NOT YOUR AVERAGE CRIMINAL: DEXTER, WEEDS AND THE SOPRANOS, CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL MEDIA PORTRAYALS

by

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ABSTRACT

The media and the criminal justice system are both prominent institutions in contemporary society. Research has explored both systems as independent and autonomous entities as well as the overlap between these two institutions. Both communications and criminological theories are examined to gain insight into the enjoyment of crime drama programming. A historical development of crime dramas is provided as a framework for understanding the traditional media portrayal of the criminal justice system and criminals. Thematic content analysis is employed with three television programs *Dexter*, *Weeds* and *The Sopranos*, to demonstrate a media shift that challenges the traditional portrayal of criminals and the criminal justice system. The reasons behind this shift as well as implications for popular culture are then explored.

Keywords: Crime and Media, Media Portrayals, Deviance, Television Crime Dramas, Media and the Criminal Justice System
DEDICATION

To Christine: my best friend and my biggest supporter throughout my university career.
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1: INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years, a new trend has developed among fictional crime dramas on television. While the crime genre is not a new one, the depiction of the criminal justice system has traditionally been the focus, with criminals presented as one-dimensional or crude stock characters. A shift has taken place where the criminal justice system has become a muted backdrop for the exploration of the lives of individuals who engage in criminal activities. The specific shows, which represent this shift, include *The Sopranos* (a show featuring a guilt-ridden mob boss who seeks therapy), *Weeds* (a show featuring a suburban widow who turns to drug dealing to support her family) and *Dexter* (a show featuring a vigilante serial killer who works as a forensic blood analyst). These shows are a marked departure from the traditional portrayal of crime and criminals on dramatic television.

This thesis will explore key issues and questions concerning the emergence of these new crime dramas. Why have these shows emerged at this particular point in time? Are there identifiable components that make deviance interesting and attractive to an audience? Are criminals on these new crime dramas portrayed as more or less morally blameworthy? What do these shows demonstrate about popular and/or subculture ideas about criminality? Are there relevant criminological theories that can be used or applied to understand the characters on these shows?

In order to address these issues and questions, a connection must first be made between crime and media to gain insight into the ways that individual definitions of crime are shaped. A baseline of historical portrayals of crime and criminals is then necessary in order to demonstrate that a shift has occurred.
Chapter two outlines relevant literature on both criminological and communication theories. Social construction and symbolic interaction theories will be used to establish that the media are the primary source for individuals in gaining knowledge and constructing reality surrounding criminological issues. According to these theories, crime is subjectively rather than objectively defined. This can be assumed, given a lack of universal laws and the adoption of laws that are time and location specific.

What makes crime such an interesting topic for media entertainment? This question will be addressed through an examination of the parallels between the crime genre and media. One of the main reasons behind audience interest in the crime genre is the concept of voyeurism or a ‘backstage pass’. Individuals are often curious about phenomena that are outside of daily or ordinary life.

Once interest in crime fiction has been established, it must then be sustained. Research on entertainment and enjoyment will explore the motivations behind an individual’s decision to engage in media consumption. One element of enjoyment is the relationship that develops between the audience and fictional characters. Part of the enjoyment of crime dramas specifically is attributed to the perception of justice prevailing. This brings into question the concept of justice itself. The new shows would indicate that the idea of justice is not limited to the simplistic definition of ‘bad guys’ being put in jail. These new shows push the boundaries of social norms and challenge the traditional notions of justice and how it can be achieved.

One level of analysis will be to examine criminological theories and determine if the theories can be applied to the new genre of television programs. While many theories may be applicable, the most relevant criminological theories related to deviance include Anomie/Strain theory and Functional Deviance. Anomie/Strain theory centres on the tendency of individuals to remain in line with social norms. Specific adaptations to social strain were first theorized by Robert Merton in 1938 and are still pertinent in contemporary society and in the analysis of the new television shows. These adaptations will be described and then later
applied to the specific shows. As mentioned above, crime is often subjectively rather than objectively defined. One function of deviance that will be discussed is the ways in which deviance serves to create and reinforce acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in society.

Repeated exposure to certain types of criminal portrayals will be shown to be instrumental in creating a stereotypical portrayal of police and criminals. The issues of race and gender are important to examine when attempting to gain insight into the overall picture of crime and media. The stereotype of African Americans as criminals will be explored as a fictionalized construction of the media. It will also be argued that female criminals are doubly deviant because they are violating both the law and social norms. There will be an examination of the traditional portrayal of women offenders in the media.

To further illustrate how these new shows represent a difference in criminal justice portrayals, chapter two will also explore the role of the criminal justice system in the media. The criminal justice system is comprised of three main sections, the police, the courts and corrections. While all three of these sections have previously been explored in fictional crime media, the new shows take a different approach by looking specifically at the lives of the criminals in all three shows and looking at a police department in *Dexter*.

Once the connection between crime and media has been established, chapter three will examine the historical development of crime dramas on television. This examination will include historical, political and social issues that influenced society and the media over time. It is necessary to examine the past in order to recognize the emerging trends and patterns of crime and criminal portrayals.

Chapter three traces the progression of crime dramas on television from Westerns through to the 2000s and the emergence of the new crime dramas. This chapter is divided into decades, with each section providing a brief historical snapshot and describing major crime television dramas of that time. The shows often reflect major political and social issues that occurred at the time. A brief
description of the new shows *The Sopranos, Weeds* and *Dexter* is provided. This chapter then concludes with a summary of media and crime.

Chapters two and three provide the theoretical and historical framework for understanding the key questions and issues introduced. Chapter four outlines the methods employed for conducting a qualitative thematic content analysis. This research project developed out of preliminary research conducted on crime and media. A description of how and why the three crime dramas were selected is provided as background information for the sampling frame. The data being collected were communications based and it was deemed necessary to explore relevant communication theories. These theories are then described and an explanation of how these theories acted as guidelines for the research design is given.

Five specific thematic categories were developed to address the research questions. These categories include main character portrayal, punitiveness, vigilantism, family dynamics and normalcy. For each thematic category, sub-category questions are listed that helped to focus the data collection. An explanation for the basis and selection of each category is described. The methodology chapter concludes with a brief description of the main advantages and disadvantages of the research design.

Chapter five is the discussion section, where the specific episode theme summaries will be presented. The chapter is divided first by program followed by thematic category. Each show is first introduced through a description of the program’s opening sequence. The opening scenes were included because they provided a visual summary of the premise of the show that is necessary to convey to a reading audience. The examples for each of the thematic categories is provided in the form of exemplar quotes that best illustrate the theme being described. In certain cases, sub-themes were generated inductively, as data were being collected.

The final chapter is the analysis, conclusion and future research directions. The thematic categories were designed for use with all three
television shows. However, certain themes were more prominent in some shows than others. The analysis section will draw connections between the major theories explored in Chapter two and the examples provided in chapter five. This chapter is divided by the specific research questions that were introduced in chapter four. The analysis will connect the current data with the previous research and past television portrayals. Criminological and communications theories are first related to the thematic category that was most significant for each show. The concept of how deviance can be attractive is demonstrated through a description of the victim selection on Dexter and a review of vicarious enjoyment.

The research question of determining if these characters are seen as more or less morally blameworthy is addressed through a definition of victimology and the concept of the ‘ideal victim’. The issue of why these shows have emerged at this time is discussed through an analysis of race and gender in the media and the concept of nature vs. nurture. This is followed by a discussion of implications for popular culture. Future research directions are explored noting specific research avenues that were either not feasible for the current project or were determined to be beyond the scope of this research.
2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The media and the criminal justice system are both prominent institutions in contemporary society. Research has explored both systems as independent and autonomous entities. In recent years, the overlap and inter-relationship between the two institutions has grown significantly (Surette, 1998). Crime serves both an educational and entertainment function in society (Dowler and Fleming, 2006). There is not an inherent problem with using crime as the subject matter for television entertainment.

The issue of crime and media arises when viewers are no longer able to discern crime fact from crime fiction. This is a pressing concern when statistics show that eight out of ten Americans cite the television as their primary source for news and information (Fox and Van Sickel, 2001). “…[T]he more news media audience members consumed, the greater their illusion of being well informed” (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006, p. 125). In recent years, statistics would most likely reflect the trends of internet usage as another main source for news and information.

One area of concern with crime and media is that there has been a blurring of boundaries. The rise in popularity of reality based crime shows has contributed to the distortion between crime information and crime entertainment (Dowler and Fleming, 2006). The line between fact and fiction in crime related media has become virtually invisible. In the past, there was a clearer separation between actual tragedy and devastation, current events and dramatic shows. In the current media culture, those separations have almost vanished (Fox and Van Sickel, 2001).
2.1 The Social Construction of Crime and Media

The social constructionist perspective describes reality as comprised from knowledge obtained through direct and indirect social experiences. Knowledge is viewed as a subjective creation of participants in a social environment rather than an objective set of information to be learned. This subjective view is then highly influenced by culture and society at a given period in time. Reality can be explained as fluid and changing rather than static and fixed. Media play an extremely influential role in acquiring knowledge.

Media have also emerged as a main source in the social construction of reality. “…[p]eople use knowledge they obtain from the media to construct a picture of the world, an image of reality on which they base their actions” (Surette, 1998, p. 1). The media provide images and descriptions of events that a viewer has not directly experienced. Through exposure to television, the environments and experiences portrayed on television can become the building blocks in an individual's creation of reality.

...[M]ost Canadians appear to have limited knowledge about actual crime rates and tend to overestimate the amount of violent crime, along with being ill informed about other key aspects of criminal justice functions (Winterdyk, 2000, p. 43).

For Canadians, the vast majority of their criminal justice knowledge is based on the American rather than the Canadian legal system due to the fact that the most popular crime-related television programs are based in major American cities. An implication of the strong influence of the media is that the public accepts the conflicts and drama presented as an objective event when it may in fact be a fictional construction (Surette, 1998).

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory defined as “…an individual’s identity and self-concept, cognitive processes, values and attitudes…” that are viewed as “…existing only in the context of society acting, reacting, and changing in social interaction with others” (Akers and Sellers, 2004, p. 136). Sociologist Harold Blumer originally developed the theory in the 1960s.
The first premise of the theory was that human interaction and behaviour towards objects are based on the meanings contained within said objects (Blumer, 1969). This premise suggests that animate and inanimate objects that people encounter develop meaning based on interactions rather than having an objective meaning of their own. The second premise is that meaning given to objects is established through social interaction with peers (Blumer, 1969). People create meaning for objects on an individual basis but greater importance is given to the meanings that are widely held by peers. “...[P]eople act in relation to the meaning others have of them, and in doing so they incorporate some of the others’ definitions into their own definition of themselves” (Einstadter and Henry, 2006, p. 211). The third premise is that meanings are subject to change and are dealt with using an interpretive process (Blumer, 1969). The meaning given to an object can modify over time, based on changing social conditions. People are dynamic and ever changing. Personal reality is subject to change and redefinition (Einstadter and Henry, 2006).

The interactionist perspective maintains that human beings are active participants in the creation of reality. Humans are also flexible in interactions with others. While people are free to create their own reality, they are also subject to the social reality of the others whom they interact with on a regular basis (Einstadter and Henry, 2006). Human agency allows an individual to integrate language, symbols and messages into his/her social world. People are able to behave in a meaningful way in relation and reaction to others in their world. This ability is situational and people are able to determine appropriate responses based on incoming information. As a result, people are adaptable when new scenarios require new responses (Einstadter and Henry, 2006).

In this perspective, society is viewed as a social construction. However, reality is not simply fictional. Reality is seen as a consensus of many individuals’ constructions over time. Society is a collection of ‘acting units’ which consist of individuals operating together in a frequent activity i.e. family. This perspective views society as “…merely a framework inside of which social action takes place in specific social contexts” (Einstadter and Henry, 2006, p. 215).
Aberrant behaviours that are evaluated and deemed negative may result in the banning of the behaviour, which in turn becomes law (Einstadter and Henry, 2006). The behaviour in and of itself is not necessarily problematic but rather the collective response to the behaviour is what matters. The behaviour is identified and defined as unwanted and a determination of what must be done inevitably follows. Banning a particular behaviour is viewed as a reactive rather than a proactive measure. The reaction may be against a real or imagined threat.

Within the social construction perspective, deviance is seen as a human creation. Deviance is “…a reflection of the meaning(s) we assign to others and their behaviour” (Deutschmann, 1998, p. 305). These meanings are created out of numerous interactions with others, which in turn become ‘traditions’. Interactionist theories centre on the concept of social meanings or interpretations assigned to behaviours (Deutschmann 1998). Deviance is related to the entertainment genre in the sense that individuals have a desire to view media that depicts events or circumstances that are outside of the norm.

The entertainment genre is designed to fulfil escapist fantasies. People are allowed to temporarily exit the mundane realities of everyday life and immerse themselves in a world to which they would not normally have been granted access. The individual’s interest in criminal activity can largely be attributed to the fact that crime is hidden and out of sight and this sense of the unknown piques individual interest (Surette, 1998). As a result, people seek out ways to learn about that unseen world. In some respects, individuals may be attempting to make sense or understand an out of the norm behaviour by being drawn to material that deals with crime.

The desire for knowledge and understanding is largely thwarted by the media, which present a very distorted and skewed picture. While there is not a direct linear path from media crime and violence to real world violence, it can be argued that an individual's frame of reference and baseline knowledge of violence will, however, be largely comprised of information gathered from the media, even through fictional accounts.
Another concern is the amount of attention that is devoted to individual criminals rather than to place a crime within a social context. “Coverage of individual crimes has in fact been found to rank as the single most common crime-and-justice news item for both newspapers and television” (Surette, 1998, p. 68). Sotirovic (2003) notes that viewers are repeatedly shown messages that focus crime on an individual level. The culpability of the criminal is then increased as viewers of the news are only informed of the faults of the individual. Deviant behaviour is seen as a choice of the individual while social, economic or structural explanations are largely ignored (Dowler 2004).

The individual involved in the criminal act is discussed in terms of personality flaws or problems related to personal circumstance. Rather than exploring alternative explanations, crime is repeatedly presented as being a pathological proclivity of individuals (Dowler, 2004; Sotirovic, 2003). The recurring message put forward by media is that predatory individuals exist who are innately different from the rest of society and that criminality results from individually based problems or issues.

The issues of media and crime also intersect through fear production. The media present and highlight criminal behaviour on a local, national and international level. The viewer is then exposed to a large percentage of crime related information. Viewers are led to believe that crime is an omnipresent force and that all people are potential victims of crime. Altheide (1997) describes the ‘problem frame’, which “…promote[s] a discourse of fear that may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the affective environment” (p. 648). These themes of danger are then incorporated into subjective social reality.

Viewers are not only instructed to be fearful but also informed of the targets of that fear. Fear is then further defined as “…certain characteristics and identities [that] are attributed to those persons that we associated with fearing acts” (Altheide, 1997, p. 663). There is an extreme binary that has emerged with very clear divisions of a criminal being bad and an average citizen being good.
Viewers are then able to collectively fear a specific enemy. If media are generating fear that is abstract then crime is a way for that fear to become concrete and real. The fear and danger are no longer far away but they are real and everywhere (Altheide, 1997).

A related feature to the social construction of crime and media is the concept of knowledge acquisition. This requires an examination of how people acquire knowledge surrounding crime and criminological issues. "Much of what people know about the issues in the world come not from direct experiences but from media portrayals" (Winterdyk, 2000, p. 45). Winterdyk (2000) describes four major influences that shape an individual’s views of crime. These include (1) personal knowledge, (2) mass media, (3) official state knowledge, and (4) sociological knowledge.

Winterdyk (2000) also outlines five basic methods for obtaining and understanding information about crime. The first is referred to as speculation and logical analysis. Conclusions are formed based on logical observations. Deductive reasoning is subject to personal bias and a limited scope of personal knowledge. The second method is known as authority. A person in a position of power advocates a specific viewpoint and because of the respect for that authority figure, individuals are more likely to believe what the authority figure says.

The third method described by Winterdyk (2000) is consensus. Individuals will look to the wisdom of peers as sources of information. This may be problematic because an individual will associate with peers who have a similar point of view. Individual opinions are based on what one personally observes and experiences. Finally, past experience draws upon previous incidents and events that can re-affirm personal hypotheses. Mass media are seen as especially influential because they incorporate many of the above elements.
2.2 Parallels between Crime Genre and Media

Crime is a real world phenomenon that has been fictionalized through television and movies. In many instances, the situations and scenarios portrayed within a conflict are real and the media simply accentuate the conflict by providing intense coverage (Snow, 1983). The shows provide an insider view of the criminal justice system and viewers revel in this 'backstage pass' without stopping to realize that the information may not be accurate. “...[M]any viewers assume that police and court practices depicted in television fiction correspond to actual practice in real life” (Snow, 1983, p 152). The inner workings of the criminal justice world are largely hidden from ordinary view and television allows individuals to get a glimpse, albeit a potentially false one, inside the system.

Robert Snow (1983) describes the concept of media culture. There are specific characteristics and attributes of information being classified as entertainment. The first is that what is being shown is outside of the norm. Behaviour is depicted that is not part of typical life or that could be described as ‘extra-ordinary activity’. Here the parallels between crime and entertainment are very clear. Criminal activity is, for the majority of people, an event that is outside the realm of daily life. Crimes concerning murder, violence and sexual violence are even further removed from an individual's base of knowledge. As a result, crime news becomes a major source of entertainment.

The second characteristic described by Snow (1983) is that entertainment represents an experience that is larger than life. Talented entertainers possess a quality that is both charismatic and magical. There is a sense of illusion surrounding performers - they are not quite real or attainable. The participants in criminal justice proceedings fill the role of entertainers. Often criminals are the ones who appear to be not quite a part of reality given the heinous or horrific nature of many crimes.

The idea of vicarious involvement is described as the ability to suspend reality and imagine ourselves in a particular situation. The viewers must feel that they are able to identify with situations in some way. People are then allowed to
be whomever they choose, incorporating the element of fantasy (Snow, 1983). Crimes often represent an extreme set of circumstances where an ordinary individual has been pushed beyond personal limits. The human side of crime is highlighted, allowing individuals to feel more closely tied to a case in which they have no personal or direct involvement.

Valkenburg and Peter (2006) also discuss fantasy in the context of media defining fantasy as “...a shift of attention away from an ongoing physical or mental activity toward a response to some internal stimulus” (p. 108). When an individual has an emotional response to art or to fiction, it is referred to as imagined or aesthetic emotions. This idea can be further extended to the emotions individuals feel when watching television.

When viewing fictional entertainment a person can respond in one of two ways. The first way is the ‘default mode’ whereby the viewer is not basing decisions or appraisals of the show on reality. Media that they do not believe to be real can emotionally affect the viewer, and they may not include that information (a lack of reality fit) in their evaluation of the program. In a second context, the viewer will use his/her awareness of reality to deal with unpleasant or horrific scenes. A viewer will engage in self-protection by stating that the scene was fake or make believe (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006).

