seriously than other types of crime, officers expressed greater levels of futility in their ability to prevent further occurrences, and greater levels of frustration with victims, perpetrators, and with their perceived role as social workers. Officers attributed the cause of domestic violence to the individual factors of alcohol and love, rather than structural, systemic influences such as unemployment or sexual inequality. This next section examines the influence of race upon these relationships.

Racialized Context

In general there was an over-representation of crime committed by people of color (see Table 1), so the viewer is flooded with images of African Americans and Latinos committing crimes and being hauled off in handcuffs by the police. Security cameras are shown following Black teenagers around stores as a precautionary measure. Cops slow down to check out groups of young Black or Latino males congregating on sidewalks. Disparaging comments are made about gang members or those that appear to
be members based upon style of dress. No "white gangs" were shown, nor were whites shown as individual members of gangs.

In much the same way that police were found to trivialize domestic violence they also talked about crime based upon race as being, "just racial". Further the very notion that people of color are discriminated against was called into question. One officer remarked while shaking his head, "Anything to get out of an arrest." Meaning the young Black man that was being taken off to jail would use "the race card" to avoid consequences of his illegal actions. Two other such instances were shown. In both, having been caught in the act, the suspects had clearly committed a crime. In the first, a small group of bystanders, largely African American, assembled when the perpetrator began shouting that he was being assaulted by the police. Video cameras showed the man was merely being detained. Seemingly spurred on by the show of support from the gathering crowd the man began to struggle with the police. The crowd began vocalizing their concerns about what they perceived to be police brutality. An exasperated officer commented, "Ever since King we got a group of them that just follows us around. We're only doing our jobs." Later, he went on to say:

You can see they got a very different way of looking at things sometimes. You know they feel that its ok sometimes for them. But the suspects not in that instance tries to strike or attack an officer. But when an officer tries to defend himself and actually strikes the suspect or strikes at the suspect and hits the suspect then it becomes a different, a different story, different rules for them. They kind of tend to feel its not ok for officers to do that. When actually it's fine and lawful for an officer to do that.

The implication here is not only that there was no racism involved, but that most cries of racism are just that "cries," and according to this officer, hinge on the unwillingness of
people of color to play by the same rules as the officers. In other words, they demand special treatment and then falsely accuse police of racism when they don’t get it.

The second scenario depicting a suspect who claimed racism on the part of the police was even more precarious than the first. In this case the man started shouting at the police and threw himself to the ground before they even got out of their vehicles. Clearly the man’s claims were false as none of the officers were within range to touch the man, much less beat him. Officers looked visually perplexed, furthering the impression that the man on the ground was mentally incompetent. Which in fact, he was deemed to be. Officers called for a psychiatric evaluation.

**Hypothesis #7: Crime Seriousness**

Crimes committed by Non-White suspects on real life police dramas will be taken more seriously by police than crimes committed by White suspects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Crime Seriousness</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>.8566</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When testing for significant differences in mean scores of the level of seriousness with which a crime is taken (see Table 10), crimes involving non-white suspects were on average taken more seriously (mean score = 9.83) than crimes involving white suspects.
(mean score = 9.54). These mean differences were found to be significant using t-test procedures (t = -3.40, p < .01), thereby supporting the research hypothesis.

**Research Question: Expression of Futility**

Do police officers on real life police dramas express greater levels of futility when the primary suspect is Non-White than when the primary suspect is White?

When testing for significant differences in mean scores of the level futility expressed by police officers (see Table 11), those cases involving Non-White suspects produced a slightly higher mean score (4.08), than those involving White suspects (4.03). However, these differences were not found to be significant (t = -0.649, p > .05).

**Table 11. Race Differences in Level of Futility Expressed by Police**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Futility</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.7232</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( t = -0.649, \ p = .157 \)

**Research Question: Lectures**

Are police more likely to lecture White or Non-white suspects? Are police more likely to lecture White or Non-White victims?

