MEDIA & COMMUNICATION STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Manufacturing white criminals: Depictions of criminality and violence on *Law & Order*

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Abstract: This study examines exposure to the police drama television genre and its impact on perceptions of crime and racial criminality. Content analyses of three seasons of *Law & Order* were examined to evaluate the show's portrayal of race and crime compared to actual crime statistics for New York City during the same periods. A survey was also conducted to examine perceptions of personal safety and the influence of television's depiction of race and crime. Results suggest whites are disproportionately portrayed as criminals five to eight times more often on police dramas compared to actual crime statistics for the city of New York, exposure to police dramas increases beliefs of threats to personal safety, and exposure to police dramas leads to elevated perceptions of white criminality among non-whites. Results provide additional support for cultivation theory and "Mean World Syndrome," and implications for delimitation and racial distrust.

Subjects: Cultural Studies; Mass Communication; Media & Film Studies; Media Communication; Police; Violent Crime

Keywords: white criminality; cultivation; race; crime; *Law & Order*

1. Introduction

Racial profiling, it's an interesting subject. Here's the reality of crime, in the street crime, approximately sixty-percent to seventy-percent is perpetrated by people of color, people of color, right? Maybe thirty-percent or thirty-five-percent of the suspects are white people. In prisons, the percentages are pretty much the same: thirty-five-percent maybe of the people

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The authors hold Doctorate degrees in Mass Communication from the University of Florida where they studied mass media effects. Effects research is the investigation of the messages presented in the media and how these messages impact the perceptions of those who consume them thus altering their behavior or thought. The media play an important role in creating our social world by presenting images that become seen by the audience as real-life portrayals. Understanding the media's role in shaping our understanding of the real world is an important topic for mass communication researchers. This study continues in that tradition by investigating how watching police dramas, and the television show *Law & Order* specifically, effects the beliefs of viewers about the real world.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study examines how the police drama television show *Law & Order* portrays race and crime and the impact these depictions have on viewers. By examining seasons of *Law & Order*, the study found whites were shown as violent criminals on the show in exaggerated proportions compared to real-world crime statistics for New York City where the show is set. A survey of those who watched police dramas showed viewers were more likely to believe they would be victims of violence than those who did not watch. The results also showed that non-white viewers of *Law & Order* were more likely to believe whites commit more crime than non-whites who did not watch. The conclusions drawn from the study were that *Law & Order* creates a false impression of white criminality and this impression is remembered and accepted by non-white viewers.

in prison are white and the rest are people of color, meaning black, Hispanic, whatever. Now on COPS, we reversed that. We showed sixty to seventy-percent white suspects and thirty to thirty-five-percent, or maybe as high occasionally as forty, of people of color. Now why do I do that? Because I don't wanna contribute to negative stereotyping. Everybody knows that crime takes place in ghettos. We all know that, or should know that; the majority of street crime. All of the white criminals are at Enron and places like that and that's just because they're not disenfranchised and they do different kinds of crime. (John Langley)

In an interview, John Langley, the creator and executive producer of the reality television police drama *COPS*, admitted that he purposely did not present race and violent crime accurately on his show, which centered around race and crime, because of the potential impact it would have on the audience (Archive of American Television, 2013). Langley essentially concedes television's power to impact how the audience sees the world and therefore consciously decided to present a false reality where whites were seen committing violent crime disproportionate to real-world statistics and real-ity. Langley's admission is not surprising as research has long shown that the media can shape thought and culture, and provide a powerful tool for individuals to learn about their social world particularly on issues like race and violence (Armstrong & Nelson, 2005; Gerbner, 1998). Since the advent of television, politicians and the public have voiced concern about its impact on political beliefs and social attitudes (Mutz & Nir, 2010). Biased or inaccurate messages may influence the audience and potentially reinforce stereotypes (Holbert, 2005) and therefore remain a vital area of inquiry for researchers. When the public is presented a narrow range of ideas in the media, and become accustomed to this narrow view, they begin to accept this portrayal as representative of society and the real world even if it is not an accurate representation (Bagdikian, 1985). This becomes a greater concern as audiences select programming they find entertaining and conforming to their own perceptions/beliefs of the world (Deroche & Deroche, 1991; Holbert, 2005; Nama, 2003), which reinforce these perceptions (Britto, Hughes, Saltzman, & Stroh, 2007; Gerbner, 1998).

Television has the power to both reinforce and combat racial/ethnic stereotypes (Armstrong & Nelson, 2005). Previous studies have examined the effects of entertainment programming on per-ceptions of race/ethnicity (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Grabe & Drew, 2007; Klein & Shiffman, 2006; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995; Potter & Ware, 1987; Scharrer, 2001), while police dramas have also been examined for portrayals of race/ethnicity (Deroche & Deroche, 1991).

Although the public's perceptions of race/ethnicity and crime are influenced by more than televi-sion (Gibson, 2014), the potential effects on viewer perceptions deserve scrutiny, particularly police dramas. Few Americans will observe real-life police stations or courtrooms, or have extensive knowl-edge of the criminal justice system, and most Americans will never be involved in or be a victim of violent crime (Britto et al., 2007). Therefore, depictions on television become de facto representa-tions of criminals and the criminal justice system, as well as real-world violence which impacts view-ers' perception (Britto et al., 2007; Mutz & Nir, 2010; Wilson & Henderson, 2014). The characters and behaviors seen become vivid and salient representations of an unknown and unexperienced reality (Mutz & Nir, 2010).

This study examines the television program *Law & Order* and the genre of police dramas more broadly, through the guise of cultivation, and its effect on perceptions of race and criminality, spe-cifically white criminality.

2. Television violence
The television industry has long been blamed for causing undue apprehension among viewers because of the prevalence of violence, leading some viewers to overestimate the dangers in their environment while raising fears about personal vulnerability to crime (Britto et al., 2007; Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986). For those already fearful they will be victims of crime, watching violence on television can reinforce these fears by showing the world as a scary and dangerous place (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007; Gerbner, 1998; Gibson, 2014). This concept forms

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the basis for cultivation theory which links heavy television viewing to an increase in perceptions of the potential for danger in the real world (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Cultivation theory, originally developed by George Gerbner in the 1970s, is one of the most used theories to examine mass media effects (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Gerbner argues the term cultivation is used to "describe the independent contributions television viewing makes to viewer conceptions of social reality" (1998, p. 180). Cultivation theory explains that heavy viewing of television creates a distorted view of reality which develops over time through repeated exposure, leading avid media consumers to adopt world views similar to those repeatedly presented in media content (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011).