Included in the concept of fantasy is the notion of immersion, the sensation of being ‘lost’ in a show or a book. The real world surrounding the viewer is temporarily shut down while he/she is fully engrossed in media. Even though the viewer is watching imaginary events, he/she may experience real emotional responses. Finally, Snow (1983) describes how entertainment is the expression of emotion. Television and movies may serve a catharsis effect. The value of entertainment can be seen if it emotionally affected people. Evidence of vicarious enjoyment can be seen through audiences laughing, crying or expressing anger and shock.
2.3 Entertainment and Enjoyment

This section describes some of the research that has been conducted on the ways in which viewers obtain enjoyment from the media. Raney (2004) defines media enjoyment as “...the sense of pleasure that one derives from consuming media products” (p. 348-349). This section is not exhaustive or specific to every single type of viewers. Audiences of television programming are not a homogeneous group. This section seeks to explore the ways that viewers may obtain enjoyment from watching media programs. When examining the role of media, it is important to evaluate the reasons behind why people choose to watch or not watch specific types of entertainment and how this relates to their overall enjoyment of media consumed. Television watching, apart from work and sleep, occupies the vast majority of time in the lives of people in Western society (Rhodes and Hamilton, 2006).

People make very deliberate choices in their media consumption; however, considered the exception rather than the norm. Media selection is most often impulsive. The most appealing program available at a given time will be the one selected (Bryant and Miron, 2002). As well, according to the selective exposure theory, individuals will attempt to decrease the length and duration of a negative mood while seeking to stimulate and prolong a positive mood. Individuals may select programs in attempt to manage personal mood. The viewer may engage in this selection process unconsciously (Bryant and Miron, 2002).

Nabi and Krcmar (2004) suggest that enjoyment of media is comprised of three main factors; affective, cognitive and behavioural information that work together and affect one another. Affective information includes empathy and positive and negative moods. Empathy is further defined as the ability to adopt the psychological standpoint of the protagonist and imagine the thoughts, feelings and mentality of that character (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006). Cognitive information involves judging characters’ actions and appraisal of plot line.
Behavioural information refers to the physical act or viewing itself or actions during viewing (Nabi and Krcmar, 2004).

A key component of understanding media enjoyment involves the relationship between audience and characters. Bryant and Miron (2002) suggest that “[w]e pick characters we want to identify with, and we choose the degree and duration of identification in such a way as to maximize our personal pleasure” (p. 553). Once key characters have been selected, the sentiments that the audience feels towards that specific character is of paramount importance. After a viewer has made the distinction of liked and disliked characters, he/she has the ability to empathize with the predicaments that character faces and desire a positive outcome. The pleasure that a viewer feels when a good character triumphs over adversity is linked to overall enjoyment (Raney, 2004).

“Identification with media characters is an imaginative process that is evoked as a response to characters presented in mediated texts” (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006, p. 184). In order to identify with characters, the audience must be given an illusion of reality. Even though the audience is aware that they are viewing a fictional world, there is still a desire for the characters to behave and act in a manner that closely resembles real life. The consistency of that semblance is the crucial component for audience resonance (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006). Mediated texts create the world where the fictional characters exist. Viewers often feel that they are a part of the constructed world and are readily able to identify with the characters. Individuals forget themselves as an audience and become engrossed in the thoughts and feelings of the character. There is a suspension of disbelief but not an abandonment of reality. Viewers are given a temporary pass into a fictional realm (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006).

Enjoyment of media goes deeper than the characters themselves and incorporates the conflicts that they may face. The audience has a desire to see the conflict resolved. For dramatic programs to be considered high quality, the audience must be emotionally invested in the characters. A drama requires positive and negative responses to those involved in the program. The need for a
hero to root for is of equal importance to having a villain to hate. The audience will very quickly be able to establish positive sentiments towards specific ‘good’ protagonists and negative sentiments towards ‘bad’ antagonists (Bryant and Miron, 2002).

2.3.1 Disposition Theory

Disposition theory “...describes a process by which audiences develop emotional alliances with characters they encounter in fictional media” (Rhodes and Hamilton, 2006, p. 125). The emotional reaction is based upon subjective moral judgements that the audience determines about specific characters. When watching a dramatic program that audience acts as “...untiring moral monitors of the actions and intentions of others” (Zillman, 2003, p. 554). Disposition theory suggests that viewers are more engaged in this process rather than being passive observers. The emotional bonds that the viewer forms create certain expectations regarding the outcome of the show. Enjoyment is heightened when the outcome closely matches the viewers’ expectations.

Zillman (2003) explains the disposition theory by offering an explanation for the stages a person goes through when determining if he/she enjoys a dramatic program. (1) “Agents are observed” and “(2) their behaviour as well as their apparent intentions are judged to be good or bad”. Audiences are introduced to characters and then asked to make a determination about the quality of that character. This determination can occur very early when watching a media program.

“(3) If behaviours and intentions are approved and deemed laudatory, positive affective dispositions toward the agents are formed and manifest in liking and caring” (p. 554). Once a viewer has concluded that a character is worth liking, he or she will begin to develop an emotional bond with that character. The level of that emotional bond can vary over time, dependent on the actions of the character. “(4) Implicit in liking and caring is that good fortunes are hoped for and bad fortunes are feared” (p. 554). A viewer desires the best possible outcome for
a character whom he or she likes. The emotional attachment allows the viewer to feel empathy and not wish any harm to befall the character.

(5) As good or bad fortunes materialize and reactions to them are witnessed, the agent’s affective experiences foster concordant affect. In other words, observers will empathize, feeling good when the agents do, and feeling bad when the agents do (p. 554).

The viewers' feelings of enjoyment are at their highest when the characters whom they like are seen as successful. The viewer will experience emotions similar to the character when a difficult or traumatic situation is presented.

(6) If agents toward whom positive dispositions are held experience the fortunes that were hoped for and that are judged to be deserved and justified, appreciable dispositional changes are not expected. However, if such agents experience the fortunes that were feared and that judged to be undeserved and unjust, affective dispositions are adjusted. Specifically, the greater the perceived injustice of bad fortunes, the more favourable the dispositional adjustment. This dispositional enhancement is recursive (p. 554).

As described above, a key component of the enjoyment of television programs is that there must be some resolution of conflict between characters or within a storyline. The resolution of conflict may be associated with the enjoyment of crime dramas. Within crime dramas, in particular, the conflict resolution is associated with justice being served. Raney (2002) conducted a study which examined the relationship between psychological factors related to moral judgement and enjoyment of crime drama. He asserted that the standard format of the crime drama genre includes the commission of a crime that disturbs the balance of justice and requires retribution or punishment in order to re-establish justice. This format allows the television program to dictate an appropriate penalty for specific types of crime. The television program takes responsibility for taking what is viewed as an appropriate stance about retributive justice (Raney, 2002).

The study explored the proposition that viewers will weigh the show against their personal morality to determine if justice has been adequately
restored. Raney (2002) stated that this process will in turn influence the viewers’ overall enjoyment of the shows. He noted disparity between appropriate levels of punishment on the shows in comparison to what is morally acceptable in real life. Television’s responses tend to be harsher than the actual criminal justice system.

The integrated model of enjoyment of crime drama suggests that certain subjectively held notions of social justice will predict a viewer’s moral judgements about how deserving the criminal’s punishment was and how sympathetic he or she is toward the victim (Raney, 2002, p. 320).

This indicates that a viewer’s moral judgement of a character is largely dependent upon socially held norms about crime and justice.

Raney and Bryant (2002) conducted a study, which focused on the idea of retributive justice as well as the restoration of order after a violation of social norms or rules. The study specifically examined the characters, either victims or offenders, and the variables of the crime portrayed. The perception that justice has prevailed is achieved when a criminal receives what he or she deserved or was owed. The authors describe the process of how viewers evaluate a justice sequence on a crime drama program. An evaluation is influenced by both audience and message inputs. Audience inputs are comprised of factors that viewers possess and are carried with them to the show. These are then further subdivided into affective or cognitive characteristics. Affective characteristics include feelings of empathy while cognitive characteristics focus on beliefs about reasonable punishment and views about the criminal justice system. The second component of message input consists of content that features the justice sequence (Raney and Bryant, 2002).

The results of the study indicate that when determining enjoyment of a crime drama program, viewers evaluate the characters and crimes after the initial evaluation of the justice sequence. Raney and Bryant (2002) argue that enjoyment is largely based on judgement of characters. Enjoyment is increased when a liked character is doing well or experiences positive outcomes.
Conversely, enjoyment is also increased when a disliked character is shown to suffer.

In the traditional model of crime drama programs, members of the criminal justice system, including police officers, lawyers and judges, are shown in a more positive light than the accused or convicted criminals. Programs are designed to reinforce the criminal justice system by showing its members as more likeable than the offenders. “...[I]t is generally held that we evaluate more favourably – which can be reasonably associated with ‘liking’ – those with whom we share some commonality” (Raney, 2004, p. 358). Historically, viewers’ enjoyment of crime drama programming has revolved around likeability of the criminal justice system characters.

Viewers use moral reasoning when determining either positive or negative sentiments towards characters on crime drama programs. Viewers have the ability to establish strong ‘relationships’ with specific characters. Raney (2004) comments that “[a]t times, it seems that our liking precedes our moral judgement” (p. 353). Once a character’s likeability has been firmly entrenched in the minds of the viewers, that character suddenly has more leeway in terms of questionable moral or ethical behaviour. “We extend the boundaries of what is morally allowable or tolerable because we like them so much, and we want to continue liking them” (p. 360-361). In this way, the relationship between a viewer and a character mirrors the relationship between friends. One peer may commit an act which violates the other peer’s personal moral code. However, because of the positive relationship, the person is able to look past the moral violation and continue the friendship. The difference in these relationships is that between friends the relationship is reciprocal whereas a relationship with a well-liked television character is unilateral and fictional. Viewers are often more forgiving of television characters than people in their own lives.

Television gives “…viewers license to ‘suspend their disbelief’ and permit unrealistic acts to take place for the sake of enjoyment” (Raney, 2004, p. 356). Viewers may watch television programs because they enjoy the voyeurism of a
world where a well-liked character is not bound by the same moral code that operates in the real world. Viewers are able to pick and choose which rules or norms are most important when evaluating the behaviour of a character. “By selectively activating and disengaging the sanctions that typically regulate conduct, individuals can permit and accept conduct that would otherwise be judged as inappropriate” (Raney, 2004, p. 359).

2.3.2 Functions and Gratifications of Watching Television Programs

Media theorists argue that when people make the choice to watch a television program they are motivated by both function and gratification. There is a utility behind an individual’s decision to view television as opposed to another activity. As well, the viewer receives a certain level of fulfilment from television programs. The basic underlying assumption of this perspective is that viewers are considered active rather than passive. The term ‘active audience’ implies that viewers are involved in the communication process (Bryant and Thompson, 2002).

When selecting a program to watch, viewers make choices that fulfil personal needs and influence what the viewer actually hears and sees. Viewing selection is greatly variable, given that it is comprised of features unique to each viewer. In order to feel gratification, viewers may seek out information related to issues that affect them as well as topics that they perceive as interesting. Specifically seeking out information through television is considered proactive rather than passive media usage (Bryant and Thompson, 2002).

While individuals may initially search for programs to meet a certain need, over time the majority of viewers become ritualized. Ritualized media use refers to the process of media consumption becoming a habit or diversion and a way to pass the time. Some individuals may engage in instrumental media use and continue to be goal oriented in their viewing selections e.g. watching the evening news (Bryant and Thompson, 2002).
Davis et al (2001) expand on the basic notions of the functions and gratifications of media usage by focusing specifically on crime drama shows. Davis et al (2001) pose the question "What functions do crime shows serve, and why are they so popular?" (p. 103). They concluded that four main categories exist which offer a response to this question.

First is the concept termed ‘morality plays’ which establishes that a key task of any society is to create and maintain public order. Public order is required in order to ensure the sustained functioning of a society. Many crime shows have an underlying moral agenda through a demonstration of what is right or wrong and good or evil. Crime shows provide an audience with the belief that the social order will not be undermined by crime and that justice will triumph. Norms and sanctions are confirmed and viewers are shown the juxtaposition of model good behaviour compared to bad behaviour (Davis et al, 2001).

The second concept of ‘public information’ is based on the notion that art reflects life. Crime shows are designed as dramatizations of real world criminal events. The details of the nightly news have been retooled into a dramatic television program. The crimes depicted on the shows are meant to illustrate the tough and gritty nature of life in an urban environment. The shows are intended to “…serve as a cautionary tale for society” (p. 103). Brief insight into the mind of the criminal is shown but the information is limited and most often serves to reinforce the position of the police rather than to provide true understanding of criminals. The shows also have the aim of increasing trust and faith in the government by exposing the inner working of the criminal justice system (Davis et al, 2001).

The third concept explored by Davis et al (2001) is arousal and cultivation. After a certain amount of exposure to media, people may begin to believe that the virtual world depicted on television is realistically representing the real world. As a result, viewers may have expectations about how police officers behave based solely on dramatic programming as opposed to real world experience. Many people have never had any encounter with the police, either positive or
negative, outside of minor traffic related incidents. Consequently, many people may truly think that the police officers on television are representative of the police officers on the street.

“The depiction of a scary, dangerous world also provides fertile soil for the growth of public attitudes supporting a repressive and punitive criminal justice system” (Davis et al, 2001, p 104). Certain stereotypes about criminals are repeatedly reinforced on crime drama programs. Poor people are regularly equated with thugs, scumbags, roaches and other vermin and disease terminology. This reference provides validation for individual ideas about revenge and vigilantism.

Davis et al (2001) also describe the concept of entertainment as catharsis. Aristotle was one of the first philosophers to put forth the notion that people could find drama therapeutic. The basic premise of entertainment as catharsis is that all individuals suffer from a multitude of varied anxieties. The greater part of these anxieties stem from an unknown origin. Crime shows have the ability to draw out these anxieties in an attempt to alleviate them. Take a world that is full of disorder and chaos and provide a carefully packaged resolution in less than one hour. The shows are anxiety-provoking luring the audience and holding their attention.

2.4 Relevant Criminological Theories Related to Deviance

One aspect of media enjoyment is selecting which characters are viewed as the villains. As much as viewers want to see well liked characters triumph, they may equally enjoy watching a hated character fail or get what he/she deserves. In order to further explore how certain media characters are labelled as deviant, it is useful to analyze certain criminological theories which seek to explain deviance and crime in society. This section will examine the functions of deviance and anomie or strain theory. These theories will also be linked to media and social construction of reality.
2.4.1 Anomie and Strain Theory

Emile Durkheim first developed the concept of anomie and strain theory. There were two key assumptions of Durkheim’s theory. The first was that social organization was required to keep natural propensities of individuals in line with greater social norms. The second was that when the social order breaks down, social norms lose their value which leads to a condition of anomie and an increase in crime. Crime is viewed as natural and inevitable in society (Winterdyk, 2000).

Robert Merton continued the work of Durkheim by further developing the concept of anomie and adding the elements of strain. Merton theorized that crime is a natural adaption to an abnormal situation. Crime was viewed as a structural rather than an individual problem. The central tenet of Merton’s theory was that societal goals are established and prescribed. However, these goals are not readily achievable by all members of society. As well, the goals may be attainable by some but may be unwanted or unsatisfying to others. “Aberrant conduct, therefore, may be viewed as a symptom of dissociation between culturally defined aspirations and socially structured means” (Merton, 1938, p 674). Certain aspects of the social structure may be the cause of antisocial behaviour because there is a discrepancy between the emphasis placed on goals and means.

The cause of this inability to reach satiable goals is either the unequal opportunities some are afforded by a society’s social organization or a failure of its culture to clearly define and limit what individuals can achieve (Einstadter and Henry, 2006, p. 151-152).

In response to strain in society, Merton describes five modes of adaptation. The two most relevant adaptations in the context of media are conformist and innovator. The modes of adaptation are based upon whether or not an individual has accepted the universally prescribed goals as well as the acceptance of the institutionalized means of achieving those goals (Merton, 1938).
Table 1 Modes of Adjustment/Adaptation by Individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes of Adaptation</th>
<th>Cultural Goals</th>
<th>Institutionalized Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Conformity</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Innovation</td>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ritualism</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Retreatism</td>
<td>Reject</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rebellion</td>
<td>Accept and Reject</td>
<td>Accept and Reject</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from (Merton, 1938, p 676)

The modes of adaptation were created to be situation specific rather than personality based. Conformity is the most common adaptation because it allows society to function by reinforcing the basic values of the group (Merton, 1938). The conformist is someone who is law abiding and contributes to the maintenance of the social order. People in this group will usually follow the prescribed path of finishing school, starting a career and having a family (Winterdyk, 2000).

The innovator is someone who accepts the goals but rejects the socially approved means for obtaining those goals. This category is not necessarily synonymous with deviants and law breakers. This adaptation is believed to be more prevalent in the lower classes because there are more obstacles to obtaining wealth (Winterdyk, 2000). “...[T]his adjustment occurs when the individual has assimilated the cultural emphasis on success without equally internalizing the morally prescribed norms governing means for its attainment” (Merton, 1938, p 678).
Those within the innovator category are often negatively portrayed in television dramas. Programs emphasize that deviants or criminals are trying to ‘beat the system’ by obtaining wealth or status without the hard work other people must do to achieve those same goals. Conformity is repeatedly emphasized as the message of ‘crime does not pay’ is shown. Criminals are depicted as attempting to take the easy road by utilizing illegal means.

Though Merton developed this theory in the late 1930s, many of his ideas are still relevant and resonate with contemporary society. Merton argued that within American societies there is intense pressure placed on individuals to achieve prestige-bearing success.

‘The end-justifies-the-means’ doctrine becomes a guiding tenet for action when the cultural structure unduly exalts the end and the social organization unduly limits possible recourse to approved means (Merton, 1938, p. 681).

The strain perspective maintains that there are three major components of society: structure, culture and social order. A society’s structure consists of institutions and social classes. All societal elements are necessary and serve the whole to function together. These elements include but are not limited to law, religion, family and education. A society strives to maintain balance. If one institution is not fulfilling its required role, another will come in to fill the void (Einstadter and Henry, 2006)

The second feature, culture, suggests that social order is in part disseminated through the process of socialization. Members of a society are taught the basic norms and standards of conduct. The standards of conduct will include societal goals and values. These societal goals and values are internalized by member of the society and viewed as personal goals. These values may include ambition, achievement, respect and working hard. In North American society, a main unifying goal and value is monetary success.

The third feature is social order or a system of maintaining order. Class, differentiated by wealth, is one mechanism that aids in the maintenance of social
order. Other factors include social status or hierarchy and race, gender and ethnicity. These differences are built into the social order and are believed to exert some level of control over individual members of society (Einstadter and Henry, 2006). Einstadter and Henry (2006) discuss that law is the primary means of preserving social order. They define law as the formal codification or norms and values that members of society have collectively agreed upon. Friction of day-to-day life is minimized though the law which provides a guiding framework.

2.4.2 Functions of Deviance

Deutschmann (1998) describes that within the functionalist perspective, deviance is not only functional but provides positive consequences for society. As discussed in the above section regarding the social construction of reality, deviance in society is mainly defined by those in that given society. Deviance is not necessarily an innate feature of behaviour. Lauderdale (1976) argues that when considering deviance in society “…attention is focused not on what motivates individuals to violate norms but on what causes others to define their behaviour as ‘normal’ under some conditions but ‘deviant’ under others” (p. 660). An act or behaviour is not objectively deviant but rather deviant is the label that the act or behaviour has been assigned. Television can serve to strengthen those labels by repeatedly showing viewers the consequences of the deviant behaviour.