In order to determine if the race of suspects and victims would have an influence on one’s likelihood of receiving a lecture from police officers and if so what that influence would be, cross tabulations were constructed for the bivariate relationship between those who received a lecture and the receiver’s race for those scenarios where
police delivered a lecture (see Table 12). Interestingly, in looking at the table, we find that non-white suspects and victims were more likely to receive no lecture than were white suspects and victims, with 32 percent of non-whites not being lectured and only 22 percent of whites not receiving a lecture. In cases where both victims and suspects were lectured it was non-whites who were most likely to receive the lecture (30.7% as compared to 21.7% for whites). It would appear that when people of color are lectured, officers are less discriminating about whom they lecture. However, when only one party received a lecture, white victims (21.7%) and white suspects (34.8%) were more likely to be the recipients than were non-white victims (16.9%) and suspects (22.8%). Chi-Square tests indicate that race differences with respect to who is more likely to receive lectures are significant ($X^2 = 13.695, p < .01$).

Table 12. Frequency and Percentage of Who Received Lectures by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiver of Lecture</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect &amp; Victim</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Lecture</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 13.695, p < .01$
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND RACE

Crime Seriousness

In order to explore the effect type of criminal activity has upon the relationship between race and the level of seriousness with which police officers treat the crime, partial tables were constructed for the tivariate relationship between race and level of seriousness with the type of criminal activity as the control variable (see Table 13). When reading the table, we find that for domestic violence scenarios, Non-white suspects elicited a mean crime seriousness score of 9.48 and White suspects elicited a mean crime seriousness score of 9.36. T-tests indicate no significant differences in mean scores between white and non-white suspects with respect to level of crime seriousness (t = - .484, p < .05). However, when comparing those suspects involved in non-domestic violence scenarios statistical significance results (t = -3.09, p < .01), wherein crime committed by Non-White suspects was treated with greater seriousness (mean score = 9.87), than crime committed by White suspects (mean = 9.58).

Table 13. Race Differences in Level of Seriousness of Criminal Activity Controlling for Crime Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>Level of Crime Seriousness</td>
<td>9.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Domestic</td>
<td>Level of Crime Seriousness</td>
<td>9.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t \text{ (domestic violence)} = -.484, p = .631 \]
\[ t \text{ (non-domestic)} = -3.09, p = .002 \]
Recalling previously obtained results where race was found to produce statistically significant differences with respect to level of crime seriousness (see Table 10), it would appear that the original relationship between level of crime seriousness and race of the suspect is conditional upon the type of crime being committed. For non-domestic violence vignettes, police treat crime involving non-white suspects with a higher degree of seriousness than crime involving white suspect, however, this difference disappears for domestic violence cases.

**Lectures**

In order to explore the effect the type of criminal activity has upon the relationship between race and who police are more likely to lecture, cross tabulation tables were constructed for the trivariate relationship between race and who received a lecture, with the type of criminal activity as the control variable (see Table 14). In reading the table, we find that for domestic violence scenarios there were no significant race differences with respect to who was most likely to receive a lecture ($X^2 = 1.616, p > .05$). However, for non-domestic violence scenarios significant race differences were detected ($X^2 = 19.775, p < .01$). Non-whites were more likely to receive no lecture (34.6%) than were whites (20.4%). However when non-whites were lectured, officers were more likely to lecture both the victim and the suspect (31.4%) than they were to lecture both the victim and the suspect when whites were lectured.
Table 14. Frequency and Percentage of Who Received Lectures by Race Controlling for Type of Criminal Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Crime</th>
<th>Receiver of Lecture</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect &amp; Victim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Lecture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Domestic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspect &amp; Victim</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Lecture</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2$ (domestic violence) = 1.616, $p > .05$

$X^2$ (non-domestic) = 19.775, $p < .01$

Recollecting previously obtained results where race was found to produce statistically significant differences with respect to who police lectured (see Table 12), it would appear that the original relationship between who is most likely to receive a lecture and the race is conditional upon the type of crime being committed. As with level of crime seriousness, statistical differences in who receives lectures were found only for non-domestic violence scenarios. Race differences disappear in domestic violence scenarios.
Latent Content Analysis

