

The Real CSI: A Criticism of Media's Manipulation of Forensic Science

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By

Stephanie Slaught

Christopher Skiles
Senior Project Advisor

Signature

Date

Dr. Bernard K. Duffy
Department Chair

Signature

Date

Table of Contents

Television and The CSI Effect.....3
“The Real CSI Effect”.....4
Interpretation and Evaluation.....9
Conclusion.....21

I. Television and The CSI Effect

Today's most popular medium for media consumption is television (Harris 34). The messages broadcasted through this technology help tell society what we *think* we know about the world. It aids in conveying and reinforcing dominant, hegemonic social norms that exist in and run a civilization. According to Luke Georgette author of "The Hung Jury: Scholarly Consensus on the Value of the CSI Effect in the Future of American Justice" even basic human behaviors and tendencies can be traced back to the media that we choose to consume (Georgette 8). Although experts argue that the dominant medium is shifting from television to the Internet, television's power to manipulate society is still considered to be undeniable.

The current household averages 2.2 televisions per home (Harris 76). These 2.2 televisions are on, broadcasting information, seven to eight hours per day. Taking these numbers and analyzing them against other daily tasks, places television as the third most popular past time performed in a day behind work and sleep. The statistics do not stop there, children as young as two are exposed to the same, if not more, amount of television a day. It was calculated in 2009 that 26% of children under the age of two have personal televisions in their rooms. This information demonstrates that Americans across all socio-economic backgrounds, living locations, and ages consider television to be an active and dominant technology in their lives.

It is important to consider television as a dominant medium in order to determine its overall influence in the average American's everyday life. After establishing its role and influence, it is then important to begin focusing on the type of content society is exposed to during their aforementioned seven to eight hours a day of television.

Television's content is not stagnant; the shows produced every year are constantly changing. However, there are circumstances when show narrative does become repetitive. For

example when one program shows incredible success, other networks try to recreate that success by producing their own copycat versions of the original program (Shelton 19). Recently, one of the more popular trends has been the production of crime dramas. Networks across the board have decided to produce their own crime stories. Currently, there are twenty-seven crime dramas airing on cable TV in the United States (Shelton 20). This CSI craze does not stop in the US; countries around the world have embraced this kind of crime entertainment. Now, what does this mean for society? Why does this crime fascination matter? Some experts feel that the different shows prominence and popularity justify their research while others feel they have already seen consequences appear in our justice system.

II. “The Real CSI”

According to Donald Shelton, law professionals were the first group of people to acknowledge that there were discrepancies between people’s perception of crime law and the realities in a courtroom. It was their constant frustrations with juries that lead professionals to study this particular subject. Over the last decade this theory of misrepresented realities has been coined the CSI Effect. Plainly speaking, the CSI Effect is an umbrella term that describes the correlation between exposure to media and its potential positive or negative consequences within the criminal justice system. Since its title went viral in mainstream media in 2004, the controversies surrounding this theory have sparked even greater public interest (Cooley 452). Although professionals who work in the justice system claim this theory to be true, some experts are still skeptical of its existence.

What created this forensic frenzy in the media? CSI effect researchers suggest that the increase in television crime dramas is one of the many reasons the CSI Effect has increased in popularity (Shelton 2). In the past decade the sheer number of crime dramas populating the

television screen have tripled; meaning, the average person today is 3 times as likely to be exposed to this kind of entertainment than they would have been just a few years ago (Lay 54). This increase in exposure has now also increased the number of people vulnerable to the CSI Effect. Dr. Shelton, a CSI Effect researcher and state Judge from Michigan, believes that the number of these shows directly correlates with the success they are having across the different networks (Shelton 2). He found that in 2006, these shows had accumulated over 100 million viewers. Since reporting those statistics in 2006, Shelton found in 2011 that the ratings for this genera of television have continued to improve (Shelton 115). The crime shows have proven to consistently generate significant incomes for the networks. This continued success has now encouraged those not previously participating in this trend to jump on the crime drama bandwagon.