The analogy of society as an organism is useful in understanding this perspective. All parts of an organism must function together to maintain the stability of the whole. The same can be said to be true of a society. Some level of crime is typical and serves a purpose (Einstadter and Henry, 2006, Winterdyk, 2000). A key purpose of crime is that it serves to reinforce community standards and reactions which strengthen moral boundaries. Deviance is a violation of social rules that other members of the community hold in high regard. There is a desire by the community to punish the individual deviant (Liska and Warner, 1991). Watching crime and criminals and television can also serve the same
purpose. The viewer has the ability to regard the deviant behaviour as unwanted, which serves to reinforce the desire to be a law-abiding citizen.

Deviance serves to raise the value of conformity by punishing the deviant behaviour while reinforcing the value that has been breached. People are given labels such as failures, unworthy or rule breakers while individuals establish themselves, in relation to those who commit deviant behaviours, as successful and worthy. When deviant behaviour goes unchecked or unpunished, law-abiding individuals may lose their motivation to maintain conformity (Deutschmann, 1998).

Deviance also demonstrates acceptable moral boundaries. “Negatively sanctioning deviance becomes public communication about the importance of the moral boundaries leading to an increase in solidarity among the non-deviants” (Lauderdale, 1976, p. 661). Deviance may incite a reaction that serves to unite a group or society. A group may join forces to support a value or norm that has been violated. As a result, the value regains importance and the integration of the community has been strengthened. Society can become united against a common enemy or individual who has been labelled a deviant. That deviant person in turn becomes a scapegoat (Deutshmann 1998).

Finally, deviance can serve to protect the vested interests of certain members of society. The criminal justice and mental health system require deviance to operate. “[T]he pattern of finding deviance in society tends to preserve the balance of power in that most deviants are ‘discovered’ among members of the lower class and other marginal groups” (Deutschmann, 1998, p. 265). Members of these ‘deviant’ groups are then placed under intense scrutiny. This phenomenon of identifying members of a marginal group or lower class as deviant is also present in dramatic television programs. In general, the focus of the shows is on the powerful members of the criminal justice system and those who commit crimes are simply identified and labelled as deviant.
2.5 Development and Creation of Stereotypical Portrayal of Police and Criminals

The social cognitive paradigm suggests that images in the media influence perceptions of viewers by emphasizing a cognitive connection between a particular group and a specific role. Priming research states that once a stereotype has been established, that knowledge is more likely to be used in future judgments. A stereotype is further defined as “…a cognitive structure or category that affects the encoding and processing of information, particularly information pertaining to groups to which the perceiver does not belong” (Dixon et al, 2003, p. 501). The social cognitive paradigm is useful when examining the impact that the media can have on viewers. This is also known as the process of ‘othering’ where a dominant group defines and creates an inferior group. Symbolic boundaries are also formed to create membership within the dominant group. The boundaries are defined through every day language and situations to which the dominant group will have intimate knowledge (Altheide, 2006).

To understand the ways in which viewers have been ‘primed’, a brief examination of stereotypes portrayed is necessary.

2.5.1 Race and Gender in the Media

One of the major concerns with crime portrayal in the media is its impact on perceptions about race and gender. Exposure to television news highlights and reinforces negative stereotypes about race, specifically that people of colour have a predisposition to commit crime. Dixon et al (2003) state that African Americans are two times as likely to be shown as perpetrators of crime rather than as officers of the law. There is also a higher probability that the mug shot of an African American will be shown on the news. White people are more likely to be shown as members of the criminal justice system or as victims.

Dixon and Azorcar (2007) examined the construct of the black criminal stereotype. Their research suggested that the media repeatedly links blacks with
criminality. This construct then becomes readily available in the minds of those viewers who consume a large amount of media. They position their research with the priming paradigm which emphasizes that people make judgments about policy issues concerning race based upon their racial perceptions. These perceptions are highly impacted by stereotypes which are described as “part of an associative network of related opinion nodes or schemas that are linked in memory, and activating one node in a network spreads to other linked nodes” (Dixon and Azocar, 2007, p. 228). These stereotypes become automatic due to frequent past activation through media exposure. The authors assert that long term effects of media exposure may lead to viewers subconsciously associating criminality with black individuals whenever issues of race are represented within the media.

Mastro and Robinson (2000) suggest television programming regularly depicts minorities in roles that are designed to elicit fear among viewers and encourage racial stereotyping. They examined portrayals of police officers and criminals on television with a specific focus on the use of force. Their research indicated that television shows tend to over-represent minorities in the role of officers while under-representing minorities as criminals. This difference may be attributed to positive distortions created to increase perceptions of balanced racial groups by network programmers. However, the research also indicated that young, minority males received the most force of any criminals portrayed. These individuals were shown as so problematic as to warrant the use of excessive force. The legitimacy of police authority is rarely questioned in these shows, which give viewers the impression that young, male minority criminals must be dealt with in whatever way possible. The authors conclude by stating how these portrayals contribute to the already persistently negative black criminal stereotype.

When considering race and the media, racial minorities are most often portrayed in the role of perpetrator. As discussed above, the black criminal stereotype is prevalent in American news and entertainment media. When examining gender and the media, women are most often portrayed as victims
rather than perpetrators. One explanation for this presentation is the chivalry hypothesis.

The chivalry hypothesis asserts that women are seen as weak or irrational and the criminal justice system responds more leniently (Grabe et al, 2006). This viewpoint suggests that female criminality challenges traditional gender roles. The type of offence rather than the severity of that offence determines the treatment received. This reflects the notion that there are feminine and unfeminine categories of crime. Crimes of violence or victimization of children are considered to be more unfeminine types of crimes and are treated more harshly in comparison to theft or fraud related crimes (Grabe et al, 2006).

Grabe et al (2006) examined six months of newspaper reporting in the United States to further test the chivalry hypothesis. Their research indicated that when a woman committed a crime but still acted within the gender boundaries of a caring and nurturing individual, the journalistic treatment received was more lenient as compared to men who had committed comparable crimes. However, when women were found to have violated their prescribed roles in committing an ‘unfeminine’ crime, the treatment was very harsh in comparison to men who had committed comparable crimes and women who had not violated the gender boundaries. The researchers concluded by stating that the chivalry hypothesis is not widespread across crime news reporting but rather it is applied selectively to women who violate gender norms.

Cuklanz and Moorti (2006) explored the issues of feminism and media within the prime-time drama program Law and Order: Special Victims Unit. The authors in this study asserted that the show offers a portrayal of sexual assault that takes into account feminist ideologies. However, they also noted that the representation of women criminals is still problematic in that it perpetuates the idea of ‘monstrous maternal’. The term ‘monstrous maternal’ refers to those mothers who have so critically failed in their role as maternal caregiver to have harmed or caused the death of their child or children. Violent women in this vein are portrayed as being more dangerous than other victimizers.
On the show women are portrayed as committing crimes which not only break the law but violate the women’s role as maternal caregiver. These crimes include neglect, withholding food, psychological manipulation of children or failure to nurture. Mothers are also more likely to be implicated when a criminal is shown to be a rapist, psychopath or paedophile as compared to fathers. The role of father abuse is shown as a factor for psychological harm caused to the child whereas the abuse committed by the mother is shown to be a large contributor to the criminality of the offender (Cuklanz and Moorti, 2006). The Cuklanz and Moorti’s (2006) examination of *Law and Order: SVU* states that the show represents a new kind of feminism where sexual assault can be explored in a genre that had previously been dominated by male detective shows. The authors also offer a critique of many of the show’s story lines, which still perpetuate gender stereotypes, particularly about the role of motherhood.

The public has a very limited knowledge of women in prison. The knowledge base that does exist is primarily comprised of media imagery. Historically, these images have been very gendered and sexualized depictions. Cecil (2007) conducted a study in order to examine the way in which documentaries, television news magazines and talk shows depict incarcerated women and frame relevant issues. While these programs have begun to move away from the historical images of women in prison, the author asserts that women are still mainly presented in the context of violence and sex. The critical issues are examined but there is still an effort made to titillate viewers by providing a back stage pass to women behind bars.

Cecil (2007) found that the majority of programs chose to present the ‘sexy’ crimes of violence and murder rather than crimes that reflect poverty and substance abuse. This production choice makes sense in light of other research surrounding crime media. People are most interested in learning about the individual criminal rather than the social context in which the individual committed the crime. These production decisions may have also been influenced by the fact that it is easier to depict an individual involved in crime rather than exploring the specific social determinants of criminality. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to
explore the production codes of these programs. Their inclusion here is to illustrate the traditional way that women have been portrayed in crime dramas.

As in the research conducted by Cuklanz and Moorti (2006), the issue of motherhood is highlighted. This issue is presented from the perspective of how the mothers feel about their children and the possibility of reunion. The programs ask- why mothers would commit crimes in the first place since it would result in the loss of their children. The women are then seen as bad mothers because the loss of their children was not enough of a deterrent (Cecil, 2007). This portrayal still focuses on the individual faults of the women who is doubly deviant as someone who has committed a criminal act and is a bad mother.

While the programs Cecil (2007) studied were attempts to move beyond the traditional ‘babes-behind-bars’ portrayal of women in prison, they still centred on three main issues; violence, sex and motherhood. For each of these issues, the program reassures the viewer that women do in fact belong in prison. The focus on violent women is detrimental for two main reasons. First, violent women, especially murderers, are the exception rather than the norm. By highlighting these women’s stories, the idea of the woman murderer becomes more commonplace in the mind of the public, which does not accurately reflect criminal justice statistics. The second reason is that it further emphasizes how far these particular women have stepped outside their gender role (Cecil, 2007). Women are not supposed to be violent or aggressive and so viewers are fascinated by the women who have committed these types of crimes.

It would be more beneficial to focus on issues of poverty and gender discrimination facing women before they enter prison rather than reinforcing the gender stereotypes that a good woman or mother puts her family first and does not commit violent crime (Cecil 2007). The programs that depict women who are involved in the criminal justice system can be described as representation as opposed to reflection. These shows may not set out with the agenda of being statistically accurate but rather to explore certain issues surrounding female criminality.
2.5.2 The Criminal Justice System in the Media

All facets of the criminal justice system are explored through the media including policing, courts and prisons. Television programs concerning the criminal process present a condensed and scandalous version of the legal process. Certain aspects of the system are highlighted while others are omitted completely (Mastro and Robinson, 2000). The majority of crime dramas that deal with the criminal justice system are told from the perspective of law enforcement officials or prosecutors. The consistent theme in these shows is the concept of ‘justice’ which is mainly achieved through an offender being apprehended. (Eschholz et al, 2003).

Dowler and Zawilski (2007) explored the impact of presentations of policing styles on viewers. They found that two dominant portrayals of police exist within the media. In print and broadcast media, the police are often shown as incompetent and ineffective. On drama based police shows, police are shown to be heroes who fight crime and evil. Police are portrayed as caring, sensitive and knowledgeable. In the television shows, police are shown to solve crimes and apprehend the criminal at an extremely high rate. There is evidence that misconduct, in the form of abuse of suspects in custody, is still portrayed in a positive light since it assists the police in achieving their end goal of justice.

The image of the police officer as crime fighter symbolizes the importance of individualism within American culture. The media super cop is usually an outsider or a rogue individual from within the system. This person is very effective at solving crimes but appears to have no ability to prevent them. The system is shown to be overburdened with crime and criminals and ordinary measures are not sufficient. Police often use special tactics and unconventional methods to solve crime. The repeated message is that standard and traditional practices are not enough and exceptional and often illegal measures are required (Surette, 1998).

Fox and Van Sickel (2001) suggest that the media play a large part in either eroding or fostering confidence in the criminal justice system. A citizen’s
assessment of a court’s decision may be largely mitigated by the way in which the story was presented in the media. This assessment has been overwhelmingly negative towards major justice institutions such as courts and prisons. Coverage in this realm has trivialized important news by highlighting tabloid criminal cases. The authors go on to suggest two main impacts of this tabloid style of media coverage.

Given the high profile nature of tabloid or celebrity cases, the public has extensive knowledge and familiarity with the facts of the case. The public will retain most of the facts specifically because they are presented in a sensational format. A second consequence is this exposure to tabloid cases has resulted in diminished faith in the criminal justice system (Fox and Van Sickel, 2001). With high profile cases, viewers may feel intimately involved with the case at hand. As a result, if they do not agree with the outcome, they may feel personally slighted. This negative effect is then redirected at the criminal justice system which is viewed as responsible for making the wrong decision in some aspect of the case.

Of the three facets of the criminal justice system, the inner workings of the prison system are the most hidden from public view. Prisons, in general, support a retributive model of punishment. When an individual has committed a crime, he/she must be punished through removal and isolation. The elimination of prisons from the everyday world of experience means that audiences depend on the media to offer insight and information (Meiners, 2007). Media images of prison tend to focus on stereotypes of race and violence. These media representations are a major factor in the widespread belief that crime and violence are biologically determined. “…mass media reproduces an active public racialized ignorance about crime and prisons” (Meiners, 2007, p 26).

The violent stereotype is perpetuated through the depiction of prison riots and the dangers associated with being an inmate. The media also highlights brutal attacks committed by individuals who have recently been paroled. This type of coverage is extremely successful at wearing away public confidence in the corrections system. Doubt is cast on the ability of correctional institutes to
deter or rehabilitate offenders. As a result, the public supports more punitive measures for all types of offenders (Surette, 1998).

Mason (2007) explored the ways in which British crime journalism constructed prisons and prisoners through an examination of four major press stories. The study revealed that prison is often portrayed as a lenient form of punishment and prisoners are constructed as posing a high risk to society. Prison is also shown as the only viable solution to the problem of highly violent criminal offenders. The media exploit the fears of the public through the over-reporting of crime which in turn lends support for the prison system.

While the above is not an exhaustive investigation in the ways that different crimes and elements of the criminal justice system are portrayed, it provides insight into some of the main topics explored by researchers in this field.
Chapter two established that, in the current media culture, there are specific patterns of portrayal for both members of the criminal justice system and criminals. In order to gain deeper insight into these depictions, an historical analysis of selected crime dramas is explored. The following chapter details the emergence of crime dramas on American television from Westerns through to the 2000s. Television programs were selected where the main character on the program was a police officer or involved in the criminal justice system.

The question of why have these shows emerged at this particular point in time can be addressed by analysing the many factors that have contributed to create the kind of environment where a serial killer, a drug dealer and a mobster could take the lead roles in a television criminal drama. These factors include the historical portrayal of the criminal justice system on television, the political landscape of the United States and the punitive nature of the American criminal justice system. These three elements will be examined in conjunction with the historical portrayal of crime and criminals on television.

The historical portrayal is relevant to explore because it provides the background for the examination of fictional crime dramas. A progression can be seen from a time when the police and the criminal justice system were revered, through a steady process of erosion of faith in the system, to a morally and ethically ambivalent situation where an audience is capable of empathizing and caring about a criminal character. This progression is not directly linear rather it is an examination of the types of fictional crime dramas that have existed prior to the emergence of these three new crime dramas. This chapter is not meant to illustrate a direct path from Westerns in the 1940s to the creation of new crime
dramas. The purpose of this chapter is to show the trends that have existed within fictional crime dramas in order to demonstrate that a shift has occurred. The consistent theme throughout the decades is that either the criminal justice system is flawed and must be dealt with, usually, by the police or that society is flawed and the only hope is the criminal justice system.

The concept of the police genre has existed since the inception of television programming. The original crime drama programs were Westerns with the ‘good guys’ portrayed as cowboys and the ‘bad guys’ portrayed as Indians. Westerns were the forerunner to the modern crime drama. Television sought out familiar story lines in westerns and private detective stories. The focus was not on character development but on solving problems with action. Crime story lines were exciting and did not require elaborate special effects (Stark, 1997).

“Until the advent of television, however, popular culture had traditionally romanticized crime, with the police (or their equivalents) often treated as villains, not heroes” (Stark, 1997, p. 32). Prior to crime shows, there were strong anti-establishment sentiments towards legal authority. Stark (1997) states that an examination of popular Anglo-American culture demonstrates that the wrongdoer or criminal had achieved the status of romantic hero for Americans. This can be seen in the character of Robin Hood and the popularity of private detective television shows and movies. Private detectives had the ability to work independently, track down the criminal and outwit the police.

Popular private detectives such as Sherlock Holmes and Philip Marlow often stepped in or were hired when the police were unwilling or unable to solve a crime. Americans, as a result of the legacy of the romanticized criminal, developed an ambivalence towards the law and helped to create the subject of crime as an inspired obsession (Stark, 1997). Westerns, as a genre, began the shift, where the new hero was the person upholding the law rather than the one outsmarting it.

Westerns represented a fictionalized account of the period between 1865 and 1895. It was a simplistic portrayal of the fight between good and evil and
order and chaos. Westerns revealed a sense of nostalgia that American society held for a simpler time. They were also a safe canvas on which to explore contemporary issues (Davis et al, 2001).

As a genre, Westerns were held together through the common theme of the frontier, which was a psychological, historical and geographical location. This genre was an idealized meeting point between civilization and barbarianism. Westerns addressed an American contradiction between the values of competition and free enterprise that lead to inequalities and the egalitarian idealism creation by the American constitution (Buxton, 1990).

This tension, endemic to republicanism, is displaced on to an imaginary past before the development of industrial capitalism, on to conflicts involving inalienable values outside commodity relations the community, the family and the sanctity of a white woman. (Buxton, 1990, p. 28)

Westerns reflected an imaginary utopia of shared moral values. They also reflect a romanticized version of American history; manifest destiny, conquering the land and the notion of man’s triumph over nature. This genre portrayed the very foundations of society where nature was humanised, the law was enacted and labour was imposed. American patriotism and militarism are highlighted, with the United States celebrating the imperialist conquest of the West and ‘defeat’ of the Native populations (Buxton, 1990).

America has a very rich history of cultural myths based on legend and fact. That history has been shaped by the stories surrounding heroic feats committed by individual personalities. The classic character in Westerns is a sheriff or marshal who worked alone. He would be a man of few words and the only thing that stood between peace and lawlessness. The western hero embodied the typical cowboy traits of tenaciousness and autonomy combined with the endurance and fortitude of a ‘gunslinger’ (Roman, 2005).

Westerns emphasized individualism, traditional values and the utility of a small government. “Westerns were the embodiment of a cultural sense that America’s rough decency made it a great country” (Stark, 1997, p. 68). The
ideology that justice was to be carried out by a single sheriff or cowboy with a
disdain for the traditional system of law was central to the Western genre (Stark
1997).

Westerns also reflected the American vigilante tradition. Lenz (2003)
defines vigilantism as “...an individual acting alone or a group acting together to
take the law into their own hands to dispense justice without regard for due
process of law” (p. 38). The belief of people who embrace vigilantism is that
“...the government is unwilling or unable to provide public safety” (p. 38). The
heroic image of a vigilante is very similar to the imagery of the cowboy or sheriff
where a person is taking on the responsibilities of justice as a personal mission
to assure public safety. There is identification with the average person rather
than the educated, wealthy or powerful few individuals (Lenz, 2003).

Vigilantism is about politics and not solely about crime. Vigilantism was
more of an issue in the United States than other western nations due to the close
link between politics and the law. Americans have a higher commitment to public
involvement in the administration of justice through the election or appointment of
judges and prosecutors and the use of juries. The concept of vigilant justice is
based on the concept of ‘popular sovereignty’ where the people are sovereign.
The people are the source of authority rather than the government and the laws.
Popular sovereignty is based on the concept of contract theory or social contract,
originally created by the philosopher John Locke (Lenz, 2003).