Very few overt differences emerged in the way the police handled domestic violence cases with respect to race and ethnicity. However analysis of latent content exposed interesting differences. Men and women of color as both perpetrators and victims, were often depicted as being more out of control and angry than white perpetrators and victims. Thirty-five percent of non-whites involved in domestic disputes were shown yelling and even advancing on each other after the police arrived as opposed to only fifteen percent of whites. In some cases they would turn their rage on the police. In that regard the situations appeared to be more dangerous for the officers themselves. Police officers reinforced the view of people of color as out of control by frequently telling them to “calm down,” “relax,” or “get it together.” In one instance an officer took it upon himself to lecture a victim on her “lack of self control.”

Officer: [angry, at times hostile tone] “Ma’am I want to tell you something. Listen to me. Show some self control. I listened to him. He says you all fought. Listen to me. You’re not showing any self control. The two of them said you all fought I have a feeling you both fought. You’re uncooperative. You don’t want to tell me what happened. So now you’re going to stand back here and you’re going to show self control now do you understand what I’m saying? Let me show you....let me see your mouth closed real quick and lets see how long they can stay that way ok? That’s self control. (All the while the officer is cutting off the victims attempts to interject by pointing his finger in her face).

A second difference with respect to ethnicity was found in the ways suspects were informed about specific penal codes against domestic assault. While suspects in general were informed of state laws requiring mandatory arrest in domestic violence situations, people of color, in particular Spanish speaking people, were the only ones to receive lectures specifically on following U.S. laws. Such reprimands were not only given to
people clearly established to be immigrants, but to those who merely spoke English with a Spanish accent.

    Officer: “You can’t do that here. We have laws against hitting.”

    Officer: “Are you aware that in this country you can’t just go around hitting her when she makes you angry? Ever.”

    Officer: “Do you understand you are in the United States now? You must follow our laws.”

In conjunction with the fear of deportation, especially on the border states, such rebuffs evoke a unique fear for the people on the receiving end, namely that they might be deemed illegal aliens and sent out of the country.

    A related problem that arose was in language barriers between police and those involved in domestic disputes. Officers became visibly more frustrated when they could not understand suspects and victims, or when they felt they were not being understood. In such cases, police became snappish with their replies and were more quick to raise their voices.

INTERSECTIONALITY: LINKING RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER

    As discussed in Chapter Two, cops on real-life police dramas construct a sense of shared identity with the viewing audience by highlighting the differences between themselves and those engaging in or victimized by crime. This in-group/out-group portrait largely hinges on the exploitation of some of the more negative stereotypes of those living in poverty. We, as the audience, know the criminals/victims are poor because they exhibit some of the most negative stereotypical behaviors/traits that we have of those living in poverty. In turn our very recognition of the poor based on these
stereotypes goes toward reinforcing these images as we see no counter examples of those living poverty. All crime on real life police drama is committed by the poor, and all people living in poverty are depicted as being entrenched in a culture of crime and violence. Hence, the picture painted is not only one of widespread crime, but one that links crime with poverty.

Domestic violence cases offer some of the greatest potential for promoting these negative images of poverty. Here, we as the viewing audience, are allowed a voyeuristic look at the insides of the homes of the poor. And while police also venture inside homes in other types of criminal investigations, domestic violence cases allow the camera a more leisurely look around the home where we are confronted with a montage of unkept houses, dirty and often naked children, animals running around, discarded beer cans, and heavily intoxicated people. These images are used as social indicators of the type of person who would engage in, or remain in, intimate relationships fraught with physical and/or verbal violence. The police reinforce this link by lecturing perpetrators and victims on their housekeeping skills in the midst of lectures on the ills of domestic assaults. For instance, one officer, when offering suggestions for getting the life of a white, female victim back “on-track” advised:

“Let’s start by picking up a few things. Dirty dishes should be in the kitchen, not on the floor. Do you have a dish washer? That pile of clothes over there, how long has it been there?”