Perceptions of the real world are at least partially based on what individuals see and hear in the media, in particular on television, and these perceptions can influence decisions on how to behave in and interpret real-world situations (Klein & Shiffman, 2006). Cumulative exposure to media thus shapes the audience's perceptions of social reality (Klein & Shiffman, 2006; Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Audiences develop a sense of their social reality cultivated from this exposure to entertainment and news media, and based on cultivation theory, the more television individuals watch, the more they believe the real world mirrors what is shown, even when these images conflict with real-world occurrences (Botta, 2000; Crouteau & Hoynes, 2003; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Wilson & Henderson, 2014).

Gerbner and Gross (1976) suggested that Americans who watched more than four hours of prime time television a day believed the world was more dangerous than those who watched two hours or less. The researchers contended violent television programs teach the audience to be less trustful of others and accept violence as a social reality they must live with or flee, leading to exaggerated assumptions about threats to personal safety (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This creates a slippery slope as those fearful of their environment from watching violent television are more likely to stay indoors, further exposing themselves to violent television and perpetuating these fears (Gerbner, 1998; Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986).

According to Kahlor and Eastin (2011), there are two types of cultivation effects: first order which influences individual beliefs concerning the prevalence of a social phenomenon and thus influences views on personal safety, and second order which relates to an individual's beliefs about society impacted from viewing media content and thus influences views on the causes of the social phenomenon. Both may alter perceptions as well as individual actions.

2.1. Development of cultivation theory

Since cultivation theory was first proposed, researchers have questioned if heavy media use alone leads to perceptions of a "Mean World" and how other factors such as gender, age, education, environment, socioeconomic status, and previous experience with violence can increase the effects of cultivation (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Gerbner, 1998; Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986). Findings however have been mixed or contradictory. For example, Weaver and Wakshlag tested if heavy media use in general, or violent programming specifically, led to an increase in perceived fear of crime, and concluded that heavy media use in general did not influence perceptions of an individual's personal safety, but exposure to crime-related programming "may lead to the assimilation of elevated crime-related perceptions" (1986, p. 154). Kahlor and Eastin (2011) also found dramatic content such as police dramas and television news were more powerful in influencing perceptions of the world than other content (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011). However, Custers and Van den Bulck (2012) instead argued news consumption led to underestimations of perceived risk.

Custers and Van den Bulck (2012) also found perceived risk of violence was higher among those of higher socioeconomic status and those with no personal experience with crime. Weaver and Wakshlag (1986) investigated whether direct personal experience with violence, or knowledge of the experience of others who had been victims of violence, increased the level of fear for one's safety when combined with heavy media use. Results from Weaver and Wakshlag (1986) suggested previous experiences

with criminal victimization were only associated with a fear of violence in hypothetical and uncontrollable situations, but not to perceived personal safety on a day-to-day basis or fear of involvement in the future.

From these mixed and sometimes contradictory conclusions came such areas of research as criminological cultivation which examines the perceptions viewers develop concerning crime, deviance, and the criminal justice system after repeated and long-term exposure to media content focusing on police dramas and television news (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). A specific focus is placed on the disconnect between media portrayals of crime and the criminal justice system and the real world (Wilson & Henderson, 2014).

2.2. Reality and police dramas

Each television genre is defined by programming categories with a formula-driven, mass-produced quality based on audience expectations (Gerbner, 1998; Nama, 2003). As a genre, dramas are expected to be true-to-life portrayals of reality (Nama, 2003). More than other non-reality TV genres, television dramas are defined by their attempt to depict the real world (Nama, 2003). Scharrer argues, "Although fictional television programming is far from an accurate reflection of society, it is equally hard to argue that content does not correspond to real-world occurrences in some way" (2001, p. 618). However, depictions must match what the audience believes constitutes reality, or it will be rejected. Interpretation rests with the audience, but audience impact depends on the programming (Gerbner, 1998).

The dramatic genre attempts to depict reality while also mirroring to the audience their own concept of social reality. In effect, dramatic television affirms social beliefs and values leading to the desire to watch programming supporting these beliefs and values (Nama, 2003). Deroche and Deroche (1991) conclude, popular television speaks to us about ourselves, or as Kahlor and Eastin referred to it, television is a "purveyor of social norms" (2011, p. 215). But, dramatic television also provides cultural images the audience internalizes to understand their world (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011).

As a subgenre, police dramas have been characterized for using the sights, sounds, and visual imagery of real police work to project a sense of realism (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007). Despite this lean toward realism, while violent crime has decreased nationally in recent years, the number of police dramas on TV has increased, becoming ever more visually gruesome and remaining one of the most popular fictional television genres (Mutz & Nir, 2010). Rather than portraying a world where crime has decreased, police dramas instead exaggerate victimization, and inflate the proportion of violent crime, while under-representing nonviolent crime (Britto et al., 2007; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995). The combination of projected realism with overt depictions of a violent and dangerous world may influence a viewers' sense of reality and cause them to perceive the world as more dangerous than it is, yet real-world perceptions of violence may not be the only cultivated influence from television.

2.3. Race on television

Previous research has found that whites are the most frequently depicted race/ethnicity in American media (Nama, 2003; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995; Potter & Ware, 1987), while non-whites are often under-represented (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Nama, 2003). Research on police dramas has also shown whites are similarly overrepresented as violent criminals compared to actual crime statistics (Britto et al., 2007; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995; Potter & Ware, 1987; Scharrer, 2001). For example, in an examination of the 2003–2004 Season of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, Britto et al. (2007) found only 18% of all offenders shown were racial/ethnic minorities and only 2% of criminals were Hispanic. Potter and Ware (1987) posited that the rationale for this disparity was because as white, middle-aged males were the most frequently seen characters on television, white male characters between the ages of 20 and 50 would be the most frequently shown committing antisocial behavior.