In addition to the increase in crime dramas, Media's tendency to sensationalize real criminal trials has also been said to add to this theory's fame (Schweitzer 357). In the last few decades there have been many criminal trials that have taken over the media scene. The OJ Simpson (1995), Scott Peterson (2002), Casey Anthony (2005), and Jodi Arias (2013) trials are four perfect examples of cases that have been sensationalized by the media. All four of these trials were televised for people to observe almost in live action. In addition to actual courtroom footage, these cases also had hours upon hours of coverage by the main TV news outlets.

Now that I have established what the CSI Effect is and what is contributing to its success, I will now introduce what media effects scholars are saying about its potential consequences.

In order to understand the CSI Effect, it is imperative to recognize probable consequences. Arguably the most important and recognized problem is that it could lead to wrongful jury decisions. Experts agree that the representations in the media show a science and

justice system in which crimes and their respective outcomes are perfect, in the sense that all of the on-going investigations are solved quickly and without error. Experts believe that crime drama television coaches its viewers into expecting certain conditions in a courtroom. The most common misconception cited by focus groups is the necessity of forensic science to decide on a conviction or acquittal in a trial (Shelton 8). The reality is only 37% of cases use forensic testing in their investigations (Singer 102). This statistic indicates actual incidence is lower than public perception. In short, researchers of the CSI Effect believe that crime show viewers acquire this forensic bias and unintentionally use it in their juror experience.

If crime show viewers accept media representations as reality, a heavy burden is placed on the prosecution. According to Judge Shelton, presenting the case against the defendant gets extremely difficult when having to explain to a media-conditioned jury why there is an absence of forensic evidence or testing in the case (Shelton 6). Researchers worry if the CSI Effect is not addressed trial verdicts will be inaccurately judged. Forensic tests have been overrepresented in media to such an extent that, juries often believe they need them to determine a verdict. This has caused other non-science related evidence to lose value in the mind of the juror. Because circumstantial evidence is not definitive like its forensic counterpart, experts worry jurors will neglect to take eyewitness testimony and stories into their court decisions.

Brandon Mayfield a war veteran and lawyer from Oregon had this very situation happen to him. Mayfield was accused and convicted of bombing a train station in Madrid, Spain in early 2004. Even though he was able to present viable circumstantial evidence suggesting that he had not left the country, a supposed “match” to his fingerprint on a detonator sealed his fate. Although, everything but this fingerprint pointed to his innocence, Mayfield was sentenced to life in prison. Eyewitnesses put Mayfield in Oregon minutes before the bomb explosion in

Spain, yet jurors felt more inclined to ignore that testimony and focus attention on the prosecution's forensic tests. Eventually, other evidence arose from a terrorist ring in Spain, and Brandon was exonerated from all charges. This case is an example of the inherent bias in favor of forensic tests. The court system does not want an increase in skewed expectations and misrepresented realities because those can lead to wrongful convictions like Mayfield's (Frontline).

Another concern mentioned in CSI Effect research is the issue of misrepresented technology. Crime dramas tend to exaggerate the realities of forensic tests. The tests performed on the programs do not necessarily exist in reality. According to "The State of Cultivation," 40% of the tests performed on TV are fictional (Cole & Dioso-Villa 57). In addition to fake tests, crime dramas also fail to portray the expenses that are involved with forensic science. This misrepresentation reinforces science's fake, flashy, and fun definition put out there by the media.

A third concern expressed in media effects research, which is the least credible of all, is that it teaches criminals how to better conceal their crimes. Some experts feel that continued exposure to forensic tests allow those watching a better insight on how to develop and perform illegal tasks. Unlike the other concerns mentioned above, this is the only effect that does not have specific scientific or experimental backing (Singer 28).

A fourth concern frequently addressed in CSI Effect research is the ideology formed by viewers that science is infallible. This puts defense teams at an extreme disadvantage, since it makes forensic tests for the prosecution look perfect. Scholars say that these shows portray the tests in a manner that makes them seem error proof. Unlike the infallible science we see in the media, forensic tests are left vastly open to human error and tend to rely more on interpretations of evidence, rather than actual set criteria that determine facts.

According to Shelton, crime drama's perfect forensic science disguises the system's need for forensic science standards. Standards are something developed along side science, that help guide this process in the right direction. They help sort sometimes vague, hazy information into categories for analysis. Standards ultimately act as criteria or as a model for science to follow. With science and technology always changing, rules and regulations used to facilitate science are also forced to advance. Our progression in science has passed our existing standards, leaving little system structure. In other words, because standards have not caught up with the new types of forensic work, interpretation is being overly used to determine our forensic tests.