In another case, involving a woman of color, an officer sarcastically commented:

“It’s no wonder that you could find anything in this mess. When was the last time you saw the floor? You have children, right? When was the last time you saw them?”
Because women are traditionally responsible for housekeeping, it is arguable that these images and lectures subtly support the notion that something must be especially wrong with the women in these scenarios. And as we have seen the female victims of domestic violence are also held responsible for a variety of other victimizing behaviors on the part of her assailant.

In addition to visual cues of the dysfunctional nature of those living in poverty and engaging in domestic violence, the police verbally reinforce the notion that those engaging in domestic violence are somehow different than the rest of civilized humanity. At times this distancing was rather overt, as one officer tells the viewing audience: “You can see they got a very different way of looking at things sometimes.” “Different,” here is associated with a lesser or more flawed way of looking at things, of thinking. The officer continues, “We come in, trying to help and they want to fight with us. We’re the good guys, they don’t seem to get that. They just want to fight and beat up on each other.” Another officer remarked in his closing statements to the video camera, “You can’t possibly understand the thinking we are dealing with, until you see it. Everyday these people are at it. They never learn.” While still another commented that, “there’s no reasoning with that kind. They simply don’t understand normal relations.” Other comments regarding the differentness of those encountered by the police were more subtle in nature. Perhaps it is the frequent use of terms such as “these people” and “that kind” that goes the furthest in establishing the us/them dynamic.

In many respects such comments appeared to be race blind, as they were directed at white as well as non-white suspects and victims alike. In fact, as we have seen many of the race differences presented in real life crime dramas disappeared when we looked
specifically at domestic violence with poverty becoming the more salient variable. However, it should not go unnoted that in some instances race combines with poverty to exasperate the in-group/out-group dichotomy. This is especially true of those people of color who spoke limited or no English. For them, in addition to baring all the signs of poverty publicly smited by police officers, they lacked the language to communicate with officers who only spoke English. Some were further set apart by assumptions on the part of the police officers that they must also be ignorant of U.S. legal code and custom.
ENDNOTES

1. The 1970s sitcom All in the Family was based on a working class family. As a rule, the main character Archy Bunker was verbally abusive toward women and ethnic minorities.

2. While the officer in this case says “hold up” the dispatcher said “shoplifting”.

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I believe all people should be treated with courtesy, dignity, and respect regardless of who they are or what their backgrounds from. You know we contact someone, you contact them when they’re at their worst, you don’t know if they just experienced a tragedy or family hardship. They deserve courtesy and respect until they basically change the rules. We have to do what we have to do to be safe and enforce the law but that doesn’t mean you can’t treat people with courtesy, dignity, and respect regardless of where they’re from. (White, Male Police Officer, COPS).

While most certainly and an admirable goal, the preceding statement says something very important about how the people who come into contact with the police are viewed. There is some indication of them being different from the police officers in ways more fundamental than occupation. Rather than it going without saying, they are a people in need of special reminders to be treated with “courtesy, dignity, and respect.” Unfortunately, this verbal reminder often goes unheeded.

This chapter will provide a summary discussion of the major findings of this research project and will offer conclusionary remarks and suggested directions for future research. The first section is a general overview of the types of crime that are depicted on real life police dramas and how that contributes to the perception that we live in a “mean and dangerous world.” The second section summarizes findings with respect to domestic violence and comparisons with other types of crime. The third section focuses
on race and ethnic differences in the treatment of criminal suspects on real life police dramas. The fourth section examines the significance of race, class, and gender in domestic violence scenarios. The final section will address limitations of this project and offer suggestions for future research.

CRIME IN GENERAL: MEAN WORLD HEGEMONY

As predicted violent crime made up the single largest category of crime depicted on real life police dramas (see Chapter Four). Forty percent of crimes were violent in nature, while only 21 percent were property crimes. In accordance with previous research these numbers were heavily skewed from FBI Uniform Crime Reports (1996) which suggest violent crime only account for 13 percent of crime, while property crimes make up 77 percent of UCR data. Recalling from Chapter Two that the mean world syndrome is a phenomena whereby heavy viewing of television programing featuring greater amounts of violence contributes to the perception that we live in a dangerous, crime riddled society, real life police dramas run the potential of contributing to such skewed views of the world.