While non-whites have long been under-represented in American media, before the 1960s and the Civil Right Movement, when non-whites were included, they were portrayed as racist stereotypes (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007; Crouteau & Hoynes, 2003; Nama, 2003). Minority characters were seen in disparaging roles with Hispanics depicted as poor and uneducated criminals, buffoons, or Latin lovers, while blacks appeared as lazy, untrustworthy, and living in ghettos (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000).

More recently however, while remaining relatively few in American media, black characters are more likely to be seen working in legitimate professions as police officers rather than criminals on police dramas (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007), and given more positive representations than their white counterparts (Deroche & Deroche, 1991). But, black characters are still given few roles in American media. Deroche and Deroche (1991) concluded the lack of representation has been caused by attempts to appear inoffensive in the entertainment media's portrayal of blacks, creating an environment where black characters are not shown in any major roles to limit possible negative depictions. Negative portrayals of Hispanic characters have also declined in entertainment television. For example, in an analysis of prime time television shows on the four major networks in the fall of 1996, Mastro and Greenberg found that Hispanics "were, on average, the most respected and least lazy of any group," when compared to whites and blacks in their overall sample (2000, p. 700).

2.4. The impact of racial depictions

"Perceptions of different races may accrue at least in part from one's television experiences with those races" (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000, p. 692). The effect is that repeated media presentations of a group as violent will lead the audience to associate that group with violence. Thus, from a cultivation perspective, when negative stereotype depictions, creating an out-group homogenization, are combined with heavy media use, this may cultivate negative perceptions of race and reality (Oliver & Fonash, 2002), perhaps especially true for those who believe the shows they are watching accurately portray reality.

While other factors may have a greater impact on perceptions of race/ethnicity than media images, the media have the capacity to reinforce or dissuade prejudiced beliefs and negative stereotypes (Oliver & Fonash, 2002). Research on cognitive processing of social information has found the danger occurs when stereotypes, once formed, become commonly employed and resistant to change (Oliver & Fonash, 2002), and reinforced from media images. If the media consistently show one group or race as "bad guys," this may impact the audience's perceptions of individuals from that group. However, research on the effects of media stereotyping has generally only studied negative stereotypes of minorities (Grabe & Drew, 2007; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000).

Researchers suggest whites routinely associate violent crime with blacks and other minorities because they observe this association on television news (Britto et al., 2007; Oliver & Fonash, 2002). Research has argued that blacks being frequently shown as criminals on television news programs (Crouteau & Hoynes, 2003; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007) reinforces negative stereotypes about blacks (Britto et al., 2007; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). The news media engage in negative stereotyping by showing minorities guilty or arrested for violent crimes, thus influencing white viewers so that when they see a black person featured in a news story about crime, "they may be particularly likely to remember the race but forget the individual, thereby implicating all Blacks rather than one specific person" (Oliver & Fonash, 2002, p. 141). Dixon and Linz add that such programming "may lead viewers to believe that the social world is populated by African Americans who are dangerous and prone to crime" (2000, p. 134). However, as opposed to television news programs, Grabe and Drew (2007) found police dramas had no statistical impact on perceptions of the amount of crime committed by blacks. Despite the existing literature in regard to criminal depictions of minorities, little attention has been given to perceptions of white criminality cultivated by media messages, leaving a significant question – Could media potentially influence audience beliefs about whites? (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000).

Kahlor and Eastin (2011) argued more content analysis must be conducted to investigate cultivation effects to better examine show content. Therefore, to first investigate the extent to which the police drama *Law & Order* accurately presents racial and ethnic criminality compared to actual crime statistics, the following research question was proposed:

RQ1: Does *Law & Order* depict violent criminals by race/ethnicity in accurate proportion to New York City violent crime statistics?

Previous research suggests cultivation effects may be more prominent among those who watch more genre-specific television programming. To investigate whether individuals believe police dramas, and specifically the *Law & Order* franchise, are accurate depictions of crime and police work, the following research question was proposed:

RQ2: Do individuals who watch the police drama *Law & Order* or any of its spinoffs believe the programs depict reality?

Police dramas may cultivate perceptions of an overly violent and dangerous world but not necessarily a world of nonviolent crime (Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986). To examine if police dramas influence viewers' beliefs about their safety, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ3a: Does exposure to police dramas influence perceptions concerning the likelihood of physical harm?

RQ3b: Does exposure to police dramas influence perceptions concerning the likelihood of being involved in non-violent crime, specifically having property stolen?

Studies have supported that television news creates the perception of minority criminality among whites through repeated depictions of minorities being arrested or found guilty of committing violent crime, but the same results were not found when examining police dramas (Grabe & Drew, 2007). To examine if police dramas influence perceptions of non-white criminality among white viewers, the following research question was proposed:

RQ4: Will white respondents who watch Law & Order perceive non-whites commit higher levels of crime than whites who do not watch?

Whites are the most frequently depicted race on entertainment programming (Nama, 2003; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995; Potter & Ware, 1987). The potential exists that as whites are the most frequently shown race on television, and therefore more frequently seen committing violent crimes on fictional television such as police dramas, this may influence perception of white criminality. To examine if police dramas influence perceptions of white criminality, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ5: Will non-white respondents who watch *Law & Order* perceive that whites commit higher levels of crime than non-white respondents who do not watch?

RQ6: Will white respondents who watch Law & Order perceive whites commit higher levels of crime than white respondents who do not watch?

3. Methods

According to Wilson and Henderson (2014), the two steps of cultivation analysis are to investigate media content to examine which messages are being presented, and to take these findings to observe if they influence a cultivation effect. Kahlor and Eastin (2011) add a third step of singling out specific variables such as race to examine cultivation impact on specific groups to see if the impact is greater among these groups.

For this examination, the first step of cultivation analysis will be conducted using content analysis of three seasons of *Law & Order*, and the second step will be conducted using a survey to examine if watching police dramas impact perceptions of personal safety. The third step of analysis will be conducted through testing if race impacts perceptions of criminality among those who watch *Law & Order*. This study examines how police dramas, specifically *Law & Order*, depict reality, race/ethnicity, and violence, and first-order effects of how these depictions influence viewers' perceptions of their safety and second-order effects of how viewing impacts the understanding of criminality among different races/ethnicities.