The Casey Anthony murder trial was one of the first times forensic standards and tests have been questioned by the public. During her court case the head of prosecution, Jeff Ashton, used a new test that was not standardized among our current justice system. This test was an odor analysis of a piece of carpet sampled from the truck of Anthony's car. The prosecution team felt that its odor resembled human decomposition so he asked Arpad Vass an experienced doctor to testify on the smells behalf. The use of this nontraditional forensic test received extreme criticism by both the public and the defense team. Those involved in the case felt that the results were based too much in interpretation and not enough in scientific fact. Many argued that forensic tests should go through significant quality assurances prior to being permitted and presented as a legitimate test in court. The debate of what is, and what is not science, is one expert's will argue until forensic standards are set by the justice system.

While the existence of the CSI Effect is still under some expert debate, its overwhelming usage in media justifies its continued research. Although a definitive existence of this theory would be ideal, causation arguments in scientific experiments are extremely hard to conclude. Some experts in the communication fields have tried to isolate and verify this theory, however no

one has been able to make a direct causation correlation. The problem of causality is one that often haunts media effect researchers. While some items are easy to study, interpret, and conclude, others are not. The questions asked when examining the CSI effect should not stop at whether or not it exists. Researchers need to continue to peruse potential harms of possible theories so, that if these theories turn out to be true, there are already actions and methods minimizing any negative effects. In essence, researchers have an obligation to keep society safe and creating preventative measures against possible harms, is the best way to combat this media problem.

III. Interpretation and Evaluation

For this next section I will introduce some concerns raised by media scholars and apply their criticisms to the CSI Effect. Today's media has grossly exaggerated the truth behind forensic science. It has taken the realities of this discipline and manipulated them into something that is fake, flashy, and entertaining. Media's representations of science have moved away from recreational amusement and into something that could cause its audience potential harm. While this threat may not explicitly affect every viewer, repeatedly watching these depictions reinforces the ideology that science is infallible: a condition often referred to as definition reinforcement. The danger in accepting this ideology lies within viewers not being able to make the distinction between what is reality and, what is TV fiction. Because this problem is almost impossible to measure, it is imperative that we at least try to acknowledge its potential effects. If these consequences continue to go unnoticed, expert's worry a snowball effect will occur and the criminal justice system will be hurt indefinitely.

For a majority of people exposure to the real forensic field is extremely limited. The impressions that many people have about this type of science come from what they see on and

interpret from prime time TV (Shelton 22). When someone is shown the same representation again and again, definition reinforcement begins to occur. This reinforcement ultimately leads to an ideology being formed. For forensic science, this ideology encompasses both sciences' historical definition as well as a personal definition formed from past experiences.

What is science? For many, this definition varies. Since the enlightenment, science has often been seen as a practice that is very black-or-white. We are taught from a young age that science, unlike its educational counter-parts, encourages the perfect/right answer. Since the beginning of its time, science has fought to define things with absolute certainty, eliminating gray area at every possible opportunity. Because science has set out to define the world in this way, it has developed a rather hefty reputation. The notions most commonly associated with the discipline such as transparency, flawlessness, and usefulness have become rhetoric, interchangeably used to define this practice. While the vernacular used to explain science might not sound life-threatening its continued use, is, in fact, a serious matter. These words put together have built expectations and a definition of what science *should be* (Sillars & Gronbeck 143). These different stereotypes have constructed a paradigm, encouraging the masses to see science in a very particular light. This frame of infallibility has undoubtedly affected science's dominant definition in the media.

The formation of a definition is worrisome because without adequate knowledge of what is CSI fact from CSI fiction, people are forced to make faulty assumptions. While a classification or definition of science may not directly hurt the justice system, the personal paradigms created while watching this media can. The viewers of these crime dramas are the very people participating as jurors in the criminal justice system. They are the ones responsible for rendering verdicts. Because it is inevitable that a crime drama viewer will participate in the

courtroom, it is imperative that preventative measure be put into place so that no man or woman is wrongfully punished. The justice system cannot afford to have erroneous beliefs about forensic science. The courts must do something to level jury expectations so that they can better mirror reality. As explained in the effects section earlier there are serious consequences associated with the CSI Effect.