This view is further skewed by the demographic make up of criminal suspects. In this overly-violent world created on real life police dramas, Non-Whites accounted for 64 percent of all primary suspects and 55 percent of suspects involved in violent crime (see Table 1). Men accounted for 92 percent of all primary criminal suspects and 90 percent of suspects involved in violent crime (See Table 2). And the poor made up the vast majority of all primary criminal suspects. Hence, it is a world where lower class Non-White men predominate as criminal suspects.
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON REALITY TELEVISION

It is within this context of a mean and dangerous world that domestic violence scenarios arise on real life police dramas. This study, in conjunction with past research (see Chapter Two), indicates that police officers were not portrayed as treating victims and suspects of domestic assault the same as they treated victims and suspects of other types of criminal activity.

Crime Seriousness

In general, police officers were portrayed as treating domestic violence cases with lower levels of seriousness than other types of crime. Specifically, police were less likely to be shown racing to the scene, victims were less likely to be seriously injured or in need of hospitalization, and officers were more likely to allow the victim to decide if an arrest should be made.

Lectures, Futility, and Frustration

While officers were not found to be more likely to issue lectures to those involved in domestic violence cases than those involved in other types of crime, the content of those lectures varied. Officers were depicted as more likely to express frustration with crime victims and expressed greater levels of futility in their efforts to stop domestic assaults from reoccurring than other types of crime. Lectures turned into venues for officers to unleash frustration with uncooperative victims who failed to follow their advise or press charges against their assailants.
Personal Troubles: Officer Attribution of Cause and Suggested Solutions

Police officers were more likely to express the opinion that domestic violence was the result of individual dysfunction, than they were to express the opinion that there might be contributing structural economic factors. Drug and alcohol abuse was the most often cited cause of domestic assault. At times it was insinuated that the victims of domestic violence were at fault for inciting the assault or for continuing to live in a relationship with an abusive mate. Officers expressed little sympathy toward victims whose economic conditions might make it more difficult for them to simply leave a abusive situations.

INFLUENCE OF RACE AND ETHNICITY ON REAL LIFE POLICE DRAMAS

On average, crime committed by Non-White suspects was taken more seriously by police than crime committed by White suspects. Non-white suspects were more likely to be arrested and placed in hand cuffs than White suspects. Officers were also more likely to draw their weapons on Non-White suspects, than on White suspects. Police were also found to be more likely to lecture both suspects and victims when Non-Whites were involved than when Whites were involved.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND RACE

Interestingly, when controlling for domestic violence, quantitative differences in police treatment between White and Non-white suspects and victims disappeared. Police did not take domestic violence more seriously when committed by Non-White suspects than they did when it was committed by white suspects. Nor were police more likely to
lecture non-white suspects and victims of domestic violence than they were to lecture white suspects and victims of domestic violence.

Additionally, few race differences emerged in latent content analysis of police dialogue and lectures. However, there were a few important distinctions. People of color were more portrayed as being more aggressive, out of control, and angry than White people were. Police were shown lecturing non-whites on U.S. law and exhibited greater amounts of frustration and less patience with those that spoke little or no English.

RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER

By virtue of the class selective nature of crimes portrayed on real life police dramas, the impression that domestic violence is a crime of poverty is actively reinforced. In other words, because these programs only show people living in poverty engaging in domestic violence, it appears as though the poor are far more likely to be involved in such situations. And because domestic violence is a popular staple of these shows, the impression that domestic violence is rampant amongst the poor is upheld.

Because people of color out numbered white people on real life police dramas there is a subtle connection between race and class being drawn. However, unlike other types of crime on real life police dramas those depicted in domestic violence scenarios were more likely to be White than Non-White. In this regard, us/them, in-group/out-group distinctions drawn by police officers appear to be more about social class than race/ethnicity. In fact, many of the commentaries given by police officers pointed to conditions of poverty as being a contributing cause of the violence in the household. For instance, lectures given on housekeeping skills and child rearing to victims of domestic
assault. In this regard, poor female victims were put on the receiving end of blame for the violent outbursts of their partners.