Law & Order depicts criminal activity, those suspected of a crime, charged with a crime, and those found guilty or admitting guilt for the crime. *Law & Order* was one of the longest running shows on television airing from September 1990 to May 2010, and reruns continue to air on cable television and through on-demand delivery. The popularity of the show spawned a number of spinoffs including the still running *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. In addition, former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg appeared on the show as himself adding to the show's sense of realism.

Content analysis of the 1992 Season 3, 1995 Season 6, and 2003 Season 14 of *Law & Order* examined violent offenders by race/ethnicity in each episode. The specific Seasons were compared to crime statistics provided by New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS, *Computerized criminal history*, personal communication, February 10, 2009, December 6, 2011) of violent felony arrests in New York City per racial/ethnic category identified by the city. The 69 episodes across the three seasons form a sufficient sample to test the Research Questions (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004).

The time frame between 1992 and 2003 was deemed important because it depicts New York City before, during, and after the mayoral term of Rudy Giuliani who held the office from 1994 to 2001. During this time, that the United States witnessed a steady decline in crime and murder; in 1991, the murder rate in the United States was 9.8 per 100,000 people, but by 2009, the murder rate had dropped to 5.4 per 100,000 people; the lowest level since the 1960s (Von Drehle, 2010). New York City's murder rate went down just as dramatically from a peak right before Giuliani took office to a 56% decrease by the end of the 1990s (Sterbenz, 2014), and a 66% decline in murders, 45.7% decline in rapes, and 39.6% decline in aggravated assaults between 1993 and 2001 (Peters & Woolley, 2007). Many claim it was Giuliani and his "broken windows" policing approach of cracking down on minor crimes which increased overall quality of life for New Yorkers which lead to a decrease in undesirable activity including violent crime (Sterbenz, 2014). But despite dramatic declines in violence in the real world, *Law & Order*, following the norms of the genre, depicted violent acts in each episode and thus a dangerous city.

3.1. Violence

According to Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan (1995), violence can be difficult to define operationally. However, for the purpose of this study, violent offenders were defined as individuals convicted or admitting to violent felonies legislatively defined in the New York State Penal Law Section 70.02 (New York Penal Law System, 2006). This definition was chosen so felony crime arrest statistics for the city of New York could be compared to violent offenders convicted or admitting guilt on *Law & Order*, as all episodes take place in New York City.

To determine the race/ethnicity and number of violent criminals during the three seasons of *Law & Order*, a coding sheet was created to examine every episode and code the race/ethnicity of the criminals prosecuted or admitting guilt (see Appendix A). If the criminal was not specifically identified according to race/ethnicity by one of the actors, the researchers identified the criminal based on physical characteristics, accents or their first and/or last name (Britto et al., 2007). In addition, a second coder co-coded a random sample of the three seasons using the same coding sheets and coding instructions. According to Lacy and Riffe (1996), using multiple coders to analyze a sample of the overall population helps ensure the results do not represent biases of any one coder. Thirty-two percent (*n* = 22) of the sample was co-coded and tested for intercoder agreement using the Cohen's

kappa statistic. At 32%, the sample included all of Season 3 as representative of the total, and exceeded the standard 10% subsample (Lombard et al., 2004).

Law & Order is divided into two parts, police and courtroom drama, and only those found guilty of committing a violent crime or admitted guilt were recorded. Arrests for those found not guilty were not coded. As it is possible for someone to be arrested for a crime and languish in the penal system long before a verdict is reached of guilt or innocence, crime arrest records for New York City were compared to those found guilty or admitted guilt on the program rather than to convictions which could take months or years after arrests occur for such data to be available and would not relate to the arrests during the same period when the shows aired.

Violent criminals were coded by race/ethnicity using categories from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice (DCJS, personal communication, December 6, 2011). Based on the New York State Division of Criminal Justice (DCJS, personal communication, December 6, 2011), in 1992, race/ethnicity was divided into five categories: whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asian/Indian and Unknown/Missing, and for 1995 and 2003 race/ethnicity categories included: whites, blacks, Hispanics, others, and unknowns (DCJS, personal communication, February 10, 2009). Anyone found guilty of a violent crime, or admitted to committing a crime, was coded according to these racial/ethnic categories. Results were then compared to arrest statistics from the DCJS for those periods. Testing for intercoder agreement yielded a result of $k = .75$ for the race/ethnicity of offender variable in the co-coded sample. Testing for intercoder agreement yielded a result of $k = .90$ for the race/ethnicity of victim variable in the co-coded sample. According to previous research (Landis & Koch, 1977), this demonstrates substantial agreement between the two coders.

3.2. Survey

To examine the extent viewing fictional television police dramas related to increased perceptions of danger to one's personal safety and perceptions of racial/ethnic criminality, a survey was administered to college students for extra credit in six communication courses at a large public university in the southeast. To determine exposure to the program *Law & Order* and police dramas in general, respondents were asked, "How many days last week did you watch the police drama *Law & Order* or any of its spinoffs, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* or *Law & Order: Criminal Intent?*" and "How many days last week did you watch entertainment programs that show police in action, such as *Law & Order* or *C.S.I*?" (Grabe & Drew, 2007). Respondents selected from a six-point scale (None, Once, Twice. Three times, Four times, and Five or More times). To test participants' perceived realism of police dramas, the following question was included, "How realistic do you believe police dramas like *Law & Order* depict crime and law enforcement?" (Oliver & Armstrong, 1995, p. 563). Respondents selected between Very Realistic, Realistic, Unrealistic, and Very Unrealistic.

To measure first-order cultivation effects of perception of the likelihood of becoming victim of a crime, participants were asked, "How likely do you think it is that someone will steal something from you, your house, or your car during the next 12 months?" and "How likely do you think it is that someone will intentionally cause you bodily harm during the next 12 months?" (Grabe & Drew, 2007, p. 156). Respondents selected between Very Likely, Likely, Unlikely and Very Unlikely.

To measure second-order cultivation effects, respondents were also asked to estimate the degree of violent crime committed by whites, blacks, and Hispanics on a 10-point incremental percentage scale from 0–10% to 91–100%. Finally, demographic questions were asked about race and gender (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011).