Sigmund Freud, a psychological researcher and author of the chapter “A Note upon The Mystic Writing Pad” performed many experiments that lead him to believe that one is greatly manipulated by messages (mediated experiences) on a subconscious level. This idea that television can influence one’s thoughts and behaviors without one being aware of such influence is a consequential reason to study the CSI Effect further. Freud suggests that human actions and beliefs are stored in the brain at the subconscious level. He argued that humans have little to no control over what enters and stays in the unconscious mind. So while it may be entertaining or exciting to watch unrealistic forensic tests on TV, there is little to no way of knowing exactly how much those subtle messages effect and shape current beliefs.

Within the context of a trial, it would be next to impossible for one juror to distinguish their personal interpretations of forensic science versus those represented and obtained through exposure to media. At that point, the line between what the media has subliminally reinforced and what one has learned in courtroom proceedings education is blurred beyond clarity (Freud 3). To prevent or minimize this as harm, viewers must do their best to actively process their media-infused ideas. However, given the constant media system we live in today, fighting these representations is a constant battle.

Today the media bombards us with information. All day, everyday, sources like the news, use framing and entertainment tricks to capture viewer’s attention. According to Neil

Postman American television media consumption is a dangerous habit. It is subconsciously reinforcing that all kinds of television, regardless of content, are made to entertain the audience. And since television is a passive, one-way communication technology, the information relayed to viewers is not critiqued or analyzed, as it would be if it were an open in-person discussion. In *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, Postman uses television news as an example to prove his theory. Postman argues that news stations use production tricks to frame their shows (Postman 86). He says that these news programs tend to relay facts over content, use comical banter to distract from the stories, play certain music to control viewer's moods, and display flashy quick graphics to capture and entertain their audience. Postman states, "The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining" (Postman 87). He claims this type of editing or framing changes the purpose of the programs. They are no longer ethical journalism news shows but rather trivial entertainment programs that play directly into the hands of the dominant norms (Postman 87). Like effect researchers, scholars in media criticism also acknowledge a problem. Critics like Postman study and analyze the media in order to help bridge the gap between problems and effects.

Next, I will apply both perspectives previously talked about in this paper to an artifact. The artifact I have chosen to dissect is an episode of PBS *Frontline* titled "The Real CSI". On April 17, 2012, PBS's *Frontline* ran a 60-minute special concerning forensic science and its role in society today. *Frontline*'s reasoning for airing the program was to educate and illustrate forensic science's status quo. The programs contributors argue that science's current definition and role in society have been heavily shaped by current media representations and practices. *Frontline* urges its viewers to address this issue by educating themselves on the realities of

forensic science in the world today. Throughout the documentary *Frontline* interviews experts in the field, to gather what they believe to be the truth behind the CSI Effect.

Although *Frontline's* episode does a great job introducing the justice system and its current flaws, it like other media outlets, just adds to the glorification of forensic science. This documentary presents its material in a way that distracts the audience from seeing science's functioning realities. While it accurately addresses our justices system needs for standards, it fails to instill the importance of media criticism and consuming a healthy pop culture diet.

Throughout the episode *Frontline* strives to separate crime scene investigation, fact from fiction. Trying to prove that while the entertainment industry shows forensic science to be fun, fast, and neat; the real crime scene investigation, is not (Shelton 24). The documentary used three high profile cases to highlight the imperfections of this science and expose what happens when science is seen as infallible. *Frontline* separated what they called true science from non-science, using the criterion of other scientific disciplines, to determine the distinction.

The three trials used to exemplify these science myths include: Brandon Mayfield, Levon Brooks, and Casey Anthony. While these cases are incredibly different they do share one particular aspect in common, forensic testing. *Frontline* created this documentary to help clarify the sometimes-fuzzy line between what is forensic reality and what is not.

The episode begins with the traditional *Frontline* introduction: a collage of videos and pictures, put together to form the word *Frontline*. As these images are manipulated into the title of the show, strong upbeat music accompanies the letter formation. Once in place, the background switches from black to red, while simultaneously changing the images into a bold, white, font that clearly reads *Frontline*. James Watson, author of "Representing Realities: An Overview of News Framing," suggests that this introduction segment is a frame. The colors,

music, and images in the background are all there to prepare and prime the viewer for what is to follow. He would say that this short clip encourages viewers to see *Frontline* as a credible news source.