It is important to note however, that race differences do not completely disappear. While social class and gender are thrust into the forefront of domestic violence relations on real life police drama. The over-all context of such shows remains heavily entrenched in the lore of dangerous men of color. Specifically with reference to domestic violence, there was a tendency to portray men and women of color as being more out of control, especially with police officers, implicating that poor people of color are perhaps more naturally violent than poor whites.

The danger in all of these portrayals is best spelled out by Carmody (1998) when she writes:

These myths are potentially harmful to the victims of domestic violence in several ways. First, we know that women report higher levels of fear of crime (Stanko 1992). Programs that emphasize the role of women as victims of violent crime, and fail to offer accurate depictions of the events, may perpetuate this fear among viewers. Additionally, images of domestic violence that shift the blame away from the offender and onto the victim may discourage women from seeking police assistance. Since early intervention in domestic violence is crucial (Straus and Gelles 1990), media images that discourage victims’ efforts to obtain assistance are potentially dangerous. (171).

It is important to note that when Carmody makes this statement she is referencing myths about gender and domestic violence only. When one adds race and class to the mix the potential the urgency of her message becomes even greater.

Previous research indicates that one factor preventing Black as well as other Women of Color from reporting battery to the police is the blatant racism displayed by
the U.S. legal system (White 1995; Crenshaw 1994; Tong 1984). As Kenyari Bellfield (cited in Tong 1984) of the Harriet Tubman Woman’s Shelter in Minnesota puts it:

“The effects of sexism and racism seem to great to tackle in the face of having been victimized by a loved one. The woman often times feels powerless to change her situation, tending to feel she is being forced to tolerate the situation longer because the very system which has historically served to subjugate and oppress her is the only system which can save her from the immediate abusive system.”

Although she may wish to seek help, she can’t help but mistrust the very system which claims to offer it. Furthermore, Women of Color are well aware of the brutality with which Men of Color are treated by the legal system. Historically it has been all to willing to prosecute Men of Color beyond the fullest extent of the law. This too may prevent Women of Color from seeking help. Immigrant women are also in an onerous situation, language barriers and fear of deportation often leads them not to report beatings (Crenshaw 1994).

To the extent that real life police dramas are believed to be an accurate realistic portrayal of police interaction with those involved in domestic violence scenarios, they run the risk of discouraging victims from taking legal action. Research tells us that without intervention, domestic violence tends to increase in frequency and severity over time (Straus and Gelles 1990). “Anything that discourages a victim from seeking help may therefore increase her risk of severe injury or death” (Carmody 1998: 172).

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This project marks the first attempt to explore the intersections of race, class, and gender in domestic violence scenarios on real life police dramas. Although much was
learned about the portrayal of structural intersectionality, future research would benefit by adding an audience effects component to determine how these images influence perceptions of domestic violence with respect to race, class, and gender. For instance, is there a greater likelihood for heavy viewers of real life police dramas to assume domestic violence is more common amongst the poor or that it is caused by dysfunctional individuals? And what role does race play in all of this? Are people of color more likely to be seen as out of control by heavy viewers of real life police dramas.

A second suggestion for future projects would be the further breaking down of Non-Whites into respective ethnic groups. There was a sizable African American and Latino American population portrayed on the shows viewed. Questions arise as to whether there were differences between the way these two groups were treated generally and specifically with respect to domestic violence. Were ethnically specific stereotypes upheld? For instance, were Latino males portrayed as being more domineering in accordance with “machismo” stereotypes? Were African American women depicted as being more domineering, supporting stereotypes of the Black matriarchy?

A third suggestion for future research projects would be to focus in more exclusively on domestic violence scenarios. Intersectionality would benefit the drawing of a larger sample of domestic violence scenarios and as well as a more exclusively qualitative approach for uncovering covert, subtle forms of discrimination.
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