Under the social contract, people agree to give up some of their freedoms
by allowing the government to be in control. The result is a civil society with laws
based on consensus. Citizens must give up their right to dispense justice and the
right to punish those who harm them. Crimes are no longer against the individual
but against the public or state. Under this model, “…citizens [are] taking the law
back into their own hands rather than just taking the law into their own hands”
(Lenz, 2003, p. 39) [emphasis added]. If citizens do not believe that the
government is living up to their end of the contract, citizens have the right to
reclaim authority of the law. A vigilante sentiment among a population provides
clues to popular thinking and public confidence in the adversarial system (Lenz, 2003).

One of the most popular television westerns was *Gunsmoke* which aired on CBS from 1955-1975. It was designed as a western for adult audiences. The show was a weekly morality play, which centred on the theme of family. The characters became each other’s family and support system. The main character, Matt Dillon, was not meant to be an invincible lawman which made him more relatable to the audience. As well, cowboys represented freedom because they were not tied down to any one thing, place or person. The cowboy was an escape from conformity (Roman, 2005). “A part of the Westerns’ mystique was the way it personified the value of the open range and the freedom it manifested” (Roman, 2005, p. 38). The show was about “...heading west and bringing civilization to the frontier” (Stark, 1997, p. 64). The show’s success was, in part, due to the simple story lines, constant action and a minimalist setting. The show was less violent than traditional westerns. The main source of conflict on the show was the appearance of outsiders or ‘bad elements’ who refused to mind their own business. Audiences were taught to be wary of strangers or visitors (Buxton, 1990).

There are many similarities between Westerns and modern police dramas. They both contain non-conformist characters who are mediators of justice and interpret the law. While television was venerating the cowboy lifestyle and frontier justice, there was a simultaneous dramatization of the assets of a modern police officer (Roman, 2005). “The lawman, high on his mounted steed, patrols a vast territory searching for evil while sustaining the virtues of morality” (Roman, 2005, p. 42). The sheriff on horseback was replaced with the uniformed officer in a patrol car. The dusty frontier was replaced with a grittier urban landscape. The attributes of bravery, strength and resourcefulness that were respected and admired among sheriffs and marshals extended to police officers and modern crime fighters. “These attributes are universal constructs that are part of the mystique of the law enforcement genre and are what make these programs so attractive to television audiences” (Roman, 2005, p. 42). The term ‘law mystique’
adds to the general mythology surrounding Westerns and the police. These individuals are often portrayed as men apart or ‘lone rangers’.

Buxton (1990) suggests that the emergence of police shows was a logical consequence of the desire to have justification for physical violence as a form of entertainment. Violence was recast in “… ‘realist’ social terms so that a pedagogical alibi could be established” (p .120). Violence had to be linked with features of entertainment in order to create an acceptable genre that people were able to watch and enjoy.

The original crime dramas, Westerns, were a simplistic approach to dealing with crime. Good guys and bad guys were easily identified by the colour of their hats. The seeds of in-group vs. out-group bias were being planted as ‘outsiders’ were most often the target of the law enforcer’s attention. Not being a member of a community indicated that a person was bad or unwanted. It became the responsibility of the Sherriff to remove that person in order to restore harmony.

3.1 Crime Dramas in the 1950s

Television programming between the 1930s and 1960s reflected liberal thinking about crime and criminals. Causes of crime were largely viewed as social conditions such as poverty rather than individual criminality. Rehabilitation was sought over vengeance (Lenz, 2003). During the Cold War, citizens were alarmed that Communists had gained access to the government and other prominent American institutions. This second Red Scare allowed politicians to capitalize and exploit the nation’s fears. Americans became divided and political freedoms were reduced (Moss and Wilson, 1994).

The 1950s also marked a dramatic rise in consumerism and led to a culture of abundance and leisure. The two most prominent symbols of wealth were a home and a car. By 1953 over 2/3 of American households owned television sets and television dealers were selling six million new television sets each year (Moss and Wilson, 1994, p. 288).
Television quickly became the vital centre of the consumer culture, a vast educational enterprise teaching American consumers about the latest styles of mass consumption, and creating wants and needs for the multitudinous products of consumer civilization (Moss and Wilson, 1994, p 291-292).

3.1.1 Dragnet (1951 – 1959)

*Dragnet* was a groundbreaking police drama program. The program aired on the NBC network from 1951 until 1959. At that time, dramas tended to be more appealing to male audiences than sitcoms and the network wanted to expand its viewership. “...[T]his series both defined the concept of the police drama on television and redefined the image of law enforcement in the culture at large” (Stark, 1997, p. 32).

In a post World War II environment, the government was eager to demonstrate that the criminal justice system could provide safety for its citizens. The dominant theme reflected in *Dragnet* supported the government by demonstrating that the legal system had the ability to effectively combat crime and maintain order (Lenz, 2003). The show sought to be as realistic as possible and used case files from the Los Angeles Police Department. Technical advisors and actual LAPD officers were employed to maintain authenticity (Lenz, 2003). To be more realistic, shows were set in the outdoors of Los Angeles and were not filmed solely on a sound stage in New York. *Dragnet* also used police lingo to ensure that people felt they were witnessing actual police officers at work (Stark, 1997).

The show did not want to sensationalize crime but rather sought to present the basic information surrounding the crime. This was established through Sergeant Joe Friday’s famous line “Just the facts, ma’am” (Lenz, 2003). Friday’s character was a hard working police officer. This character differed greatly from the lone sheriffs and private detectives of the past. Joe Friday’s lack of personal life marked his distinction from private detective characters whose interests included alcohol and women, in addition to catching criminals. Friday was only interested in police work and was shown to be methodical and
meticulous. He was a sergeant but more importantly, he was part of a team that served the public rather than private interests (Stark, 1997).

*Dragnet*, demonstrated support for conservative ideals that included individual conformity, deference to authority and the importance of rules to achieve social order. The police officers were shown as “...straight arrows, by the book cops who would not think about bending the rules or breaking the law in order to catch the bad guys” (Lenz, 2003, p. 88). Bureaucracy was portrayed in a positive light, as a necessary contributor to the maintenance of social order. Joe Friday and his partner showed great respect for the law, rules and authority (Lenz, 2003).

The case of Miranda vs. Arizona (384 U.S. 436 {1966}) occurred during the airing of *Dragnet*. This Supreme Court case forced police officers to inform suspects of their right to counsel and right to remain silent upon arrest. *Dragnet* was the first show to depict officers reading the Miranda rights. The issue, which was quite controversial at the time, was introduced as very matter-of-fact. The officers relayed the message that compliance with the Supreme Court and policy change was simply part of a police officer's job. The show continued to portray the police and judges as operating on the same side (Lenz, 2003).

The portrayal of police officers willingly accepting the Miranda decision was not an accurate portrayal of the reality surrounding the issue. Conservatives were very critical of the Miranda decision, arguing that it was affording criminals too many rights. Other governments at the time resisted and defied the Supreme Court ruling. Real world police officers had a much harder time accepting a decision that limited their ability to stop, search and seize suspects (Lenz, 2003).

The show portrayed both street and white-collar crimes. A voice-over during the introduction of the show stated that the facts of the cases were true, with only the names being changed to protect the innocent. Each episode concluded with a picture of the offender and closing statements regarding the outcome of the case (Lenz, 2003). By providing a picture of an offender after
each episode, the idea of what a criminal looked like was sealed into the minds of the viewers.

*Dragnet* was modelled after documentaries, which employed impersonal conversation. This show represented a change in the portrayal of policing. Previously, amateur detectives were mainly responsible for establishing and solving crimes. On *Dragnet*, a determined effort was made by the state to fight crime. The focus of crime solving changed from an individualistic perspective (the detective) to a collectivist approach (the state police force). This shift can partly be attributed to the notion that crime was a persistent feature of life rather than an occasional disruption. Ideas and beliefs about crime and policing were being changed and reinforced through the series (Buxton, 1990).

Outside political factors affected the nature of the show. *Dragnet* was aired in the United States in an era of post World War II. There was a vested interest in portraying crime fighting that could originate and be the domain of a strong state run police force. The concept that ‘crime doesn’t pay’ needed to be solidified into the program (Buxton 1990).

The world of *Dragnet* was a society with clear divisions of right and wrong. Life for citizens was generally stable and tranquil. That world would momentarily be threatened by criminals who would then be arrested by Sergeant Joe Friday (Davis et al, 2001). The police world was shown to be successful and competent. The show provided insight into law enforcement practices during a time when the United States was dealing with increased crime rates and a rethinking of the liberal justice model. The show also reflected the 1950s style of television, which was family oriented and dictated proper behaviour (Lenz, 2003).

*Dragnet* was an extremely influential television program. Stark (1997) suggests that the popularity of the show was demonstrated through the fact the American viewers forgot that the United States “... [was] a nation of incipient cop-haters” (p. 34). Police dramas became comfort shows to viewers by providing a sense of security. All crime and chaos could be solved by the end of a one hour, weekly program. Even by 1954, during the show’s run, it was apparent that
television crime was overly frequent as were stereotypes with non-whites continually portrayed as the criminals (Stark, 1997).

During the 1950s, there was a strong desire to demonstrate that the criminal justice system was effective and that the public should have faith in the system. *Dragnet* again highlighted conservative values of conformity, following the rules and respect for authority. At this time, it was the world that was flawed and in order to re-establish order, there needed to be a strong and effective criminal justice system. The show’s documentary style allowed people to believe that they were watching actual cases. This perceived transparency of the LAPD fostered admiration for the system and the officers working within it. By allowing an audience to see the inner workings of a police station, the system is seen as strong while fighting against the social disorder and chaos of crime. *Dragnet* was extremely influential because it pioneered the formula of crimes being solved by the conclusion of a one-hour episode. This formula was then adopted among the majority of crime dramas in later years.

### 3.2 Crime Dramas in the 1960s

During the 1960s President John Kennedy passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Lyndon Johnson also declared war on poverty. These acts marked a change in crime policy and television shows reflected this change as police were portrayed as social workers. As well, there was a desire to explore the social origins of crime and the rehabilitation of offenders (Davis et al, 2001).

In 1967, young dissatisfied youth were protesting the Vietnam War on university campuses across the country. The hippie culture was also underway with the abandonment of discipline set forth by school, parents and jobs. The hippie culture lived by the motto of doing your own thing with a uniform of long hair, jeans, tank tops and sandals. The counter culture also began to use illegal drugs in particular LSD and marijuana (Moss and Wilson, 1994).
3.2.1 Adam 12 (1968 – 1975)

Television in the 1960’s was influenced by the Vietnam War, civil unrest and the hippie movement. Based on the success of Dragnet, Jack Webb co-created a new thirty-minute police drama for NBC entitled Adam 12. The show was set in Los Angeles and featured two police officers who were ‘beat cops’ as opposed to the detectives featured on Dragnet (Snauffer, 2006).

The program focused on the two police officers Pete Malloy and Jim Reed. Malloy’s character was a hardened police veteran and Reed was the young rookie. Malloy always took opportunities to teach Reed, and the audience, about police procedures. The show strived for accuracy and authenticity by using police jargon. The title of the show Adam 12 was based on the radio call sign that the officers used for their vehicle. The series centred on the two officers in their patrol car with the car, essentially, becoming a third character (Snauffer, 2006).

Adam 12 was not an instant hit and it was not until its third season that it began to gain popularity. As the show continued, the characters changed with Reed starting out as an insecure kid to becoming a confident and fully capable police officer. The two officers also became best friends. After 7 seasons and 174 episodes, NBC finally cancelled the program in 1975(Snauffer, 2006).

3.2.2 Hawaii 5-0 (1968 – 1980)

This series faced a variety of social issues that were occurring during the late 1960s. In the United States there were issues of racial integration, youth revolt, ghettos and racial violence. The show was set in Hawaii, which, the producers felt, was comparatively neutral. While Hawaii was a multi-cultural state, it was free of many of the visible issues of social unrest (Buxton 1990).

The police team was a combination of ethnicities featuring inspector Steve McGarrett and his three assistants. McGarrett was given latitude in his investigation methods as long as the result was favourable for the team. Detective Danny William was McGarett’s right hand man. Detectives Chin Ho
Kelley and Kono Kalakaue, both Hawaiian natives, rounded out the special unit (Snauffer, 2006).

The police were shown as one-dimensional characters with no personal lives. Crime was an issue of morality rather than politics. The viewpoint espoused was that crime was the fault of individuals rather than systemic societal problems. While the police were not portrayed as incompetent, actual detective work was negligible. Clues would conveniently appear, as would witnesses just in time (Buxton, 1990).

Another feature of this show was that it was setting acceptable boundaries for the audience. It was the responsibility of the police series to establish where the boundary line existed between general consumerism and unacceptable levels of greed (Buxton 1990). The police were also shown to be an ally who individuals could team up with in the fight against criminals. “…[T]he police are a public service against a state of endemic violence, a carefully dosed combination of liberalism and authority” (Buxton, 1990, p. 127). The television series was designed to reinforce faith in the government and the police.

3.2.3 The Mod Squad (1968 – 1972)

ABC created The Mod Squad to appeal to a younger demographic. The show was a one-hour crime drama that featured a special squad of young officers. These officers were to be undercover and had the ability to integrate themselves in the youth culture better than regular police officers (Snauffer, 2006).

The Mod Squad was comprised of three young individuals who were receiving an alternate punishment to jail time by becoming police officers. The idea of three young individuals with no training being made into police officers was a fantasy designed for a youthful audience with an inherent distrust of the police. The character Pete Cochran was a spoiled young man who had become disillusioned with his Beverly Hills family and lifestyle. He had been put in jail after stealing a car and was arrested by the LAPD for joyriding. The character of
Linc Hayes was portrayed as a young black man full of anger who was arrested during the Watts riots. The character of Julie Barnes was the daughter of a prostitute who had left home and was picked up by the police for vagrancy. Captain Adam Greer, who had made the deal with the youth to allow them to become officers, not simply informants, in order to avoid serving time (Snauffer, 2006), supervised the three young officers.

The 1960s crime dramas again tried to reinforce the message that people could have confidence in the police. The dominant theme in this decade, similar to the 1950s, is that the world is a chaotic and crime filled place but the police have the skills and abilities to combat that chaos. *Hawaii-5-0* portrayed police officers as allies who could work with individuals outside of the police force in order to solve crime. This concept of solving crimes through any means necessary became highly significant as crime dramas progressed. A central theme was that crime is a big enough evil to unite police officers and petty criminals. This mentality was highlighted through war metaphors or terminology where crime is a war and police and citizens must join forces to win the battle.

*The Mod Squad* also represented this alliance where the police decide that young people had a more intimate knowledge of street crime and would make effective police officers. The criminal pasts of the young people chosen is overlooked because the overall goal of fighting crime is more important than penalties for minor offences. *The Mod Squad* also planted the notion that there may be flaws with the system itself if regularly trained officers are no longer the first choice to solve crime. The young people represented the counter-culture of the era where a black man with an afro hairstyle, a blonde woman and a privileged young man could fight crime. This also fostered the attitude that fighting crime was the responsibility of everyone rather than just the police.

This era of crime dramas also introduced the important element of setting. *Hawaii-5-0* was specifically set in a tropical paradise in order to examine issues of crime in a multi-cultural state without having to explore the underlying social and economic unrest that was contributing to ghettos throughout the United States. The urban setting of *The Mod Squad* and *Adam-12* were important
because the shows were attempting to explore urban and street crime that were believed to be a serious threat.

### 3.3 Crime Dramas in the 1970’s

Many of the popular crime dramas of the 1970s actually premiered during the 1960s. These programs featured a conservative approach to policing. The crime dramas of the 1970s demonstrated a different approach to the police genre (Snauffer, 2006). The 1970s was a decade marked with social upheaval, as citizens were increasingly critical and resistant to the Vietnam War. With President Nixon in power, ‘get tough’ laws and tougher prison sentences were advocated as the solution to crime (Davis et al, 2001). Television shows of this decade “…reflected the spirit of the time in plotlines about cops handicapped by legal constraints” (Davis et al, 2001, p. 107). The sentiment expressed was often that it might be necessary for the police to break the law in order to uphold it.

During the 1970s, the insurgencies of the 1960s continued and the women’s movement was gaining strength with the creation of the National Organization of Women (NOW). President Nixon was impeached during the Watergate scandal, which deeply affected the American public (Moss and Wilson, 1994). “Americans experienced a crisis of confidence, fearful that their leaders and institutions could not find solutions to their many, complex, and often interrelated problems” (Moss and Wilson, 1994, p. 417). The erosion of faith in the government was explored through the television programs of this decade.

This decade saw the development of young upwardly mobile professionals (yuppies). “Television advertising almost doubled between 1975-1979, to more than $10 billion” (Reeves, 2000, p. 228). Crime was a growing concern with the United States experiencing an increase in all crimes but particularly homicides and assaults. The costs of the criminal justice system grew from $8.5 billion in 1970 to $24 billion in 1978 (Reeves, 2000).

At this time, well funded, right wing political action committees (PAC’s) were created that supported the political platforms of ‘tough on crime’ and ‘the
war on poverty’. The consistent message was that crime was out of control and that poor people were lazy. Starting with President Nixon (and continued by Presidents Reagan and Bush) were appointments to the Supreme Court of judges who supported decisions that were considered to ‘take the handcuffs’ off the police and allow them to push for harsher sentences (Davey, 1995).

Despite dependable research indicating the ineffectiveness of incarceration on rates of crime, the United States continued to build more prisons and incarcere more inmates. It can be argued that punitive attitudes are based on fear waves as opposed to actual crime waves. The mass media, since the 1960s, is a major source in affecting the public view of crime. There is a considerable difference between the amount of crime that occurs and the amount of crime that is communicated to the public (Davey, 1995).

President Nixon’s crackdown on crime also included the Racketeer Influence and Corrupt Organization Act (RICO) that was aimed at organized crime. Mandatory sentences were created due to public pressure about increased crime rates (Davey, 1995). RICO is important to note given its relevance to The Sopranos discussed in chapters five and six.

3.3.1 Starsky and Hutch (1975 – 1979)

“Starting with Adam 12 to a certain extent and evolving more deeply in the reality-strewn inner-city police shows of the early-to-mid 1970s, cops were now becoming friends, in many cases, best friends” (Snauffer, 2006, p. 100). With this series a new type of police work emerged with two characters who, while best friends, were diametrically opposed. Starsky’s character was more aggressive and angry while Hutch’s character was more laid back and easy going (Snauffer, 2006). The two lead characters would verbally spar and disagree over policing styles. Despite their differences, they had a mutual respect for each other (Buxton, 1990)

The relationship between Starsky and Hutch was meant to be a symbol for the two halves of a divided America during the 1970s. The two sides of America
“…are reconciled in a new pact against crime and social disorder requiring greater tolerance of different lifestyles” (Buxton, 1990, p. 129). The police officers had to join forces to fight against the common enemy of crime and criminals (Buxton, 1990). As with Adam-12, the car that the officers drove became an additional character. Starsky and Hutch were famous for their red and white Ford Torino (Snauffer, 2006). The fact that these officers were not required to drive a standard issue police car speaks to the overall message of the show that these two officers had unconventional but effective policing methods.