4. Results

New York City, the setting of *Law & Order*, is a diverse city, and in 2010, 44% of people living in Manhattan were white (United States Census Bureau, 2015). According to the DCJS (personal communication, December 6, 2011), in 1992 there were 51,490 violent felonies arrests in New York City. On Season 3 of *Law & Order*, although no one was found guilty or admitted to a crime in four episodes, 23 individuals

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were found guilty or admitted guilt to 27 violent felonies, 71% (*n* = 20) of which were murders. A breakdown comparing criminal arrests from DCJS (personal communication, December 6, 2011) and convictions or admissions of guilt from Season 3 by race/ethnicity is shown in Table 1. In Season 3 of *Law & Order*, nearly two-thirds of all violent criminals were white, an association that is contrary to actual crime statistics as demonstrated by a chi-square goodness of fit, X^2 (2, *N* = 23) = 11.5, *p* < .01. Such a result shows that the null hypothesis of no difference should be rejected and the alternative hypothesis should be accepted that *Law & Order* overemphasized white criminals.

According to the DCJS (personal communication, February 10, 2009), in 1995, there were 49,549 violent felony arrests in NYC. On Season 6 of *Law & Order*, 33 individuals were found guilty or admitted guilt to violent felonies. In addition, although Season 6 aired before the September 11th terrorist attack and after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, one episode included a terrorist attack where a white male was convicted of murder and terrorism for killing 20 black people on the New York subway. A breakdown comparing criminal arrests from DCJS (personal communication, February 10, 2009) and convictions or admissions of guilt from Season 6 by race/ethnicity is shown in Table 2. Although no one was found guilty or admitted to a crime in two episodes, 35 total violent crimes occurred, 80% (*n* = 28) of which were murders. In Season 6 of *Law & Order*, nearly 80% of all violent crimes were committed by whites, an association that is contrary to actual crime statistics as demonstrated by a chi-square goodness of fit, X^2 (2, *N* = 33) = 35.0, *p* < .01.

In 2003, there were 29,146 violent felony arrests in New York City, a 41.2% decrease from 1995 (DCJS, personal communication, February 10, 2009). On Season 14 of *Law & Order*, there were 33 individuals found guilty or admitted guilt to violent felonies. A breakdown of criminal arrests from DCJS (personal communication, February 10, 2009) and convictions or admissions of guilt by race/ethnicity is shown in Table 3. Of the total crimes depicted, 91% (*n* = 30) involved murder. A murder arson case in Episode 5 involved the daughter of an aging rock star who set the pyrotechnics too high causing a night club to burn down which killed 23 white spectators; based loosely on the 20 February 2003 nightclub fire in West Warwick, Rhode Island, by the 1980s rock band Great White. Season 14 was the only season examined with criminals who were a race/ethnicity not coded as white, black, or Hispanic, but nearly two-thirds were white, an association that is contrary to actual crime statistics as demonstrated by a chi-square goodness of fit, X^2 (3, *N* = 33) = 113.8, *p* < .01.

Table 1. DCJS arrests in 1992 and convictions or admissions of guilt in Season 3 by race/ethnicity

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Indian	Unknown	Total
DCJS	5,567 (10.8%)	27,976 (54.3%)	16,096 (31.3%)	1,846 (3.6%)	5 (>.00%)	51,490
Law & Order	15 (65%)	2 (9%)	6 (26%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	23

Table 2. DCJS arrests in 1995 and convictions or admissions of guilt in Season 6 by race/ethnicity

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Unknown	Total
DCJS	5,332 (10.8%)	27,405 (55.3%)	15,169 (30.6%)	1,626 (3.3%)	17 (0%)	49,549
Law & Order	26 (79%)	3 (9%)	4 (12%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	33

Table 3. DCJS arrests in 2003 and convictions or admissions of guilt in Season 14, by race/ethnicity

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Unknown	Total
DCJS	2,688 (9.2%)	15,945 (54.7%)	9,333 (32%)	917 (3.1%)	263 (.9%)	29,146
Law & Order	20 (61%)	7 (21%)	2 (6%)	4 (12%)*	0 (0%)	33

*Two Asians, one Jewish-Persian, and one Indian.

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4.1. Survey results

Undergraduate students in six communication courses participated in the study, yielding 303 fully completed surveys. Participants who self-identified as Hispanic/White were categorized as white throughout the data analysis. A breakdown of participants by gender and race is shown in Table 4.

When participants were asked the number of times they watched an entertainment program featuring police in action in the previous week, 53.1% (*n* = 161) of the respondents answered none, 16.8% (*n* = 51) said once, 14.5% (*n* = 44) said twice, 8.9% said three times (*n* = 27), 3.6% said four times (*n* = 11), and 3% said five or more times (*n* = 9). Asked the number of times they watched *Law & Order* or any of its spin-offs in the previous week, 66% (*n* = 200) of the respondents answered none, 14.2% (*n* = 43) said once, 9.9% (*n* = 30) said twice, 4% said three times (*n* = 12), 3% said four times (*n* = 9), 2.6% said five or more times (*n* = 8), and there was one non-response.

Among the participants, only 2% (*n* = 6) responded police dramas very unrealistically depict crime and law enforcement, 9.2% said unrealistic (*n* = 28), 49.8% said realistic (*n* = 151), and 38.9% said very realistic (*n* = 118). On the questions of personal safety, 10.6% (*n* = 32) of respondents said it was very unlikely someone would steal from them in the next 12 months, 64.4% said it was unlikely (*n* = 195), 22.8% said likely (*n* = 69), 2% said very likely (*n* = 6), and there was one non-response. Among the participants, 21.1% (*n* = 64) responded it was very unlikely someone would cause them physical harm in the next 12 months, 68% said unlikely (*n* = 206), 9.9% said likely (*n* = 30), and 1% said very likely (*n* = 3).

All participants were asked to estimate the amount of crime committed by whites, blacks, and Hispanics (Table 5).

RQ2 asked individuals who watch the police drama *Law & Order* or any of its spin-offs if they believed the program depicts reality. As this study investigates the show *Law & Order*, this question was intended to determine if individuals who actually watch *Law & Order* or any of its spin-offs believe these shows accurately depict crime and law enforcement more than those who do not watch. An independent sample *t* test was conducted to compare watching *Law & Order* and any of its spin-offs and perceptions of the reality of the show. There was a significant difference in the scores for frequency participants who did not watch (M = 3.30, SD = .643) and participants who did watch [M = 3.51, SD = .625; t (300) = 2.64, p = .01]. These results suggest individuals who watch *Law & Order* and its spin-offs on a regular basis are more likely to believe police dramas are realistic than those who do not watch on a regular basis.