Before diving into the details of the three cases mentioned above, the episode takes two minutes to state the documentary's major claims. The three claims mentioned are the media's role in this controversy, the argument of what is science vs. non-science, and the call for standards to protect our criminal justice system. While explaining their premise images from popular TV crime dramas, media news broadcasts, and interviews fill the screen, mimicking what the voiceover has said. This introduction has a similar purpose to the *Frontline* one played prior, to focus the viewer's attention of the basic premises of their argument.

The first case mentioned in the *Frontline* documentary is Brandon Mayfield's. His trial was one of the first times that the justice system and those involved, questioned forensic testing. It took Brandon's prosecution and then exoneration to stir up enough media, to call the accuracy of finger print analysis into question. Finger print analysis is explained in the beginning of this section as a science that has yet to be perfected. *Frontline's* commentator Lowell Bergman stresses that while this is a fairly new test, the United States criminal justice system has been using the results to put human beings behind bars for close to a century. This trial, as previously mentioned in the CSI Effect portion of this paper, condemned an innocent man to life in prison. Luckily, his lawyers were eventually able to exonerate him from all charges.

After explaining the Mayfield case in depth, *Frontline* digs deeper into the ambiguity of finger print analysis. The documentary then cuts to an interview with Donald Shelton, a CSI Effect researcher and State Judge. According to Judge Shelton, "There is no scientific premise, to the beliefs, that no two people have the same fingerprint" (*Frontline*). He claims that no study

has been completed to back the basis of that argument. During Shelton's interview, he also mentions that the media's portrayals of infallible technology and perfect fingerprint matches add to this common misconception. Lastly in his interview, Shelton reveals that there are no numerical standards for making these forensic finger print matches. This means, while some experts will say one number is congruent with a match, others disagree. There is no standard for how many points a fingerprint should share before claiming the evidence is a match. In the Mayfield case the forensic investigators felt confident with the 15-point match; however, since his case, the standard has increased. Bergman questioned the system; he asked Shelton, how alike do the fingerprints have to be? How is this science measured? The judge answered Bergman with, "it varies from laboratory to laboratory, witness to witness" (Frontline). This inconsistency in addition to human error, are the two major downfalls of the science.

After cutting from the interview with Shelton the documentary then introduces a new expert. Jennifer Mnookn, a Law professor at University of California Los Angeles who then discusses her issues with fingerprint analysis. According to her "What matters here isn't, are your finger prints really different from that guy over there. The real question is, is some part of your fingerprint sufficiently similar to some part of his, that a competent examiner might mistake some part of your print for a part of somebody else's print?" This kind of mistaken identity is the exact issue that put Mayfield behind bars.

In addition to raising the standards, the Mayfield case also brought criteria of expert testimony into question. *Frontline's* Bergman, questions the independent analyst from the Mayfield case, Kenneth Moses. According to *Frontline*, Moses has participated in over 17,000 crime scenes throughout his 40-year career. When asked how he decides if something is a match he answers, "At some point, you are examining this evidence, and based on your training and

experience, you make a leap of faith” (Frontline). Should a leap of faith have the power to put an accused person behind bars?

Experts have also started to worry that a cognitive bias might hurt this process. *Frontline* interviewed Dr. Dror, a cognitive scientist who strongly believes forensic science needs to change. Specifically, he thinks the discipline needs quantitative standards. Dr. Dror asserts, “The examiner is the instrument of analysis. There is absolutely no objective criteria” (Frontline). He asserts that the results and the forensic science system used today should not be trusted. To prove his hypotheses he decided to conduct an experiment that tested cognitive bias in forensic trials. Dror took old cases, changed their information and descriptions, and then asked the same examiner to study them again. *Frontline* and Dr. Dror reported that 50% of the experts disagreed with their initial judgments. Even head FBI forensic analyst, Melissa Gishe, agrees with Dror. She states, “Well, there’s going to be, I think, variability any time there’s a human involved in the process... If you’re asking me if I think that there is the potential for cognitive bias to come into play in a fingerprint examination process, I would say yes” (Frontline). If our criminal justice system is going to last, significant changes regarding standards and expert testimony needs to change.