Even though Starsky and Hutch did not follow traditional policing techniques, their superior, Captain Dobey, showed them leniency because they were considered the best officers on the force. Minor criminals were also shown as being very useful to the police officers as other allies in the fight against crime. The character ‘Huggy Bear’ was the officers’ link to the criminal underworld. Huggy Bear was extremely useful by providing the officers with timely and accurate tips that they would not have been able to obtain on their own (Buxton, 1990).

The focus of crime on the show was at an individualistic level. Crime was seen as the result of personal failure. The show did not take into account the social issues, which were contributing factors to crime. “…[C]riminals are generally portrayed as mad dogs that have to be put down, so avoiding the ‘sociological’ problems posed by a criminal underclass” (Buxton, 1990, p. 133). The show further entrenched the idea that criminals are, essentially, a different class or breed of people. While the officers may have used criminals as informants or for assistance, a clear division was still being drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and positions in life.

The 1970s saw a shift in crime dramas from the belief that the criminal justice system was beyond reproach, to an acknowledgement that the system may have problems but certain police officers have the ability to make headway against crime. The alliance theme is present in this show because the two officers often utilize the information from individuals in the underworld. While
petty criminals were rewarded for their valuable tips, a clear distinction was still made between police officer and criminal. Criminals were a different class of people and the show repeatedly highlighted who were members of the in-group and who were not.

3.3.2 Kojak (1973 – 1978)

The television show Kojak was centred on the police officer Theodore Kojak who was a rogue officer out of New York. Kojak was depicted as the leader of an ethnically diverse team of police officers in South Manhattan. Kojak did not follow the rules and in fact “…uses crime to fight crime…” (Buxton, 1990, p. 134). He was a tough individual who was familiar with the streets. Similar to Starsky and Hutch, Kojak made use of information supplied by criminals. The difference in this show, as compared to Starsky and Hutch, was that Kojak’s methods had cost him promotions rather than being accepted by his superiors. Kojak was punished for his belligerence but he preferred his position and constantly strived to be the officer who ‘made the collar’ and brought in the suspect (Buxton, 1990: Snauffer, 2006). Kojak represented an individual who believed that fighting crime was more important than receiving commendations from his superiors.

The show had pessimistic overtones and suggested that fighting crime was not meant to be glamorous or rewarding but necessary. Those involved with policing were aware of the futility of crime fighting and policing but were still resigned to their jobs. “In a situation of rampant corruption and social breakdown, there seems to be little point in observing the niceties of the law: the police are fighting an impossible war and know it” (Buxton, 1990, p. 134). Even with the negative viewpoint of the show, police work was still shown as worthwhile if one person could be saved from a life of crime. Kojak was an individual against a backdrop of an indifferent police system. Police and criminals were portrayed as separate classes of humans. In spite of that portrayal, the show represented a more individualistic approach to understanding criminals as a product of circumstance (Buxton, 1990).
In the 1970’s, *Kojak* was the show that sent the message that fighting crime was an impossible battle and police officers had to do whatever was necessary, including breaking the law. The character of Kojak was an individual who recognized the futility of fighting crime but still wanted to bring in suspects and make arrests. He was not a model police officer but he was getting the job done. The show portrayed the police system as indifferent and passive. The desire to fight crime had to come from the individual officers rather than from the police organization.

### 3.4 Crime Dramas of the 1980s

Legal fiction of the 1980s was bleak and mirrored a loss of faith in American institutions (Lenz, 2003). This decade was characterized by the conservative presidency of Ronald Reagan, a leader more concerned with economic than social issues (Reeves, 2000). Police shows during the 1980s reflected changes in widely held opinions. *Hill Street Blues* first aired during the week of President Reagan’s inauguration (Davis et al., 2001).

During the 1980s, there was an increase in violent and juvenile violent crime. One out of every sixty-nine Americans was involved in the corrections system by 1989. One out of every three hundred and sixty four was in prison, 296,000 in local jails, 362,000 on parole and 2.4 million on probation (Reeves, 2000, p. 244). A large percentage of these crimes were drug related and First Lady Nancy Reagan spearheaded the war on drugs with the slogan ‘just say no’ (Reeves, 2000).

The war on drugs also created increased imprisonment for non-violent crimes, which led to a massive increase in incarceration. American prisons became full of drug offenders (Kieso, 2005). In 1988, the mandatory minimum for possession of ‘crack’ cocaine was increased to five years. During this era of tough on crime between 1980 and 1988 drug offenders rose from 8% to 26% in state and federal prisons (Kieso, 2005).
At this time, numerous national news agencies were purchased by large corporations whose primary concern was lowering cost and increasing profits. The focus of the news also shifted to an increased spotlight on domestic and street crimes. “... [A]s newscasts became more focused on ‘entertaining’, criminals have been typically shown as more sinister or evil and heroes as more innocent and likeable” (Kieso, 2005, p. 31). Politicians' used tough on crime rhetoric as a political platform, targeted social programs and criminalized the poor. Crimes committed by the poor were considered their own fault and less forgivable. Crimes that went unpunished were considered to be enabling criminal behaviour and this attitude increased support for punitive penalties.

This period saw the proposition of bills that were designed to make the penal code more punitive, with the belief that an increase in punishment would correspond with a decrease in crime. Congress passed the Justice Assistance Act in 1984 that provided block grants to state and local law enforcement to assist in enforcing drug laws (Davey, 1995). In 1982, President Reagan created The Office for Victims of Crime in the Justice Department. This was a direct result of the media giving increased coverage and exposure to victims of crime.

The criminal justice system is based on the principle that when a crime is committed it is against ‘the state’ and ‘the state’ can proceed with criminal charges. The overall goal is the protection of society rather than the protection of victims. The system is designed this way to prevent and discourage victims from taking revenge or promoting vigilante justice (Kieso, 2005). These changes in punitive attitudes were then reflected in the crime dramas of the decade.

3.4.1 Hill Street Blues (1981 – 1987)

*Hill Street Blues* premiered on NBC as the first post-liberal police drama program (Davis et al, 2001). The show utilized complex storylines and featured multiple characters and open ended plots (Stark, 1997). In order to achieve an authentic feel, handheld cameras and overlapping dialogue were introduced. The show “…had a gritty, darkish, and even ‘messy’ look and sound” (Stark, 1997, p.
The show was aimed at upscale viewers by striving for engagement rather than escapist television. The 13 characters were less stereotypical and featured all genders and races with an average age above 35, which was higher than the norm at the time (Stark, 1997).

The show centred around the squad room with Sergeant Esterhaus conducting the morning call to order. Each episode he instructed his officers to ‘be careful out there’. Ethical police dilemmas were highlighted and were often out of the headlines. The show set out to explore the issue of male police officers in an age of feminism through its storylines (Stark, 1997). Hill Street Blues was similar to old Sherlock Homes story lines. Stories “...that illustrate the contrast between a violent underclass and a group of professionals trying to manage the damage” (Spark, 1997, p. 239). This concept has been a consistent theme in television crime dramas. The idea is that that crime is unrelenting and even if the police are working at full capacity, their efforts only have the ability to marginally decrease crime.

Prior to the 1980s, many crime dramas portrayed police officers as fulfilling the additional role of social workers. Hill Street Blues shifted that perspective where police officers were no longer social workers because there was no longer any hope of improving the human condition. The only hope remaining for those in the legal profession was an uphill battle and an attempt to maintain order against crime (Snauffer, 2006).

The show embraced certain aspects of Reaganism; it was critical of liberals and fearful of multiculturalism. Throughout the show, the theme of breakdown was present. There were broken phones, toilets, squad cars, police officers and the criminal justice system (Davis et al, 2001). The show had a reactionary message where “...chaos and purposeless violence that can be contained only by the assertion of repressive counter violence” (Davis et al, 2001, p 108).

Hill Street Blues was set in an unnamed urban city that was dealing with gangs, organized crime and street crime. It was the “...first television cop series
to show that the reality of violent street crime had eroded liberal idealism, particularly its faith in law (rather than violence), rehab and reason” (Lenz, 2003, p 140). The program was not light viewing but serious, heavy entertainment.

The show relied greatly on war symbolism and metaphors. The police officers did not win all cases and the battle with crime was uncertain. The city was an urban war zone with undercover police officers battling in guerrilla warfare. While they could not stop warring gangs, at the very least they could assist in negotiating a truce. The officers were shown to struggle with maintaining social order (Lenz, 2003). The officers are not indestructible heroes but fallible human beings dealing with the fall out of crime on a daily basis. The officers are “...exposed to temptations and sometimes succumb to them. Corruption, human weakness, and errors of judgement are all part of the story” (Lenz, 2003, p. 141).

The model of the police officer as hero shifted and officers were now being shown as human beings who were handling major crimes to the best of their abilities.

3.4.2 Miami Vice (1984 – 1989)

*Miami Vice*, originally titled MTV cops, “...took the traditional police show and turned it into a kind of weekly hour-long rock video replete with musical sound track, jagged narrative, emphasis on stylized violence, and sharp visuals” (Stark, 1997). The police officers traded in traditional uniforms for Italian designer suits, jackets over t-shirts and pleated pants. The show was heavily influenced by the introduction of MTV (music television). These influences included heightened sensation and feeling over thought and ‘semiotic pornography’ (Stark, 1997).

This show incorporated neurophysiological research conducted by the University of Michigan Communication Tech Lab. That research determined that American viewers were often distracted by complex storylines in television programs. To increase viewers’ visual and auditory stimulation the plot was reduced while visual and aesthetics were emphasized with colour and music.
This formula coincided with rise of consumerism and MTV in the United States during the 1980s (Buxton, 1990).

...The 1980s cop makes a lonely stand in a world in which virtually all social bonding has been torn to shreds by a voracious, cynical individualism, the consequence of the very consumption values the series seeks, on at least one level, to uphold (Buxton, 1990, p. 143).

*Miami Vice* was similar to *Starsky and Hutch* in its viewpoint of crime. Crime was omnipresent and the police had a very limited ability to combat it in any meaningful way. The police officers were shown as leading double lives through undercover work. The show expressed the idea that the only way to make an impact on crime was to be completely immersed in it and evoke change from the inside out (Buxton, 1990). The show chose to explain crime and poverty in moral rather than sociological terms. *Miami Vice* shied away from making bold statements about corruption, breakdown and social disorder (Buxton, 1990).

While the late 1960s and 1970s touched on issues concerning the ineffectiveness of policing and the criminal justice system, crime dramas in the 1980s dealt with those issues directly. This was an era of a loss of hope and faith in major American institutions. Police were no longer seen as helping criminals because criminals were considered beyond help. The crime dramas of the decade were bleak and gritty focusing on the uphill battle of fighting crime. *Hill Street Blues* emphasized the values of conservatives by establishing that liberalism was a misguided approach for handling criminal activity. The idea of crime as war was dominant in this show because, for the first time, the police did not solve all of their cases or win them in court. The officers were shown as attempting to maintain social order against a world of gangs and violent crime. The criminal justice system is now shown to be fallible and officers are not indestructible.

*Miami Vice*, again reflected the notion that police officers stand alone against a world of crime where people no longer have any compassion or feelings towards their fellow man. Given this backdrop, anyone who is still
committed to fighting crime is seen as valiant and heroic. The characters are people who have not given up hope in a hopeless world and believe that it is still worth fighting for justice.

3.5 Crime Dramas of the 1990s

The 1990s ushered in a new era of how networks formatted programs. The self-contained story on a weekly basis was replaced with storylines played out over a longer period. The characters and storylines were able to evolve over many episodes or even the whole season (Snauffer, 2006).

The 1990s marked a decade that incorporated the formulaic approach first seen in *Dragnet* and many of the issues explored during the 1980s about a flawed or corrupt system. *Law and Order*, one of the most influential shows to emerge from this decade, is significant for many reasons. The police officers and lawyers are shown as being moral and ethical against a sometimes corrupt system. Despite the desire to fight crime, the officers do not bend the rules but uphold them. There is co-operation shown between the different branches of the legal system. This show is a shift from hopeless to hopeful. While the lawyers may not win every case, they are making positive steps to combat crime in a meaningful way.

3.5.1 Law and Order (1990 -)

*Law and Order* is currently the longest running crime drama on television. Each episode begins with a voice over describing the two branches of the criminal justice system: the police representing the law and the courts representing order. The audience follows the detectives for the first half of the show and the prosecutors for the remaining half (Davis et al, 2001).

According to Davis et al (2001), the show has a very specific formula of an introductory tease or prologue with four acts and an epilogue. In the first and second acts, the detectives follow clues that lead them to a suspect. During Act
3, the assistant district attorney builds the case. Act 4 takes place in the courtroom during the trial. The epilogue occurs in the district attorney’s office where closure to the moral dilemma of the show is presented (Davis et al, 2001).

*Law and Order* does not use regular cast members who consistently remain on the show. Actors have come in and out of the program. The real stars of the show are New York City and the criminal justice system (Snauffer, 2006). “Law and Order succeeds in dissecting, analyzing, exposing, and manipulating the system for better or worse – with viewers at home sitting in ultimate judgement” (Snauffer, 2006, p. 160). The personal lives of the characters are not extensively explored. The characters have no families or friends outside of the professional relationships they maintain at work. These police officers and prosecutors are not friends who spend time together outside of the office (Snauffer, 2006).

The show presented a different world view than other 1990 police dramas. *Law and Order* featured good police officers who act with restraint and are, mostly, free from corruption. The show “…allows audiences to examine the intellectual side of contemporary crime without emotional trauma or cynicism” (Davis et al, 2001, p. 129).

The hallmark of *Law & Order* is its practice of recasting news as fiction. Knotty moral and legal issues are “ripped from the headlines” by executive producer Dick Wolf, who regards the show as a chronicle of our times. Each week, New York City cops and district attorneys use straightforward linear detective work and the judicial process to explore the ambiguities of human responsibility and the flaws of the legal system (Davis et al, 2001, p 127).

*Law and Order* does not specifically promote one style (conservative crime control) over another (liberal due process). The show features the established pattern that was so successful on *Dragnet* of documentary style realism. The show focuses on substance over style by presenting complex legal matters. Unlike other programs at the time, *Law and Order* did not rely on shock value. *Hill Street Blues* brought the gritty urban crime stories to a middle class audience and *NYPD Blue* used coarse language, sexual content and nudity. *Law and
Order tells complicated stories that hold the audience’s interest and are informative (Lenz, 2003).

The characters on the program regularly interact with other justice branches including Federal law enforcement, U.S. attorneys, defence attorneys, trial and appellate court judges, correctional officers and jurors. “The storylines show why criminal justice officials are not always reading from the same page, why their interests diverge” (Lenz, 2003, p. 157). The show readily acknowledges injustices and the struggle of working within the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system is shown as disjointed rather than a monolithic organization (Lenz, 2003).

The show features both the informal cooperation of the different criminal justice branches and the formal conflict of courtrooms, pre-trial and cross-examination of witnesses. Public defenders and private defence attorneys need to get along with the prosecutors. The show advocates that it is not always in the best interest of justice to be adversarial all the time. The storylines highlight the relationship between the legal and political systems. In the United States, prosecutors are elected or appointed (Lenz, 2003). On Law and Order, police officers enforce the law but use discretion is how to apply it. The show demonstrates that individual rights are not absolute. Legal procedures are in place to protect substantive rights (Lenz, 2003).

3.5.2 NYPD Blue (1993 – 2005)

NYPD Blue further explored the themes of Miami Vice. The show examined the “...distrust of institutions, resentment of authority, heightened awareness of life’s ambiguities, the absence of a coherent social vision...” (Davis et al, 2001, p. 109). Dennis Franz played Detective Andy Sipowicz a “...reformed alcoholic who seeks to exorcise his own demons by combating the contagion of urban evil” (Davis et al, 2001, p. 109). He is a flawed man who is divorced and survived the murder of his son and second wife. Sipowicz takes crimes very
personally. He intimidates suspects and is not worried about civil liberties (Davis et al, 2001).

The show reflects a class hierarchy where criminals are considered to be ‘scumbags’. The officers on the show “...exude class hatred, disgust, a loathing of the rot and refuse of urban chaos” (Davis et al, 2001, p. 110). There is an undertone of cynicism. Crimes often go unsolved, witnesses will not come forward and suspects are often cocky. Despite the officers’ best efforts, sometimes there is no justice (Davis et al, 2001).

In the opening scene of the show, a worn down building is imploded but never replaced. The scene is symbolic for the human deterioration surrounding the police officers in New York. The show focuses on the personal lives of the police officers rather than the police work. The majority of the murders are solved within the first forty minutes of the program. The major theme of the show is “...maintaining sanity and personal integrity in a world gone awry...” (Davis et al, 2001, p. 110). The premise of crime creating disorder and chaos and the police attempting to put the world back to rights has been a consistent message throughout the decades.

While *Law and Order* was a step towards a more positive view of the criminal justice system, *NYPD Blue* was similar to *Miami Vice* in its desolate world view. The character of Andy Sipowicz is a bitter and cynical police officer who represents the lone man against an army of criminals. Both the society and the system are seen as flawed to the point that this officer will break the rules and intimidate suspects. A breakdown in the overall system is being shown.

### 3.6 Crime Dramas of the 2000s

While the decade of the 2000s has not yet concluded, the first portion of this period has been marked by the politics of President Bush, events of September 11th, 2001 and the war on terror. The war on terror has replaced previous conceptual wars including the war on drugs, the war on crime and the war on poverty. Howell (2006) argues that it is not feasible to win a war against a
concept specifically because in a war against a concept it is impossible to know whom people are fighting and what weapons should be used. Howell (2006) also states that President Bush has confused the term terrorism with the terms revolution, anarchy, war and ethnic conflict.

President Bush was inaugurated on January 20th, 2001. His time in office was immediately challenged by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. The events of September 11th were devastating and traumatic for the United States, and what followed was a climate of fear and hatred, us vs. them and American vs. Un-American. The war on terror included the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover all of the details concerning September 11th, the war on Iraq and the war on terror. It is relevant to mention these events in order to appreciate the political and cultural climate that influenced the media at this time.

The war on terror would not have been successful without the use of the media. Media were instrumental in promoting fear generation and repeatedly exposing the public to images related to terrorism. Similar to the climate in the United States during the anti-communism years, those of Arab descent were all grouped together as potential terrorists.

On January 20th, 2009 Barack Obama was inaugurated and became the first Black president of the United States. After 8 years of President Bush and the Republican party, many are hopeful that a new democratic president will have significant effects on the United States and the global community.

3.6.1 CSI (2000 - )

CBS introduced CSI as a new take on the police drama show. The show is set in Las Vegas and follows a team of crime scene analysts who are not official members of the Las Vegas Police Department. The team must gather, preserve and analyze evidence. The show uses very realistic crime scenes including frequent autopsies (Snauffer, 2006). CSI ushered a new era of crime fighting where the weapons in the fight against crime were no longer solely guns but now
included forensic evidence. Previous crime dramas had provided the audience with an inside view of the workings of police stations and the courthouse. CSI took the public’s interest in crime and moved it in a new direction. While police officers and a criminal justice system can be flawed or corrupt, science does not lie. Audiences were now being educated about forensic science and shown that DNA evidence can be relevant and applicable in numerous criminal cases.