Table 4. Survey participants by race/ethnicity and gender		
	Number	**Percentage**
Gender		
Male	115	38.0
Female	188	62
Total	*303*	*100*
Race		
Black	42	13.9
Hispanic/Non-White	22	7.3
Hispanic/White	40	13.2
White	177	58.4
Other	22	7.3
Total	*303*	*100*

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RQ3 asked if greater exposure to police dramas influenced perceptions on the likelihood of physical harm and of being robbed. As this question was intended to determine if viewing police dramas in general, rather than *Law & Order* specifically, cultivate the perception of a violent and dangerous world, responses to the question "How many days last week did you watch entertainment programs that show police in action, such as *Law & Order* or *C.S.I*?," were compared with responses to the questions about the likelihood someone would steal from the respondent in the next 12 months and the likelihood someone would cause them physical harm in the next 12 months. An independent sample *t* test was conducted to compare watching police dramas and the perception participants would be victims of a non-violent crime like having their property stolen in the next 12 months. There was not a significant difference in the scores for frequency of participants who did not watch (M = 2.12, SD = .626) and participants who did watch [M = 2.24, SD = .613; *t* (300) = 1.64, p = .10]. An independent sample *t* test was also conducted to compare watching police dramas and the perception participants would be victims of a violent crime in the next 12 months. There was a significant difference in the scores for frequency of participants who did not watch (M = 1.86, SD = .598) and participants who did watch [M = 2.01, SD = .547; *t* (301) = 2.19, *p* = .03].

RQ4 questioned if white respondents, including those who responded Hispanic/White, who watch *Law & Order* perceive non-whites commit higher levels of crime than whites who do not watch. A Pearson product-moment correlation test was run to find a correlation between watching *Law & Order* among whites and perception of crime committed by race/ethnicity other than white after filtering non-white respondents from the sample. No correlation was found between white viewership and an increased perception of black criminality (r = .03, n = 216, p = .65) or Hispanic criminality (r = .08, n = 217, p = .26).

RQ5 asked if exposure to *Law & Order* among non-whites increased perceptions of white criminality compared to non-whites who did not watch. To examine this question, first white respondents were filtered out leaving only those respondents who answered something other than white or Hispanic/White for race/ethnicity. Among the remaining non-white respondents, a Pearson product-moment correlation test was run to find a correlation between watching *Law & Order* among non-whites and perception of crime committed by whites. The results indicate a positive correlation between the two test variables (r = .25, n = 85, p = .02). Conversely, no correlation for non-white viewership and black criminality (r = −.17, n = 85, p = .12) or Hispanic criminality (r = .08, n = 85, p = .48) was found.

RQ6 asked if whites, including those who responded Hispanic/White, who watched *Law & Order* perceived whites were more likely to commit violent crime than whites who did not watch. Non-white respondents were filtered out and a Pearson product-moment correlation test was run to find a correlation between watching *Law & Order* among whites and perception of crime committed by

Table 5. Estimates of crimes committed by whites, blacks and Hispanics			
	Black crime	**White crime**	**Hispanic crime**
0–10%	0% (n = 0)	3% (n = 9)	1.0% (n = 3)
11–20%	4.6% (n = 14)	10.2% (n = 31)	16.5% (n = 50)
21–30%	13.9% (n = 42)	26.1% (n = 79)	25.4% (n = 77)
31–40%	26.1% (n = 79)	30.0% (n = 91)	29% (n = 88)
41–50%	22.1% (n = 67)	13.9% (n = 42)	11.2% (n = 34)
51–60%	16.8% (n = 51)	8.9% (n = 27)	9.9% (n = 30)
61–70%	8.9% (n = 27)	5.3% (n = 16)	2.6% (n = 8)
71–80%	5.9% (n = 18)	1.7% (n = 5)	3.6% (n = 11)
81–90%	1.0% (n = 4)	1.0% (n = 3)	.7% (n = 2)
91–100%	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)
Missing	.3% (n = 1)	0% (n = 0)	0% (n = 0)

whites. The results indicate no correlation between the two test variables ($r = .07$, $n = 215$, $p = .29$), supporting no relationship between watching *Law & Order* and an increased perception of white criminality among white viewers.

5. Discussion

Different from most effects research, this study did not examine if viewing media violence led to greater levels of aggression, but if viewing media violence led to greater levels of perceived threat as well as perceived white criminality. But, understanding how dramatic television cultivates perceptions of race and crime is important as television dramas construct their characters "with social conventions they believe are representative of what viewers will perceive as typical or even natural" (Nama, 2003, p. 25).

Although the murder rate is down nearly 80% in New York City from its peak in the early 1990s (Von Drehle, 2010), *Law & Order* depicts a dangerous city, filled with crime and acts of terrorism. This depiction may create a perception of a dangerous city replete with violent white criminals removed from reality. Significantly, this perception may lead to delimitation where individuals avoid New York City or other metropolitan areas out of unnecessary fear and increased concerns about crime, or these depictions may cause distrust of whites in minority communities (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Gibson, 2014).

5.1. Depictions in police dramas

Evident from this investigation and consistent with previous research (Britto et al., 2007), whites continue to be portrayed as violent criminals in a greater proportion than actual crime statistics indicate. Whites never accounted for more than 11% of violent criminal arrests in New York City in 1992, 1995, or 2003 (DCJS, personal communication, February 10, 2009, December 6, 2011), but were depicted as violent offenders 65, 79, and 61% of the time across the three respective seasons examined of *Law & Order*. Although blacks made up more than half of all violent felony arrests during those three years, they were shown as 21% of violent criminals in Season 14, but as low as 9% in Seasons 3 and 6. People of Hispanic or Latino origin were arrested for nearly one-third of all violent crimes in 1992, 1995, and 2003, but Hispanics were only depicted as violent criminals 26, 12, and 6% of the time during the respective seasons. This apparent disconnect might help explain what became a controversy on June 28, 2013, when then New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced police "disproportionately stop whites too much and minorities too little" as compared to murder suspect's descriptions when speaking about the then controversial New York City Police tactic known as "stop and frisk" (Peltz, 2013). Bloomberg based his comments on reports from New York City officials showing more than 90% of suspects in murders in the city from 2011 to 2013 were described as black or Hispanic (Peltz, 2013).