The next section of the documentary then cuts to a clip of them introducing their second case. This trial is yet another example of the flaws behind forensic science. This case was similar to Mayfield in that it put another innocent man behind bars. Levon Brooks, an African American man, was charged and convicted in Mississippi for murder one. It was said by *Frontline* in the documentary that the only evidence brought against the defendant was a bite mark (forensic science), molded and examined by a forensic dentist (human examiner). After being sentenced to life in prison and serving close to 20 years of his punishment, Levon was

cleared. Another murder identical to the one he was charged for was committed. This called the original forensic test into question, leaving enough reasonable doubt for an appeal verdict to be approved.

While this story was being presented to the viewers via voiceover from *Frontline's* correspondent Lowell Bergman, images and news pieces broadcasted during the time of this trial fill the screen. This is yet another example of *Frontline's* shameless use of framing and priming to obtain and reinforce their own personal paradigm.

According to Levon's lawyer, Peter Neufeld, there are many tests that are under scrutiny. He argues that judges allow these tests into the courtroom just because they come from men in white lab coats. He coined this concept the white coat theory. He also suggests that this effect does not stop at law enforcement. He believes juries could be hit by this effect as well. The forensic tests that Neufeld and *Frontline* include in their non-science category consist of: fingerprint analysis, blood spatter, hair and fiber samples, ballistics, and bite/dental impressions.

After revealing the laundry list of forensic test that do not make the real science cut, Bergman uses two quotes from the Journal of National Academy of Sciences to back up this claim. He reads, "The National Academy of Sciences concluded that many forensic sciences, have never been exposed to stringent scientific scrutiny [and] do not meet the fundamental requirements of science" (*Frontline*). After *Frontline* exposed the realities of the tests, Bergman interviews another expert who agrees that structure, to the forensic science system, can only help. Harry T. Edwards, a judge from the U.S. Court of Appeals, asserts that the public has been misled when it comes to the realities of forensic science. As one may have noticed, DNA was not included in the non-science category listed above. *Frontline* states that while there are a plethora of tests that do not meet scientific standards, DNA analysis does. *Frontline* asserts, "DNA

analysis was developed by medical science, and has been subjected to decades of rigorous scrutiny.” *Frontline* then inserts a quote from Judge Edwards who agrees with this claim. He says, “DNA is the principal example of real science at work. DNA really is the only discipline among the forensic disciplines that consistently produces results that you can rely on with a fair level of confidence” (Frontline).

Judge Edward also says, many professionals are simply unaware that some tests don’t make the cut. He said that they were never taught to question what was presented as a fact. Edwards continues, “You assumed that the work in putting the evidence together and in offering the testimony was proper...you didn’t assume what we later uncovered, which was that there were systemic, serious problems with respect to certain aspects of the disciplines” (Frontline). According to Edwards, the tools and techniques are just the top of this forensic science fallacy. He says the people of the system, the judges, lawyers criminals, and experts themselves, are a huge part of the problem. The final case described below is a perfect example of what happens when those who are not experts get involved in a criminal trial.

The final case mentioned in this documentary is the Casey Anthony Case. The problem with this case, that *Frontline* targeted, was the difference in opinion in who should be considered an expert. This argument is similar to the one stated above about science vs. non-science. Who should be considered an expert is just as important to the verdict as the forensic evidence itself. As explained in the CSI Effect portion of this paper, an odor test was used as evidence in this trial. The controversy surrounding this case was whether or not a test, like the odor one being presented, was legitimate science. To the persecuting attorney Ashton, Voss’s experience at a body farm studying decomposing bodies, made him an expert. The defensive team disagreed not only with Voss’s expertise but with the legitimacy actual test. To the prosecution this science

was cutting edge but, to the defense, it was a cheap, bogus, and invalid way to cheat forensic evidence.