This show also serves to reinforce the criminal justice system by highlighting the special scientific tools and skills that the police have in their arsenal. With the use of DNA and fingerprinting, there is also increased support for punitive punishments. Scientific evidence is often considered more trustworthy than witness statements. Sentencing a person to a longer sentence seems justified when that person has been convicted with forensic evidence.

The senior member of the team is Gil Grissom. He is a forensic entomologist and therefore an atypical police hero. He has similar traits to Joe Friday of Dragnet. Grissom is dedicated, shows little emotion and has no personal life outside of the department. Grissom demonstrates that science is the most important tool to solving crime and often informs his subordinates to focus on the evidence rather than the people involved in the crimes (Snauffer, 2006).

The show utilises very advanced forensic technology although results of tests are often sped up to fit within the one hour of the program. The show created interest in scientific elements, which are featured alongside the personal dramas. CSI has contributed to an influx of interest in forensic science classes in colleges around the United States and Canada (Snauffer, 2006).

3.6.2 The Shield (2002 - )

The Shield premiered on the FX network in March of 2002. The show is set in the Farmington district of Los Angeles and is referred to as a war zone. The officers work out of a converted church that they call ‘The barn’. The show is centred around Det. Vic Mackay who leads the anti-gang team with neither regard nor respect for the niceties of the law. Det. Mackey will beat suspects into
submission and then force a confession. His methods are brutal but effective and other officers look the other way. Assistant Chief Ben Gilroy is Mackey’s main ally in the police department and protects him from being punished for stepping out of line. David Aceveda is the police captain who does not approve of Mackey’s tactics (Snauffer, 2006).

Critics of the show argued that it was morally reprehensible for its gratuitous depiction of violent behaviour. The belief is that viewers are becoming desensitized when it is the protagonists of the program who are the most violent. The audience is still expected to root for Mackey.

While these policemen go around murdering people, or setting them up to be murdered, beating confessions out of suspects, and participating in other illegal and immoral acts, viewers are supposedly expected to know better and to see them for what they really are (Snauffer, 2006, p. 213).

The violence on the show is a means to an end and therefore justifiable. This theme has been present in the many of the police dramas examined. Police officers are viewed as the last line of defence between criminals and average citizens. People are more forgiving of violence when it appears to be effective at controlling crime and maintaining social order.

The character of Sipowicz led the way for the character of Detective Vic Mackay of The Shield in 2002. Det. Mackay shares Sipowicz’s mentality that the city is a warzone and that officers have to use any skills or tools to fight crime. Mackay physically assaults suspects to garner confessions and the superior officers look the other way because of Mackay’s effectiveness. These two characters lay the groundwork that is necessary for understanding how a character like Dexter emerged. These first two characters pushed the boundaries for acceptable behaviour for capturing and securing a confession from a suspect. Sipowicz and Mackay were police officers who believed that the pursuit of justice was so important that it meant occasionally trampling over individual civil rights. Dexter’s character will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5 but it is worth highlighting the connection between these characters.
3.7 Emergence of New Genre of Crime Dramas

The above historical development of crime drama programs demonstrates that the trend within fictional crime dramas is to feature members of the justice system as the protagonists. While the storylines have changed over time, the essential features of the shows have remained. A crime has been committed and a branch of the criminal justice system must deal with that crime. The following three crime dramas approach the same issues but from a different perspective. The Sopranos, Weeds and Dexter all have a criminal as the main character. This is a marked shift from the programs of the past. Previously, shows may have explored criminality in varying depths. However at the end of the show it was still clear the criminal justice system represented 'good' while the criminals represented 'evil'.

One element of these new shows is the fact that they were originally aired on pay cable television as opposed to network television. This created a niche market that only subscribers could access. Home Box Office (HBO) was the first cable program service to distribute television via satellite. HBO debuted in November of 1975 as a subsidiary of the Time Inc. Media empire. As the demand for commercial free, high budget entertainment that was not available on regular broadcast television increased, many other pay cable networks were created. These included; Showtime (1978), The Movie Channel (1979), and Cinemax (1980) (Mullen, 1999).

These pay networks would regularly pick up series that had been rejected by other networks including sitcoms and made for television movies. Pay cable became known for its original television films, series and specials (Mullen, 1999). The following is a brief description of each of these news shows. A more detailed analysis will be provided in chapter six.
3.7.1 Weeds (2005 - )

The premise of Weeds is that a suburban soccer mom finds herself suddenly widowed with two sons and no job. She turns to drug dealing as a way to maintain the lifestyle that her family has become accustomed to. Nancy Botwin starts out as a minor marijuana dealer to people in her community but eventually branches out into growing her own product and larger distribution (Showtime, 2008).

Nancy’s neighbour, Celia Hodes, is a recent cancer survivor and the town gossip. She is calculating and manipulative. Celia appears to get pleasure out of torturing her husband and daughter. Doug Wilson is Nancy’s accountant and best customer. He is a daily marijuana smoker who joins in her grow operation and also works as an advisor on the city council. Andy Botwin is Nancy’s brother-in-law who moves in with the family after his brother, Judah Botwin, passes away. He is in full support of Nancy’s business, as he is also a regular marijuana smoker (Showtime, 2008).

3.7.2 Dexter (2006 - )

Dexter features Dexter Morgan, a blood spatter analyst for the Miami Police Department and, in his spare time, a serial killer. He is very charming and good looking but underneath his normal facade is a man who receives immense pleasure from killing and chopping people up. He carefully selects his victims, as he believes that he is conducting his own form of justice. He stalks and murders only those people who have fallen through the cracks of the justice system (Showtime, 2008).

Dexter keeps up the appearance of a normal life by having a girlfriend, Rita Bennett. Rita is a battered wife whose abusive ex-husband is now in prison. She is emotionally vulnerable and sexually disinterested. This suits Dexter very well because he does not have emotions and is not very interested in sex. Dexter’s adopted sister is Debra Morgan; she is a police officer with the Miami Police Department. She has no idea who Dexter truly is and turns to him for
support and advice. Sergeant Doakes is another police officer and he is the only one who actually suspects Dexter. Lieutenant Maria Laguerta is the resident dictator who shamelessly flirts with Dexter. She is often at the losing end of the police bureaucracy game (Showtime, 2008).

Working alongside Dexter is the other forensic expert Vincent Masuka. Masuka often adds comic relief with his dark and morbid sense of humour. Angel Batista is another homicide detective who works with Dexter and values his insight and help with cases. Harry Morgan is Dexter’s adopted father who has passed away. The audience is frequently introduced to Harry through flashbacks. Harry was a homicide detective and recognized Dexter’s murderous tendencies at an early age. He tried to shape and channel those tendencies into vigilante justice. He also taught Dexter how not to be caught (Showtime, 2008).

3.7.3 The Sopranos (1999 – 2007)

Tony Soprano is a family man who takes cares of his wife, Carmella, two children, Meadow and Anthony Junior, and his widowed mother. He is also the head of the DiMeo family New Jersey mob. The stress of his life begins to takes its toll on him and he begins to suffer from blackouts and anxiety attacks. As a result, he makes the difficult decision to see a psychiatrist. This is not an action that someone in his position would normally undertake since breaking the mob’s code of silence could get him killed (Home Box Office, 2008).

Tony operates a waste management business as his legitimate cover for his illegal enterprises. His wife, Carmella, enjoys the profits of his mob life - a large home, expensive jewellery, furs and power. However, she is a devout Catholic and has difficulty reconciling her religious faith with Tony’s work and his frequent infidelities. Anthony Junior is a poor student who prefers video games to studying. Tony wants him to eventually take over the family business. Meadow is a pretty, bright honours student. She has been aware of Tony’s illegal activities from an early age. Other characters in Tony’s life include his psychiatrist Dr.
Jennifer Melfi, his nephew Christopher and his uncle Corrado ‘Junior’
Soprano(Home Box Office, 2008).

3.8 Conclusion

Meiners (2007) suggests that the “…mass media actively works to cement our consent through managing our ignorance” (p. 25). This viewpoint articulates one of the key concerns regarding crime and the media. The concern is that the public no longer differentiates between crime news and crime entertainment because they are packaged and presented as one singular entity by the media. As discussed in chapter two, there are many parallels between the entertainment genre and crime, which offers a partial explanation for why the boundaries in this area have been blurred. The social construction position asserts that reality is subjective and consists of individual experiences. People utilize the media to create a reality of crime. “…[P]eople’s perceptions of reality based upon the mass media are sometimes more powerful than reality itself.” (Lowry et al, 2003, p. 61).

A consistent theme in crime media is also that the ends justify the means. When the overall goal is justice and safety, any measures taken are not only necessary but applauded. This theme is reinforced through the constant portrayal of crime at an individual level. The public is repeatedly shown that criminals are pathological and are inherently flawed rather than having crime explained within a larger, social framework. The notion that justice must prevail at any cost is demonstrated through both crime television dramas.

Surette (1998) succinctly describes the three main issues with the current state of mass media portrayals of crime information. The first is that the vast majority of crime coverage concerns violent or sensational cases, which are not proportional to official crime statistics. Second, explanations provided by the criminal justice system are often simplistic and individualistic. Finally, there is an overemphasis on violent crimes while personal risk factors and prevention
strategies are not adequately addressed, which leads to an increased fear of crime.
4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sampling Frame:

This project evolved out of an initial interest in the role of the media in perception and understanding of crime. Research conducted for the literature review drew from both criminological and communications research. Research on media and crime had previously focused on the news media and the portrayal of the criminal justice system. The new shows of Dexter, Weeds, and The Sopranos were interesting because they were markedly different by featuring a lead character who was a criminal.

The decision to watch only the first season of the three shows was influenced by a number of factors. First, Dexter and Weeds are still on the air while The Sopranos has concluded and it was not possible to study all three shows in their entirety. The first season of a program lays the groundwork for the show. The premise of the show is explored and the audience must develop relationships with the characters to continue watching. Project feasibility was also a consideration as watching the first three seasons of these shows entailed 30 hours of data collection. As well, the first season of a program can be considered the most ‘pure form’ of that show, operating with its original premise. The first season usually reflects the original visions of the show however, the audience may not be aware of changes being made to represent the influences of ratings, audience and reviews.

Television, as opposed to movies, was selected as the study medium due to a television series’ ability to have more established characters and storylines. Audiences have the ability to develop relationships with characters over a period of time.
Season one of *Dexter* (12 one hour episodes), Season one of *Weeds* (10 thirty minute episodes) and Season one of *The Sopranos* (13 one hour episodes) were canvassed. All of the programs are on DVD without commercials.

The selection of the three crime dramas originated with a specific interest in *Dexter*. Preliminary viewing of *Dexter* indicated that there were certain features to Dexter that made him more ‘loveable’ to an audience. One of these factors was his close relationship with his father and sister. Other shows were then sought which also had a lead criminal character, where family played an important role. It was noted that *Dexter* was becoming increasingly popular among individuals who were not necessarily interested in more mainstream, traditional crime dramas. The popularity of the show was also worthy of note due to its level of intensity. Fans may have liked the show but they ‘loved’ the character Dexter. This led to questions of how are audiences able to identify with a criminal character who is a serial killer? What is it about Dexter that makes him loveable?

This first line of questioning expanded into finding other television crime dramas that also featured a lead character who was well liked and engaged in criminal activities. While examining the *Dexter* webpage on the Showtime network website, it became apparent that *Weeds* was another program that fit the above description. The lead character, Nancy Botwin, was not a serial killer but she was a character who was dealing marijuana and the concept of the show was intriguing. Again, a character was openly breaking the law but was viewed in a positive light. *The Sopranos* was then selected as it fit within the working structure of recent fictional crime dramas that featured a criminal protagonist.

One important factor of all three shows was that, initially, they were only available on pay cable stations. These types of characters and shows would not have been possible on regular network television. By having these shows only available to a limited audience, it created a devoted fan base. While this research project is criminological in nature, the data being collected were media based and it was therefore necessary to examine relevant communication theories in order to design the current study. Prior to discussing the method employed for
this study, it is important to situate the current methods within a framework of other communication studies.

Weimann (2000) claims that in general, the most common approaches to studying mass media include research searching for the impact or effect of exposure to mass communication. One of the key reasons to conduct research within the realm of media is that “[t]he mass media are considered an important social agent, transmitting attitudes, perceptions, images, and beliefs” (Weimann, 2000, p. 15). Researchers in this field have established fundamental prerequisites for the establishment of a causal relationship of true media effect.

There are three basic requirements which include;

The presumed cause (e.g., a person watches a lot of violence on television or in films) and the presumed effect (e.g., a person becomes more aggressive or more frightened) must covary or change together in some verifiable way.

The presumed cause (e.g., viewing violence) must precede in time the presumed effect (e.g., engaging in aggression or being in panic).

Rival causes and explanations for these other causes (e.g., living in a volatile environment) must be controlled for and/or eliminated. (Weimann, 2000, p. 16).

This study’s primary concern was not to prove a causal relationship or specific effect of watching the shows. The study is more interested in why individuals would choose to watch these specific crime dramas and gain insight into the criminal characters.

The examination of prior research was useful in creating the current study. It was determined that it was more relevant to conduct an initial thematic inquiry as opposed to studying the impact or effect on viewers. The research questions created were based more on social context and influence. The creation and enforcement of these ‘rules’ have guided the research of social scientists within the field of mass communications. Researchers in this field have employed a variety of methodologies for exploring media effects. “Some use observation
whereas others conduct surveys, content analyses, or experiments” (Weimann, 2000). The current study can be classified as a thematic content analysis.

Weimann (2000) suggests that one of the most promising new areas of direction within media effects research “…lies in attempting to assess the role of mass communication in establishing, modifying, and reinforcing the meanings people share about the world around them” (p. 30). The meanings that are being challenged and shifted through these new crime dramas include widely held definitions of crime, criminals and the criminal justice system. As mentioned in chapter two, the media are an essential component of knowledge acquisition.

As discussed in chapter two, reality is largely a social construction that is influenced by the media. In order to gain an understanding of the impact of specific crime television dramas, it is essential to investigate the role that the media play in establishing knowledge surrounding crime and criminals.

The design of the current study was influenced by the concept of meaning theory which “…sees the meanings people hold as strongly influenced by their exposure to mass communication” (Weimann, 2000, p. 30). The key component of this theory “…is that the constant flow of subjective interpretations we receive from the media and personal communication constitutes the world to which we adjust” (p 31). Meaning theory describes subjective definitions of crime and interpretation of reality as influenced by outside (media) factors.

There are four basic stages in the process of learning meaning from the media:

Meaning is linked to a label (a language symbol, such as a word, or some pattern of symbols) by a written, audio, or screen presentation describing an object, event, or situation.

The new crime dramas are a fictionalized account of plausible, real world criminal activity. Serial killers, drug dealers and the mafia do exist. The new shows have taken these real world phenomena and approached their presentation from a unique angle.
A member of the audience perceives the portrayal and undergoes some change in his or her personal interpretation of the meaning of the label. The individual’s subjective meanings may then shape behaviour toward the object, event, or situation.

The perception of the portrayal of crime and criminal characters leads to a shift in personal meaning. The shows shift the paradigm of who is a criminal. As well, they break the traditional presentation (as described in chapter three) of criminals being non-white, poor or part of a social underclass. This study represents the desire to investigate if and how the shows affect people’s attitudes towards crime.

More often, the individual communicates with others using the new or revised meaning. In this interpersonal communication, the revised meaning is further shaped and reshaped until the interacting parties hold parallel (shared) interpretations, which gradually become cultural conventions of meaning.

When meanings change for an individual, that individual will communicate the revised meanings to peers. Peers also influence knowledge acquisition. These new shows contribute to the discourse about crime and criminals among viewers.

As a result, individual behaviour toward objects, situations, or events is guided by the meanings people hold, either individually or collectively, toward them (Weimann, 2000, p. 32).

The shows may change attitudes towards certain crimes or the culpability of certain criminals. The established meaning theory described by Weimann (2000) was helpful in creating the thematic content analysis.

Through the historical development of crime dramas, a pattern of police and criminal portrayal has been demonstrated. Traditionally, dramatic programs in the crime genre have, in varying degrees, focused almost exclusively on the viewpoint of the criminal justice system. The screen time that was devoted to criminals was limited and one-dimensional. In the last decade, a shift has taken place where certain dramatic programs have chosen to break away from the conventional depiction of criminals and devoted entire programs to the
exploration of the lives of specific criminals. This change, while not an entire paradigm shift, opens up many lines of inquiry worthy of research.

The specific research questions to be explored are:

1. Can criminological theories be used/applied to understand the characters on the shows?
2. Are there identifiable components that make deviance interesting and attractive to the audience?
3. Are criminals on these shows seen as more or less morally blameworthy? (victimology)
4. Why have these shows emerged at this particular point in time?
5. What do these shows demonstrate about popular culture’s ideas about criminality?

4.2 Research Focus

The purpose of the current study is to conduct an in-depth examination of three television dramas, which focus on the lives of individuals involved in criminal activities, in order to demonstrate that a shift has occurred in the portrayal of criminal characters. What differentiates these shows from the more traditional criminal dramas (as discussed in chapter three) is that the protagonists are criminals and the audience is expected to both identify and sympathize with these characters. The characters are humanized because they are shown to be fallible but also likeable.

A case study is defined as “…an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection” (Creswell, 1998, p.61). This context of the case “…involves situating the case within its setting, which may be…the social, historical and/or economic setting for the case” (Creswell, 1998, p.61). Each episode of the three different television series will be considered one case. The collection of cases together to create
one season constitutes the case study. The context will also be examined when attempting to ascertain why these shows have emerged at this time.

This research will be both generative and explanatory. Explanatory research attempts to uncover the reasons for or relationship between what already exists. The context in which a phenomenon occurs is also relevant to this type of research, (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Explanatory research all examines “…factors or influences that underlie a particular attitude, belief or perception” (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 28).

Generative research is designed to aid in the creation of theories. It proposes new methods of inquiry to understand social phenomena. It is also useful for developing hypotheses about “…the nature of the social world and how it operates” (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 30). This study seeks to explore how popular culture is shaped by current media.

4.3 Research Design

The present study is based on the concept of the content analysis. Berg (2004) defines content analysis as the interaction of two processes “…specification of the content characteristics (basic content elements) being examined and application of explicit rules for identifying and recording these characteristics” (p. 275). Deacon et al (1999) also define a content analysis as “a method that aims to produce a ‘big picture’ (delineating trends, patterns and absences over large aggregates of texts) it is well suited to dealing with the ‘massness’ of the mass media…” (p. 117). These two definitions of the content analysis were instrumental in determining an appropriate method for analyzing the television programs.

4.3.1 Thematic Analysis Categories

A thematic analysis code sheet was constructed based on the literature reviewed, as well as the work of Davis et al (2001). Davis (et al,2001) state that
there is no one specific method for analyzing television. The method selected for this project was influenced by the “worksheet for analyzing and interpreting television ‘texts’” by Davis et al (2001, Appendix B). The original worksheet was found to be primarily sociological in nature and needed to be adapted in order to achieve a clearer criminological focus.

The thematic categories were developed with inductive and deductive approaches. Inductive is defined as the immersion of oneself “...in the documents (that is, the various messages) in order to identify the dimensions or themes that seem meaningful to the producers of each message” (Berg, 2004, p. 272-273).

Preliminary viewing of the television programs shaped the initial research and literature review. Deductive research is defined as

...[I]nsights and general questions about research derived from previous experience with the study phenomena. This may represent personal experiences, scholarly experience (having read about it), or previous research undertaken to examine the matter. (Berg, 2004, p. 273)

Through the use of both communications and criminological theories, the following themes were developed.