Instead, *Law & Order* depicts a city where whites, who only make up around two-fifths of the population of New York City (United States Census Bureau, 2015), commit as much as 79% of all violent crime. In effect, *Law & Order* exaggerates white criminality, potentially cultivating an inaccurate perception of New York City and crime in general.

5.2. Effects of watching police dramas

Crime dramas today blur the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction with plots advertised as "ripped from the headlines" which is part of the appeal of such shows (Mutz & Nir, 2010; & Scharrer, 2001). That those who watch *Law & Order* were found to believe the show more realistic than those who do not (RQ2) is important as the presentations of race and crime portrayed in New York on *Law & Order* do not match actual crime statistics. Heavy viewing of television can influence an audience to the point the depictions become learned and accepted knowledge, which may be especially true for those who believe what they see represents reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Grabe & Drew, 2007; Wilson & Henderson, 2014), particularly among those who consume crime-related content (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007; Deroche & Deroche, 1991; Mutz & Nir, 2010; Nama, 2003). To the extent this may impact individuals is unclear, but significant is that people who watch police dramas were more

likely to believe someone would cause them physical harm than those who did not watch (RQ3a), matching the findings of Weaver and Wakshlag (1986) that individuals who watch police dramas perceive a greater threat to their personal safety.

The results to RQ3b further support Weaver and Wakshlag (1986), but contest Grabe and Drew (2007) as participants who watched police dramas did not think it was more likely someone would steal from them than those who did not watch. Police dramas depict violent crime which occasionally includes petty theft, but the shows focus on murder, rape, and kidnapping. Although less violent crimes are more common than violent felonies, viewers of *Law & Order* were more prone to believe they would become victims of violence than victims of less serious crime. This supports the "Mean World Syndrome" and propagates a belief in a violent world reinforced through watching depictions of violence on television (Gerbner, 1998; Mutz & Nir, 2010). Plausibly, this effect may have become even stronger than in the 1980s when the Weaver and Wakshlag (1986) study was conducted as police dramas have become more violent and realistic and exasperate these findings.

Results from RQ4 support the findings of Grabe and Drew (2007) who found watching police dramas did not influence perceptions of non-white (black and Hispanic) criminality among white viewers. Disconcerting, however, was that the results from RQ5 indicate watching *Law & Order* impacted perceptions of white criminality among non-white viewers. This finding deserves attention as individuals who watch shows like *Law & Order* believe it represents reality (RQ2), and the show wrongly promotes a false reality of white criminality which may lead to increased associations of crime and white criminality among non-white viewers. However, the repeated imagery of white criminality on *Law & Order* did not lead to increased perceptions of white criminality among white viewers (RQ6), but the results may have been caused by whites being less influenced by repeated imagery of their in-group representation (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Oliver & Fonash, 2002). The results suggest white criminality is being cultivated among non-whites, and thus could potentially cause racial mistrust and fear of whites among certain members of society.

6. Future research

Future research should examine if socioeconomic status influences perceptions of personal safety, and beliefs of the amount of crime committed by other races (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Gerbner, 1998). Additional research should also advance beyond the limited effects of the individual to more macroscopic observations of second-order cultivation effects of how depictions of white criminality influence societal perceptions chiefly among non-whites. This could be accomplished through further study using in-depth interviewing techniques to allow participants to express factors that may lead to perceptions of white criminality and societal violence through personal experience and interpretation.

Researchers should more closely examine the extent entertainment programming influences daily actions and if delimitation occurs where individuals choose to not travel to such cities as New York for fear they are overly violent (Gibson, 2014), or if non-whites are overtly fearful of violence from whites. This could be expanded to examine if any mistrust of whites among minority communities stems from media representation. Finally, although content analysis only examined *Law & Order* in this study, researchers have argued television offers a "unified, homogenized view of reality" which "communicates mainstream values of society" (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011, p. 218). Thus if to be believed, such images found in this study would be prevalent on other shows as well, which too must be analyzed for the extent they portray exaggerated white criminality.

7. Limitations

Participants who responded police dramas such as *Law & Order* are realistic may not come to this conclusion solely on the depictions of crime, race, and police work, but also how these programs detail the personal lives of police officers and lawyers. Heavy viewers of police dramas develop emotional and emphatic connections to the characters and storylines which may produce stronger cultivation effects than other programming (Mutz & Nir, 2010). Plotlines in fictional programming can

last entire episodes, seasons, or for an entire series, and therefore are long enough to transport the audience into the fictional world portrayed losing sight of the fictional nature of the programming (Mutz & Nir, 2010). In effect, individuals may identify with the characters and believe the shows accurately depict the personal lives of police officers as real people and the subculture of police work, but not necessarily accurately depict the violence of real world criminals and violence (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007; Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Instead, participants should be asked questions about which parts of the show they perceive as realistic. In addition, self-reported viewing habits can be unreliable as participants may watch more or less police dramas on a given week from when the survey was administered. Instead, participants could be asked how frequently they watched in the previous month.

Participants could also have been asked about their previous experience with violence and their socioeconomic status to further test cultivation theory (Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986). However, additional testing of cultivation theory would not have impacted the results to Research Questions One.

In addition, responses may have been skewed by the participants examined. Overall, college students did not watch as much police dramas as was expected as 53.1% (*n* = 161) indicated they did not watch a police drama in the past week, and 66% (*n* = 200) responded they had not watched *Law & Order* or a spin-off in the previous week. In addition, although media influence is related to socio-economic status and education (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Gerbner, 1998), college students are more educated and with more disposable income than the average American, and the sample in this study lives in a relatively safe, small college town, and not an urban environment. Such an environment may have also impacted the results to test for cultivation as Gerbner (1998) argues a strong relationship exists between viewing violent television and fear of crime among those who live in high crime urban areas. But, while the characteristics of the sample of college students in the southeast does not allow for generalizations to the population of television viewers, it does allow the opportunity to test media effects on perceptions of race and crime which was the purpose of the study (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011).

Finally, the longevity of the cultivation effects was beyond the scope of this examination and as such should be further investigated.