Next to be interviewed by Bergman was defensive lawyers Linda Kenny Badden and team mate, Jose Bies. Linda showed extreme frustration that the “smell test” was allowed in the courtroom. Linda exclaimed, “The trial judge allowed this into that courtroom without there being any quality assurance controls, without there being any error-rate studies” (Frontline). She said letting that test go to court was an outrage. Head defense attorney for the Casey Anthony case, Jose Bies, completely agreed. Bies, like the rest of his team, countered the remark quoted by prosecutions, which said “that it’s the jury’s job to decide what is good, bad, or garbage” (Frontline). In court, Bies attacked the prosecution for bringing in Voss, who they felt was not qualified. They also poked fun at the smell test because it had little to no credibility according to them. If the criminal justice system was able to make clear distinctions of what is real science and what is not, as well as who should be considered an expert and who should not, the common errors in our system would diminish.

Brandon Mayfield, Levon Brooks, and Casey Anthony are three people who have seen the criminal justice system, specifically forensic science, fail. Would their outcomes have been different if our media chose to reflect a more realistic science? Yes, in my opinion, they would. Each of these cases were turning points in the history of forensic science.

In the Mayfield case, Brandon opened the eyes of many experts who believed fingerprints of two individuals, could not have more than a 15-point match. While Brandon may have endured a traumatizing and stressful trial, he and his team changed fingerprint analysis forever. Levon Brooks’ wrongful conviction took twenty years of his life. Had dental impression analysis been developed with standards maybe an innocent man could have avoided jail. Casey

Anthony's case taught the system that we not only need rules for tests and expert witnesses but we need to think about what we allow as evidence in court. The documentary ends with a recap of all the arguments previously mentioned throughout the hour episode and with the following quote, "The American people ought to understand and worry about the problems that we've found and do something to correct them. It is not pro-defense, its not pro-prosecution, it's pro-justice" (Frontline).

Frontline uses the very same framing techniques that Postman warns his readers of in chapter 6 of his book. This documentary like everything in media, is trying to steer its viewer's perceptions into accepting the medium's given claim. Both Postman and Gerbner would say the whole production was set up so *Frontline's* argument could gain credibility and power while also obtaining top ratings and reviews needed for the programs survival.

Networks, with the success they have had in recent years, are never going to change their ways. Regardless of criticism, the business people, who run these company's will always be more concerned about their bottom line than with the representations they portray in their programs. For them this is not a matter of cause and effect, it is making sure the TV shows they produce are successful. Their concerns do not and will never, align with those of a critic.

Although the documentary fails to looks at the CSI effect in a critical manner, it does do a great job breaking down the possible consequences. *Frontline* discusses all of the potential effects previously talked about in the first section of this paper. Experts interviewed in the documentary agree that if the representations of science on TV are not set straight, our justice system will feel the consequences.

IV. Conclusion

From the sheer number of crime dramas populating the TV, it is safe to assume these programs are here to stay. The unrealistic depictions they constantly produce and reinforce are not going to end. In the documentary *Dreamworld*, the commentator argues that the dominant structure of music videos depends on its viewers accepting what he calls the masculine world. While he chooses to critic this structure, he alludes that in any kind of critique situation, elimination of a norm is next to impossible. He suggests instead of trying to eradicate the dominant structure, critics and consumers should demand a more balanced media diet.

Maybe the answer is not eliminating crime dramas but demanding those that depict more realistic representations of forensic science. This means instead of producing shows that reinforce the dominant norm, the viewers of these shows should encourage networks to depict more diverse representations. Whether that means boycotting programs because they do not fit expected standards or seeking out shows that fulfill the set requirements. The most important lesson is teaching oneself how to be a good critic and consume media responsibly. Or perhaps, our justice system might need to take a more hands on approach to fix the misrepresentations we see in media. Maybe law professionals should instill some kind of regulations that requires potential jurors to be educated on the realities of the courtroom. This kind of screening could be done right before lawyers begin the jury selection process. It would be relatively inexpensive and it could help level unrealistic expectations.

Crime dramas are not the problem. The media is not the problem. The consumers thinking that media has no affect on them, is the true issue at hand. It all comes down to the individual. It is a choice. One can choose to be their own personal media critic or they can accept the dominant hegemonic norm. Whichever one they chose, they must openly accept the

consequences that follow. Is watching crime television worth establishing faulty expectations? Is the possibility of sending someone to jail because these assumptions are skewed, worth it? These are the questions one must continue to ask themselves again and again. Individuals have to be willing to assume responsibility for the content they consume or be willing to accept the possible effects that follow.

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