**Punitiveness**

This category was developed based on the research concerning entertainment and enjoyment. As discussed by Raney (2004), a key component of pleasure when viewing media is that a viewer feels a sense of enjoyment when a liked character triumphs over adversity. As well, audiences have the desire to see on-screen conflicts resolved (Bryant and Miron, 2002). The following questions were used to ascertain the degree of punishment that the characters received in an episode

1. How are characters punished (if at all) by legal means (police, security)?
2. How are characters punished by extra-legal means (family or friends)?

**Vigilantism**
Vigilantism is defined as “...an individual acting alone or a group acting together to take the law into their own hands to dispense justice without regard for due process of law” (Lenz, 2003, p. 38). This theme was developed based on the knowledge that in each of the series, the main characters are acting outside of the law and are making decisions which could be viewed as vigilantism.

1. Are there examples of characters taking the law into their own hand
2. What motivations do characters have for taking law into their own hands

**Main character portrayal**

This category explores how the audience learns about the character

1. How is the main character depicted?
2. Is the character portrayed as a victim?
3. What is the audience told about other victims?

**Family Dynamics**

Closely linked with character portrayal are family dynamics that explore the significant familial relationships within the character’s life.

1. What kind of family does the character have?
2. How does the character relate to family members?

**Normalcy**

Given that the three main characters are criminals who are operating and avoiding detection, there are certain elements which allow/assist them in continuing to avoid being caught. This category was developed based on the concept of conformity as described by Merton’s strain theory

1. How well do the main characters conform to societal norms and expectations?
The above themes were then placed in a table to create a code sheet (Appendix 1). The code sheet was specifically designed for use with the three television dramas selected by the researcher.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data for this study were collected by watching each episode and recording specific examples that exemplified a theme. The examples were then combined to answer the sub-questions of the thematic categories. The themes were used as a guideline for finding specific scenarios, incidents, or situations which illustrated that theme. The ‘Family’ theme was broken down into specific relationships with family members and the influence of that relationship on the character. Quotes were included to demonstrate the main features of each relationship. The themes are used to ascertain how an audience could develop positive relationship with criminal characters.

4.4.1 Advantages and Disadvantages

This project is an in-depth examination of the themes related to each television show. This study is illustrative in nature rather than representative. Only three shows were selected for evaluation in order to gain a deeper understanding of the main research questions. The thematic content analysis was determined to be the most appropriate method for answering the outlined research questions. The shows were then treated as individual case studies.

One of the main disadvantages with the research method is the subjective nature of the thematic analysis. The thematic categories and the subsequent data collected were based solely on the interpretations of one researcher’s point of view. The analysis is also theoretical in nature and was not based on specific audience input.
5: DISCUSSION/RESULTS

This chapter is divided first by television series and then by thematic categories. The opening sequence for each series is briefly described. Although certain themes were more prominent than others, examples of each theme for all the shows are provided.

5.1 Episode Theme Summaries: Dexter

5.1.1 Opening Scene

The entire opening scene centres on blood. In the show’s title, the word Dexter is shown to be bleeding with blood spatter around it. The scene opens with a shot of Dexter’s arm as he is lying in bed. A mosquito lands on his arm and is promptly squished leaving a small bloodstain. Dexter’s mischievous grin can be seen in the background. The camera angle is an extreme close up of Dexter shaving. He cuts himself and the blood drops into the sink, in contrast to the white porcelain. A tissue is applied to the cut and the blood is seen seeping through the paper. The scene shifts to a knife cutting through flesh. Up close it is not immediately clear that Dexter is cutting a ham steak rather than a person. He also cooks eggs and eats them with Tabasco sauce which, at a close angle, looks like blood. He slices into a blood orange to make fresh squeezed orange juice. The orange rind takes on a menacing look when viewed at such a close proximity. He flosses showing the string wrapped tightly around his fingers cutting off the circulation. When he finally puts on his t-shirt he holds the cloth over his face for an extra second as though he were being smothered.
## 5.1.2 Character Portrayal

Dexter is, initially, portrayed as an individual incapable of emotions and with a propensity for murder. A person who is devoid of emotions is often referred to as a psychopath. Hare (1999) notes that psychopaths "...see themselves as the centre of the universe, as superior beings who are justified in living according to their own rules" (p. 38). For the first part of the series, this definition fits Dexter. Dexter lives by rules that were created, in the beginning, by his adopted father Harry Morgan. In order for the audience to accept the character of Dexter, it is easier to view him as a psychopathic killer. This concept of Dexter as more than the straightforward classification of psychopath is explored in the latter half of the season.

In some respects, Dexter’s commentary through his internal dialogue makes significant revelations about social customs and human relationships. His morbid sense of humour often illuminates the oddity of human interactions. Dexter, above any other goal, seeks to be normal and fit into society. He goes to great lengths to maintain the outward appearance of a ‘regular’ person.

While initially Dexter is portrayed as a heartless psychopathic killer, this portrayal is shifted when the audience learns that Dexter witnessed his mother’s murder when he was a young boy. Dexter’s character shifts from a person with an unrelenting urge to kill to an individual who may have been traumatised at a young age and is discovering repressed memories.

A particularly bloody crime scene triggers memories for Dexter and he realizes that he watched his mother die. While not everyone has such horrific or traumatic memories in their past, Dexter is starting to be seen as vulnerable because he is forced to face a difficult memory. The question of the influence of nature vs. nurture is brought forward as Dexter is shown to be, potentially, a victim of circumstances. He knows now that he witnessed the brutal murder of his mother and that knowledge is affecting his ability to work and concentrate. This is very unfamiliar to Dexter who, usually, feels nothing.
Dexter: “I’m trapped in the clutches of a memory...[M]y mother was murdered before my eyes” (Truth Be Told, 10/12/06).

Dexter learns of the shipping yard massacre that took place in a cargo container in 1973. His mother was butchered with a chain saw by rival drug dealers and Dexter was left in the container for two days.

Dexter: “No wonder I’ve felt so disconnected my entire life. If I did have emotions, I’d have to feel this” (Truth Be Told, 10/12/06).

Now the perception of who Dexter is has shifted. He is no longer simply a killer devoid of emotions or a psychopath but the victim of an extremely traumatic event. Was Dexter born a killer or did witnessing a murder at such a young age create blood lust and a desire to kill?

Dexter: “I know where dearly, disturbed Dexter was born. Born free of all that’s human” (Truth Be Told, 10/12/06).

5.1.3 Punitiveness

Given that Dexter works for the Miami Police Department, he has the ability to gain access to valuable resources and case files. His profession as a blood spatter analyst allows him to be a superior criminal. His profession also gives him some leeway in terms of having morbid interests.

Dexter take pride in his ability to avoid being caught or even suspected of criminal activity. His confidence disappears during the episode Return to Sender when a young boy is discovered in the trunk of a car in the junk yard where Dexter has murdered two victims. The young boy begins working with a sketch artist and Dexter believes that it is only a matter of time before he is caught.

Dexter: “Eventually most serial killers get caught. There’s no retirement plan” (Return to Sender, 05/11/06).

His anxiety continues to mount throughout the episode

Dexter: “My little world of lies is crumbling around me...The noose is tightening” (Return to Sender, 05/11/06).
In response, he makes the difficult decision to throw all of his tools and supplies that he uses overboard from his boat. He realizes that he has to let go of this part of him since the cost of being apprehended is not worth the risk anymore. Although he is trying to purge all of the items from his ‘killing kit’, he is unable to part with his blood slide collection. At the conclusion of the episode, the sketch that the young boy has created with the sketch artist reveals a picture of Jesus Christ.

Dexter: “I barely escaped being caught this time. My days are numbered” (Return to Sender, 05/11/06).

5.1.4 Vigilantism

The concept of vigilante justice is the major theme that underscores the entire series. The rules that Dexter follows are described as the ‘Code of Harry’.

Harry: “It’s not about retaliation. It’s not about vengeance. It’s about balancing the books. It’s about something deep inside...[T]he world can always be set right” (Crocodile, 08/10/06).

Harry has instilled a set of moral and ethical rules for Dexter to follow because Dexter does not innately possess them. The audience is able to identify with Dexter because he is only killing people who are shown to deserve to die. It is not murder, according to Dexter, but rather taking out the trash.

The tone for the series is set in the first episode, Dexter, when Harry tells Dexter

Harry: “Son, there are people out there who do really bad things. Terrible people and the police can’t catch them all” (Dexter, 01/10/06).

Dexter believes that he is handing out his own style of justice by, initially, going after unsolved cases. In Dexter, in reference to Dexter’s second murder victim (Jaime Joworski), Dexter describes how Joworski’s laywer was able to get his client’s case dismissed due to a faulty search warrant.

Dexter: “Good thing I don’t bother with them” (Dexter, 01/10/06).
Dexter: “The police never got enough evidence for a search warrant but I don’t need permission to keep an eye on this guy” (*Dexter*, 01/10/06).

The above statements very clearly take aim at the public’s belief that the criminal justice system is often too lenient with criminals. Dexter is taking the law into his own hands by catching and punishing an individual who is portrayed as getting off the hook for his crime. The form of justice that Dexter employs entails picking up where the police left off, because he does not have to follow police procedural rules. His methods are often highlighted as being far more effective than the police department’s efforts. The series plays into the attitude that the world would often be a better place without certain people or criminals. Despite the fact that Dexter is a serial murderer, he still appears to be the ‘good guy’ or hero in the situation, especially in comparison to his selected victims.

### 5.1.5 Family

In spite of Dexter’s self-proclaimed lack of emotions, family plays a very significant role in his life. Both his adopted family of Harry and Debra and his girlfriend Rita and her children Cody and Astor are important to him.

#### 5.1.5.1 Dexter and Harry

The most influential and central relationship in Dexter’s life has been with his adopted father Harry. In *Dexter* (01/10/06), the audience learns that Dexter as a young boy began killing small animals and a neighbourhood dog. Dexter turns to his father to gain insight into why has the urge to kill. He is aware that these are not normal impulses and initially directs his desire to kill towards animals. The killing of animals in childhood is associated with conduct disorder. This behaviour is also characteristic of many well known serial killers, including Jeffrey Dahmer, whom the audience may be familiar with since his crimes are widely publicized.
Harry sets out on a mission to both hone Dexter’s killing skills but also to teach him how to avoid detection. Part of his lessons include hunting and learning about firearms. The ‘Code of Harry’ is the only set of rules that Dexter follows. He has complete faith and trust in Harry. Harry seems to be making the best of a difficult situation. It also raises the question of whether or not other fathers would help their sons become killers or seek psychological help. The audience sees that trust begin to falter and Dexter starting to question himself in the episode *Father Knows Best* (26/11/06).

Dexter is informed that he is the biological son of Joseph Driscoll and his body is awaiting cremation in Date City, Florida. Driscoll had appointed Dexter as his next of kin. When they were children, Harry told Dexter and Debra that Dexter’s biological parents had died before he had come to live with them. Up until this point in his life, Dexter has had no reason to believe otherwise. While viewing the body in the morgue, Dexter takes a blood sample from Driscoll and himself to confirm their genetic connection. Dexter is having a hard time trying to understand why his father (Harry) would lie to him.

During this episode, the audience is shown flashbacks to a young Dexter and his parents in the hospital. Dexter has been in an accident and his parents are discussing a problem about his blood. He has a very rare blood type AB and the hospital needs a blood donation before going ahead with life saving surgery for Dexter. He recovers from the surgery and makes a card for the anonymous blood donor. Dexter then finds that same card among Driscoll’s possessions confirming Harry’s knowledge of Driscoll’s existence.

Dexter: “I had a father other than Harry...I built my life on Harry’s code...you never truly can know someone” (*Father Knows Best*, 26/11/06).

### 5.1.5.2 Dexter and Debra

Debra Morgan is Dexter’s adopted sister. She is a police officer with the Miami Metro Police. At the series opener, she is working in the vice unit but is desperate to become a homicide detective. Debra implicitly trusts Dexter and
relies on his unique perspective and ‘hunches’ about cases. Dexter is very supportive and encouraging towards her.

Dexter: “If I could have feelings, I’d have them for Deb” (Dexter, 01/10/06).

She is often trying to get Dexter to open up and talk to her.

Debra: “Why don’t we ever talk brother – sister stuff?” (Crocodile, 08/10/06)

Given that both Dexter and Debra were raised by a police officer and that they both work for the police department, the topics of conversation that they have are fitting while in any other situation they would seem morbid or bizarre.

5.1.5.3  **Dexter and Rudy Cooper(aka Brian Moser/Ice Truck Killer)**

The audience is introduced to the police investigation of the Ice Truck Killer (ITK) in the premiere episode (Dexter, 01/10/06). The crime scene features a dismembered body in an empty swimming pool that has been completely drained of blood and bodily fluids. When Dexter returns home from the crime scene, he finds a Barbie doll head stuck to his freezer door and the body of the doll chopped up and tied with ribbons inside. Dexter is delighted by this discovery.

Dexter: “This is a friendly message like ‘hey wanna play? And yes I wanna play. I really, really do” (Dexter, 01/10/06)

From the first episode of the series, Dexter and the ITK have a very personal connection.

Dexter: “I think he’s trying to impress me and it’s working...he’s thinking tag Dexter. You’re it” (Crocodile, 08/10/06).

In the following episode, Shrink Wrap, Dexter reaches out to the ITK in the hopes that he can re-connect with him. Dexter posts an ad on Craigslist (a free online classified system) under the section ‘missed connections’:

Dexter’s ad” Dear Ken, I'm in pieces. Why the cold shoulder? Love Barbie (Shrink Wrap, 19/11/06).
Rudy Cooper has now been revealed to the audience as the ITK and he replies to Dexter’s ad.

   Rudy’s ad: “Barbie. Be patient. One day we’ll share a cold one. Ken” (Shrink Wrap, 19/11/06).

After conducting a small investigation of his own, Dexter learns the identity of the ITK in Truth be Told. It is revealed that the ITK is actually Brian Moser, Dexter’s biological brother

   Brian Moser: “...a real brother, none of this foster bullshit” (Born Free, 17/12/06).

Dexter realizes that Brian was also in the shipping container when Harry rescued him.

   Brian Moser: “You were a little bird with a broken wing not a fucked up kid” (Born Free, 17/12/06).

   Brian tells Dexter that he spent all of his time locked up in mental institutions while Dexter was adopted into a loving family. This distinction is very significant because it speaks to the issue of nature vs. nurture. Both Dexter and Brian were in the same situation, being left in a shipping container after watching their mother’s murder, and they both became serial killers. The key difference between Dexter and Brian is that Brian appears to kill without rules or reason. Dexter later makes the difficult decision that this type of killer must not be allowed to survive. Killing criminals who have evaded justice is acceptable but killing for the sake of killing is deemed unacceptable.

   Rudy shows Dexter into the garage where he has taped Debra to a table in the same fashion that Dexter prepares his victims. Brian clearly wants Dexter to kill Debra whom he refers to as his ‘fake sister’.

   Dexter: “I can’t. Not Deb. I’m very fond of her.”

   Brian Moser: “You can’t be a killer and a hero” (Born Free, 17/12/06).
Dexter sees Brian as a killer without reason or regret. Brian calls into question the ‘Code of Harry’.

Brian Moser: “Embrace who you are”
Dexter: “I don’t know who I am” (*Born Free*, 17/12/06).

At this moment, Debra wakes up and Dexter and Brian struggle. Brian is able to escape because Dexter is focused on helping Debra. Dexter makes the difficult decision that he must murder his own brother.

Dexter: “You’re not a trophy but you need to be put down...you should know this isn’t easy for me.”

Brian: “You’re the one who needs setting free little brother” (*Born Free*, 17/12/06).

He kills Brian in the same fashion as the ITK to make it seem like a suicide. After he slits Brian’s throat he is overcome by emotion. He curls up in the corner of the room sobbing as the blood drains from Brian’s body. This is the only instance where Dexter displays any true emotions.

Dexter: “There is no one left alive who can handle my truth” (*Born Free*, 17/12/06).

**5.1.6 Normalcy**

Dexter's main motivation in life is to appear normal. He goes to great lengths to cultivate and maintain a normal facade. His main goal in life is to fit in the best that he can.

Dexter: “People fake a lot of human interactions but I fake them all and I fake them well. That’s my burden” (*Dexter*, 01/10/06).

Dexter: “All you can do is play alone with life and hope that you get it right” (*Popping Cherry*, 15/10/06).

He is often baffled by simple social customs that most people take for granted.

Dexter: “I don’t get birthdays. Celebrating another year of being alive seems forced” (*Return to Sender*, 05/11/06)
The audience is allowed to know the true Dexter, like a co-conspirator, through his inner monologue. Dexter is involved in a relationship with Rita Bennett because he wanted to avoid questions. Being in a relationship is a ‘normal’ and accepted activity for adults. Dexter has specifically chosen Rita because he views her, in some ways, to be as damaged as he is. His sister Debra introduced them after Rita had called in a domestic violence report. Rita’s ex-husband (Paul Bennett) was physically, emotionally and sexually abusive and as a result, she is completely uninterested in a sexual relationship.

Dexter views himself as a complete outsider and comments that “normal people are so hostile” (*Dexter, 01/10/06*) without acknowledging that his sense of inner peace comes from murdering people. He is also repeatedly states that he is empty inside.

Dexter: “I’m on the outside looking in...[t]hey can laugh and play. It comes so easily to them...I just can’t feel their pain” (*Crocodile, 08/10/06*).

While intellectually he may be able to understand people’s emotions, he believes that he is completely devoid of empathy. There is a sense of wistfulness about the way that Dexter views the world because he recognizes human relationships but cannot be a part of it. Part of Dexter’s ability to remain undetected is his ability to fake relationships, especially the one with Rita. She often makes comments about how great Dexter is and how she “...can’t believe [she] found the one truly decent guy left on the planet” (*Crocodile, 08/10/06*).

Dexter has a very morbid sense of humour. His boat is named ‘slice of life’. The boat’s name is a reference to the fact that he chops people up and uses his boat to transfer the garbage bags full of body parts out to sea. The name of the boat can also be taken as innocent. This idea of double or hidden meanings is prominent throughout the series. The notion that certain people can be hiding a secret right below the surface.

Dexter: “Another beautiful Miami day. Chopped up corpses with a chance of rain” (*Crocodile, 08/10/06*). 
While reminiscing about his first murder, Dexter concedes that murdering someone permanently changes you. “It leaves you as an outsider” (Popping Cherry, 15/10/06). Often it seems as though Dexter wishes he could feel something especially for Rita.

Dexter: “If I had a heart it would be breaking right now” (Popping Cherry, 15/10/06).

Being free of the boundaries of emotions, in a way, gives Dexter permission to kill. It is the only way to make sense of something as chaotic as murder. Only someone without feelings would be capable of taking life. The notion of having no emotions makes his character acceptable and understandable. Dexter’s inner monologue often serves as social commentary.

Dexter: “Human bonds always lead to messy complications, commitments, sharing, driving people to the airport” (Let’s Give the Boy a Hand, 22/10/06).

During this episode, it is Halloween.

Dexter: “I love Halloween. The one time of year where everyone wears masks, not just me (Let’s Give the Boy a Hand, 22/10/06).