8. Conclusion

This study found watching police dramas such as *Law & Order* led to a greater perception of white criminality among non-white viewers and presented an inaccurate image of whites disproportionately portrayed as violent criminals more than real world occurrences would justify. The media cultivating white criminality is a cause for alarm as individuals use the media to make sense of the social world, and these images can influence the audience's expectations and understanding of that world. From a critical perspective, this is distressing as it could be suggested that the producers of crime shows may be attempting to advance a perception of white criminality particularly among non-whites. This conclusion is not without merit. Dixon suggests the only way to reduce the effects of black criminality portrayed in the news among white viewers is through "exposure to additional white suspects" in news coverage (2006, p. 183). While Dixon (2006) is referring to a conscious decision to highlight more crimes committed by whites in the news media, a similar logic may be being employed in entertainment media where producers of entertainment programming have control over storylines and characters and can select racial and ethnic criminality.

The rationale exists for exaggerated depictions of white criminality to prevent accusations of negative racial stereotyping against non-whites, but this argument does not explain the lack of realism in a genre that defines itself on its portrayal of reality. This may take place in part because the creators of media products use entertainment media to provide their own commentary on the real world in a less than balanced presentation knowing the audience will develop a sense of the world through exposure to the content they create (Crouteau & Hoynes, 2003). Nama offers validation for this idea by arguing dramatic television like police dramas are reality centered and what is seen on screen is

"considered to be true-to-life, acceptable, believable and in the end, valid" (2003, p. 36). Viewers watch fictional television as a form of relaxation and entertainment, and heavy viewers of such programming tend to be less informed than heavy viewers of news content. Mutz and Nir (2010) suggest these viewers may be less resistant to subtle forms of media persuasion. A worry exists, as evident from the results, that when compared to real-world crime statistics and statements by the former mayor of New York City, *Law & Order* presents an inaccurate depiction of white criminality among non-whites, the intention for this misrepresentation left to speculation. But in an interview, John Langley admitted he purposely misrepresented race and violent crime compared to actual crime statistics on the reality television crime drama *COPS* so as to not be accused of "negative stereotyping" but also in the same interview later stated:

> I want to reflect my audience more, and the audience is more white than black or Hispanic. So you know, I tried to reflect the demos of the audience, not the demos of the crime and that takes the onus off of negative stereotyping too. (Archive of American Television, 2013

Therefore, Langley admits that with *COPS*, he purposely misrepresented and exaggerated white criminality for fear of negative stereotyping but also to provide representations of both criminals and victims as the same race as the majority of his audience. Showing exaggerated numbers of white criminals as well as white victims occurs on *Law & Order* as well and perhaps for the rationale of racially matching the audience. Among the 27 total victims in Season 3, 67% ($n = 18$) were white, and 65% ($n = 15$) of those found guilty or admitted to a violent crime were white. In Season 6, 51% ($n = 27$) of the victims were white, but when the 20 black victims were removed from the terrorist attack in Episode 13, 81% ($n = 27$) of the victims were white, and 79% ($n = 26$) of those found guilty or admitted to a violent crime where white. In Season 14, among the 54 total victims, including the 23 who died in Episode 5, 83% ($n = 45$) were white; when the 23 white victims are removed from the arson episode, 71% ($n = 22$) of the victims were white, and 61% ($n = 20$) of those found guilty or admitted to a violent crime were white.

In effect, the percentage of white criminal and white victims in each season and across all three season is similar, but more significantly, the results to this study show the exaggeration of white crime and white victimization on *Law & Order* did not impact perceptions among white viewers about white criminality. Instead the exaggerated depictions led non-whites viewers to perceive whites as more dangerous than non-whites who did not watch the show. The inaccurate depictions cannot be ignored as they were shown to impact racial attitudes, and may lead to distrust of out-groups. When viewed from this standpoint, and from Langley's own admission, the media can be accused of being complicit in creating racial distrust and disharmony while paradoxically of practicing discrimination against non-whites by omitting them from such shows which ironically conflicts with the rationale to not engage in "negative stereotyping" to the point of exclusion and whitewashing of non-white characters (Deroche & Deroche, 1991).

When cultivation theory was first proposed in the 1960s and 1970s, the media landscape consisted of three major networks (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Today media consumers can select from numerous media channels including those beyond television such as on-demand media delivery where individuals can self-select programming and genres which may intensify the effects of cultivation through repeated viewing of specific programming as consumers binge watch their favorite shows and genres (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). This idea of self-selected cultivation was suggested by Chaffee and Metzger who argued cultivation theory may have shifted "toward a vision in which individuals are cultivated to specialized worldviews of their own choosing," and continue that audiences may "likely opt for content that is consistent with their preexisting ideas and prejudices, thus allowing them to match their media experience to their own views with greater precision" as people begin to "live in a cocoon of self-reinforcing media" (2001, p. 376). This may be true for those who seek out police dramas if these shows match their preconceived views of criminality regardless of the extent they match the real world. Disconcerting is that such repeated presentations of white

criminality alter real-world perceptions particularly among non-whites with an exaggerated belief of dangers posed by whites.

Overall, while watching police dramas may not be the sole factor in predicting how individuals respond to race/ethnicity or crime, the results suggest the programs are seen as realistic and influence perceptions of public safety and white criminality, and therefore may play a small part in how audiences may perceive their "Mean World" filled with violent white criminals, at least to the extent the media wants to cultivate this belief.

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Appendix A

Coding Sheet

Item ID# _____

(1) *Law & Order* season _____

(2) *Law & Order* episode _____

(3) Location of crime:

(4) Type of crime committed:

(5) Race of offender found guilty of crime or admitting to crime:

(6) Sex of offender found guilty of crime or admitting to crime:

(7) Were additional individuals found guilty of a crime or admitted guilt: YES   NO

(8) Race and gender of additional individuals found guilty of crime or admitting guilt:

First:

Second:

Third:

Fourth:

(9) Were additional individuals found guilty of a crime charged an offense different from primary offender: YES   NO

(10) If additional individuals were found guilty or admitted to separate offenses, they were:

(11) Gender of primary victim of the crime: _____

(12) Race of primary victim of the crime: _____

(13) What type of are/neighborhood did the crime take place:

Upscale   Middle Class   Projects   Impoverished   Other

(14) What time of day did the crime take place:

Morning   Daytime   Nighttime

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