This episode also provides flashbacks to Harry and Dexter as a child where Harry is trying to teach Dexter to act ‘normal’.

Dexter asks Harry: “Why should I pretend to be happy?”

Harry: “Because that’s how you fit in” (Let’s Give the Boy a Hand, 22/10/06).

During these flashbacks, Harry is always stressing to Dexter the importance of blending in. Dexter wonders who he might be had Harry not instilled these rules in him as a child.

Dexter: “Am I a collection of learned behaviours?...Everyone hides who they are some of the time” (Let’s Give the Boy a Hand, 22/10/06).
Dexter also considers that he may not be living up to the standards that Harry set out for him.

Dexter: “I'll never be the human Harry wanted me to be...I'm neither man nor beast. I’m something new entirely with my own set of rules. I’m Dexter” (Let’s Give the Boy a Hand, 22/10/06).

While he is about to murder Jorge and Valerie Costillo they begin to profess their undying love for each other. Looking slightly disgusted, Dexter asks them for advice about how to make a relationship work. They respond that the key element of a successful marriage is to share common goals. The entire conversation is perverse because the common dream that the Costillos share is making a profit off human trafficking. However, to Dexter’s surprise when he talks to Rita about dreams and goals she responds that all she wants is a normal life. Dexter and Rita have the common dream of a normal life albeit they go about it in very different ways.

Dexter takes some comfort in the knowledge that he is not the only person leading a double life.

Dexter: “Somehow it’s reassuring to know I’m not the only one pretending to be normal” (Love, American Style, 29/10/06).

He is also describes how “the inability to feel has its advantages sometimes” (Love, American Style, 29/10/06).

As the first season concludes, Dexter and Debra are entering another crime scene that is surrounded by spectators. Dexter fantasizes an imaginary parade in celebration of his work.

Dexter:” Deep down I think they’d appreciate my work” (Born Free, 17/12/06).

As he walks, he imagines an imaginary parade in his honour given to him by the crowd standing outside of a recent crime scene. They cheer for him ‘way to take out the trash!’ and ‘thanks for protecting our children’. People are holding up signs with his picture as though he were a major celebrity. A banner flies overhead with a sign reading ‘we love Dexter’.
Dexter: “...my shadow self embraced...I'm one of them in their darkest dreams” (*Born Free*, 17/12/06).

Dexter represents the dark inner killer or temptations that most people have. He ‘embraces’ this side of himself while most people would suppress any wrong or ‘evil’ urges.

### 5.2 Episode Theme Summaries: Weeds

#### 5.2.1 Opening Scene

The opening sequence of *Weeds* centres on the theme of conformity. The scene opens with the building plans for Agrestic luxury homes and the rapid development of houses. White land rovers pass in front of a large water fountain also labelled Agrestic. The same man is shown repeatedly jogging through the park. The same businessmen enter and exit the local coffee shop. The same dark SUVs pull out of their driveways. The same woman jogger runs through the neighbourhood. In Agrestic, everyone looks and acts the same while driving the same luxury cars.

As these scenes are playing, the background music plays;

little boxes on the hillside...little boxes all the same...and they’re all made out of ticky tacky and they all look just the same (Malvina, Reynolds).

The lyrics go on to describe how every person follows the same path in life of attending university, becoming a professional, getting married and having children. The opening theme lyrics set the stage for the entire series. The desire for safety has become a desire for sameness and conformity. Normal has been equated with being identical to those in your neighbourhood.
5.2.2 Character Portrayal

From the first episode (*You Can’t Miss the Bear, 8/7/2005*), Nancy is pitied by the other mothers in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The concern of the other women is double edged with judgement and contempt as they speculate as to how Nancy is able to maintain her lifestyle without working after her husband has died.

PTA mom: “I think she got a little boty between the eyes” (*You Can’t Miss the Bear, 8/7/2005*).

The woman is referring to botox and also mentions that if her husband ‘dropped dead’ she would get extensive plastic surgery. It is through these women that the audience first learns that Nancy is a widow.

Nancy is depicted as an intelligent and independent woman who has made the conscious decision to become a drug dealer. Throughout the season, the audience is lead to feel sympathetic towards her as she faces difficulties as a single mother. In *Free Goat (8/15/2005)*, Nancy’s finances become the central issue as she begins to have trouble paying her bills and continues to be the subject of gossip around her community. Her accountant, Doug Wilson, instructs her to pay for everything in cash in order to avoid detection through a paper trail. She is shown in the emergency room after her son has broken his arm and she has to pay in cash because she does not have any insurance. There is a sense of embarrassment and shame and the suggestion that she might be a bad mother.

Nancy is not simply portrayed as a helpless victim of circumstance but rather as a woman forced to make a difficult decision in light of a family tragedy. Her decision to become involved with drug dealing is seen as a logical option for a suburban homemaker. Her entrepreneurial ideas are seen as justifiable given her predicament. She balks at being labelled a drug dealer because to her, and most others, that label carries certain stereotypes and expectations that she does not believe that she embodies.
Nancy to Conrad: “Don’t call me a dealer”

Conrad: “Baby, a sexy spade is still a spade” (Dead in the Nethers, 9/12/2005).

Nancy sees herself as being different or apart from other drug dealers or criminals. She assigns herself clever euphemisms such as ‘baroness of pot’ to help assuage her guilt about selling drugs.

During the episode Free Goat (8/15/2005), Nancy is experiencing financial difficulties and is not able to pay for the drugs at Heylia’s home. She is forced to leave her expensive vehicle as collateral and drives around in Conrad’s car. In this same episode, she makes the tough decision to leave behind her wedding ring as collateral. There is a very emotional scene and the audience sees Nancy struggling to decide if she can leave the ring behind. The audience may feel very sympathetic towards Nancy at this moment while forgetting that she is leaving behind a valuable item in order to finance her drug dealing.

As her business expands, Nancy goes from a naive low-level seller, stating over the phone that she is at her dealer’s house, to a very knowledgeable dealer. She makes a point to educate herself about higher quality and better strains of marijuana. She is portrayed as a doe-eyed idealist who needs to be taught about successfully selling drugs.

5.2.3 Punitiveness

5.2.3.1 Legal

Nancy’s drug dealing goes relatively undetected during the first season of the series. The police are not present and therefore not portrayed as a significant threat. The community of Agrestic does not have a large police presence as the neighbours, essentially, ‘police’ themselves. Weeds provides a fictional world to explore what it might be like if marijuana was legalized and there were no legal consequences for being a drug dealer.
Andy (Nancy’s brother-in-law) is driving and smoking a joint (marijuana cigarette) when he is pulled over by a police officer on a bicycle.

Police Officer: “…You just rolled through a stop sign…”

Andy: “Nice bike, did your horse die? You must be in killer shape, let me see your quads…I means you’re a cop in bike shorts, it’s adorable.”

Police Officer: “I have a gun.”


This is the first interaction with a police officer in the series. The only time that the police are present, it is comical. Andy is subsequently arrested for possession of marijuana. Nancy arrives to bail Andy out and they are shown together in a lawyer’s office. Nancy takes this opportunity to ask the lawyer about potential legal consequences, which up until this point she has no really considered.

Nancy: “What if the marijuana is in baked goods say candy or chocolate?”

Mrs. Greenstein: “Ok you asked for it, the lay of the land. Marijuana currently exists in a legal grey area. It’s not illegal to have weed – less that an ounce, that is, Andrew but it’s illegal to buy it.”

Nancy: “What about growing?”

Mrs. Greenstein: “As long as it’s not broken down, non-specific weight we’re talking a slap on the wrist. Three to five.”

Nancy: “Years!”?


In The Punishment Lighter(10/03/2005), Nancy is at the university when she is confronted and detained in a security car by the head of campus security.
He takes her duffel bag full of marijuana and tells her that he is letting her leave with just a warning.

Nancy: “Are you arresting me?”

Security Officer: “I don’t know. I’m not an unreasonable man...I’m gonna cut you a break. I will not take this any further if you promise to never come back on this campus again” (*The Punishment Lighter*, 10/3/2005).

Nancy begs for her drugs back but the security guard tells her to leave the campus immediately. She goes back to Heylia’s house.

Nancy: “That’s my mortgage payment...everything I have” (*The Punishment Lighter*, 10/3/2005)

Conrad points out that the security guard is probably a drug dealer as well. Nancy was not fingerprinted and she was not photographed. She was so scared at the time that she did not realize that a police officer would not let a person carrying $14,000 worth of marijuana walk away with just a warning.

Nancy: “I got busted...threw me in his car and let me off with a warning...but he confiscated all my pot. Everything I have. I’m screwed.”

Conrad: “You didn’t get busted, you just got jacked.”

Heylia: “Did you go down to the police station?”

Nancy: “No.”

Conrad: “You get fingerprinted?”

Nancy: “No.”

Heylia: “Damn girl you as gullible as Kobe’s wife.”

Conrad: “ 500 bucks says your rent-a-cop’s a dealer too. He didn’t like you dealing in his red neck of the woods...You learned a $14,000 lesson” (*The Punishment Lighter*, 10/3/2005)
5.2.3.2 Extra-Legal

A rival drug dealer, Alejandro, arrives at Nancy’s home when she is not there and asks Lupita, the housekeeper, to deliver a message.

Alejandro: “You tell her the business that she’s in is the business she needs to get out of. You tell her Agrestic’s a one motero town” (The Punishment Light, 9/26/2005).

Alejandro waits for Nancy outside of her home. She gets him to follow her to an empty alley. She begins to throw pennies (that he has been leaving for her) and his car. They have a heated exchange where he accuses her of “slinging in my territory” (The Punishment Light, 9/26/2005) referring to Nancy selling drugs in Alejandro’s part of the city. The argument between them devolves into them having sexual relations on the hood of his car.

While he is zipping up, she points a b.b gun at his crotch.

Nancy: “…[I]t does fine work, I’d hate to see it full of holes. Stay away from my house and my family...This was unexpected and won’t happen again.” (The Punishment Light, 9/26/2005)

Nancy has found a unique way to handle her rival drug competition. Alejandro is no longer a threat and she is free to deal at the university campus.

When Nancy’s stash is confiscated by campus security, the officer Cash later arrives at her home and returns it. He is badly beaten up and apologizes to her claiming that he did not know who she was. Based on the events of the episode, the audience is led to believe that Alejandro has gone from rival drug dealer to protector and hit man. It is later revealed in the episode The Godmother (10/10/2005), that the person who attacked Cash was Conrad and his friends.

5.2.4 Vigilantism

The upkeep of the Agrestic community often falls to its members. The close proximity of the neighbours fosters a sense of safety. Many parents and
community members are involved in committees and local politics. There is an intense desire to create a perfect neighbourhood.

The son of council member Doug Wilson, Josh, only appears in the pilot episode (*You Can’t Miss The Bear*, 8/7/2005). Nancy sells drugs to him and he, in turn, sells to a younger crowd. She orders him not to sell to young children. Although she is a drug dealer, she has a moral and ethical code that does not involve supplying schoolchildren with drugs. Through Celia, Nancy learns that a 10-year-old boy has been caught with marijuana in his lunchbox. The audience sees Nancy violently confront Josh by pushing him against the side of a car and once again informing him not to sell to young children.

While looking through binoculars on her roof, she sees Josh in a hot tub with a neighbour across the street. She barges into the house, locks the owner out of his bedroom and pins down Josh on the bed. She threatens to tell his father of his homosexuality and blackmails him to forced compliance with her not selling to children policy. Despite this encounter, the character of Josh is not seen again through the rest of the first season.

**5.2.5 Family**

One element of the stereotypical portrayals of criminals on television is that they are shown to be individuals acting alone without families. The audience is repeatedly given the impression that Nancy has made the decision to sell marijuana to support her family. This decision is questioned and challenged, as her two sons respond to adolescence and the loss of their father. Nancy has trouble maintaining control of her children and in particular having authority over her older son Silas. Her brother-in-law Andy also moves in and offers to help around the house.

Nancy has reached her limit of Andy and tries to throw him out of her house. He informs her that he went to visit Conrad and Heylia that day.

Andy: “Much to my surprise, I was handed a giant bag of weed and told it was for you...The way I see it, you’re in way over your head
here. You got a house, you got bills, you’re a mommy. Dealing is a full time job. You need some help Nancy-pants” (Fashion of the Christ, 8/29/2005).

Nancy reluctantly sees the logic in what Andy is saying and grudgingly accepts his assistance with her children.

5.2.5.1 Nancy and Silas

Nancy and Silas have a strained relationship. Silas is constantly trying to assert his independence as man of the house since his father died. He is more interested in spending time with his girlfriend than with his family. In The Godmother (10/10/2005), Silas is brought home by the police for taking the drug ecstasy and breaking into a model home with his girlfriend.

Nancy to Police Officer: “Officer, I will attend to this in a grave and serious fashion” (The Godmother, 10/10/2005)

Nancy’s response to the police officer indicates that she is attempting to be a good mother. In the morning, Nancy tries to confront and punish him but instead she is met with an ultimatum by Silas.

Nancy: “You think you’re cute? I swear to God Silas, if I have to lock you in your room until you get some sense I will. You don’t fuck around with drugs.”

Silas: “This? From you? You’re the biggest hypocrite on earth!”

Nancy: “I don’t take drugs. When have you ever seen me take drugs?”

Silas: “You may not take them but you sure do sell them...I live here too. Or have you not noticed because you’re so busy with your business. I’m not an idiot. Listen...I’m not a drug addict. Yeah I like to do a little weed and tried E for the first time...Look I don’t blame you for what you do. You’re doing what you need to do. I guess. Let’s just stay out of each other’s way.”
Nancy: “You’re 16, and I’m your mother. No...I’m not giving you carte blanc at 16 to do whatever the hell you want because I made a questionable decision.”

Silas: “What choice do you have? (The Godmother, 10/10/2005)

Silas storms out and Nancy finds Andy floating in the pool.

Nancy: “Silas just informed me that I have no parental rights because I’m a drug dealer. How the fuck did he find out?” (The Godmother, 10/10/2005)

She feels that she has now lost her parental rights because of her choice to be a drug dealer, although she does not want to have to choose between business and family. Her decision to become a drug dealer, which she originally entered into to support her family, has now created a huge rift between her and her son.

5.2.5.2 Nancy and Shane

As the episode Lude Awakening opens, Shane is seen speaking with the school psychologist about a gangster rap that he wrote about a classmate who has been calling him ‘Strange Botwin’. The psychologist tells him that certain school officials are concerned that he is going to act out what he described in his rap.

Shane: “My therapist just says that I’m acting out cuz my dad’s dead” (Lude Awakening, 9/5/2005).

In Dead in the Nethers, Shane makes a video with a young girl replicating familiar scenes from terrorist kidnappings on the news. In the video he uses a decapitated Barbie head to represent the beheading of his friend. Nancy watches the video with Andy after coming home.

Nancy: “What am I gonna do with him? He shot a mountain lion, he wrote a gangster rap. Now he’s making terrorist videos”
Andy: “Yeah, and I melted army men and I peed on the neighbour’s kid...and I blew up frogs...little boys do this shit. Mostly cuz they’re dumb or they want attention. Shane’s not dumb” (*Dead in the Nethers*, 9/12/2005).

Shane is acting out because he wants attention from Nancy. Andy and Nancy are talking about Shane in the kitchen.

Andy: “How’d it go at Shane’s shrink yesterday?”

Nancy: “The doctor wants to put him on anti-depressants.”

Andy: “Drugs are not the answer.”

Nancy: “This from the king of all things mind altering.”

Andy: “Illegal drugs, not this prescription, anti-depressant, zombie shit. That fries your brain. Weed makes you hungry and happy and in your case financially solvent.

Nancy: “He bit a kid in the foot last week...”

Andy:”...He’s ten years old and his dad died. Drugging him so he acts like everything’s fine is totally fucked up” (*The Punishment Lighter*, 10/3/2005).

This exchange illustrates the wariness of putting children on pharmaceutical drugs. This issue also appears in *The Sopranos* when Tony and Carmella are told to put their son on medication for Attention Deficit Disorder (A.D.D).

5.2.5.3 Celia and Isabelle Hodes

Celia, Nancy’s neighbour, is the embodiment of the Agrestic community ideals of a perfect appearance. She is the head of the PTA but her daughter Isabel, in her opinion, does not fit within that desired ideal. Celia refers to her as ‘Isa-belly’ (*You Can’t Miss the Bear*, (8/7/2005) and frequently makes disparaging comments about her weight. Celia believes that she is helping her daughter because the world is so thin obsessed and she is trying to spare her pain later on by encouraging weight loss now.
Celia: “Excuse me for wanting my daughter to be thin and attractive so the world is her oyster...it’s a cold and cruel world out there for fat girls” (*Good Shit Lollipop*, 8/22/2005).

In the episode *Good Shit Lollipop*, while cleaning her daughter’s bedroom, Celia finds Isabel’s secret chocolate stash and, as a punishment, replaces it with chocolate laxatives. Isabel unknowingly eats the laxatives and loses control of her bowels at school.

Isabel: “They call me shit girl now” (*Good Shit Lollipop*, 8/22/2005).

The relationship between Celia and Isabel is symbolic of the desire to have a ‘cookie-cutter’ lifestyle where everyone is the same. When Celia catches Isabel kissing a girl friend of hers she informs her that

Celia: “You cannot become a lesbian just because you don’t want to lose weight...The only girl that you should be seeing is Jenny Craig” (*The Godmother*, 10/10/2005).

The exchanges between Celia and Isabel provide some comic relief but also highlight the importance of fitting in and being the same as everyone else. While Celia seems to value conformity above everything else, her daughter is already very independent and confident in herself despite her mother’s attempts to make her feel inadequate because she is not thin.

5.2.6 Normalcy

5.2.6.1 Safety and Community

One feature of the Agrestic community is the idea of ‘sameness’ and conformity. It is a planned community where all of the houses are part of a master plan to obtain an ideal community look. The community is driven by the desire for safety and the belief that if everyone within a neighbourhood is the same then it is easier to spot the potential problems or bad elements because they will stand out in contrast to everyone else.
Weeds demonstrates that while gated communities are attempting to control external threats, there are often bigger threats from within their own community. There are numerous examples throughout the first season, which illustrate how danger can exist right below the surface of the superficially created ‘safe’ community.

In Fashion of the Christ (8/29/2005), a drink cart from a low flying aircraft crashes through the roof of Dean and Celia Hodes. This occurs at the end of the episode and Celia also chooses that moment to announce that she has cancer. In Good Shit Lollipop, a news bulletin announces that a mountain lion has been spotted in the community.

TV News Reporter: “…Agrestic, a community living in fear…” (Good Shit Lollipop, 8/22/2005)

The planned development of Agrestic is an attempt to have a secluded area for private homes but it is encroaching on nature. There is a contrast between the efforts to maintain a closed off community and the fact that wild animals do not respect property lines.

The drink cart crash is shown in juxtaposition with a drive by shooting that occurs while Nancy is at Heylia’s home. Heylia’s home is also in a lower class urban neighbourhood. The shift from Agrestic’s planned community to the graffiti and broken buildings of Heylia’s area is shown when Nancy is driving from her home to pick up her new drug supply.

Nancy: “Isn’t someone going to call the police?”

Heylia: “Baby, that probably was the police…White people get soda pop and Niggers get bullets” (Lude Awakening, 9/5/2005).

At this point, Nancy is facing the darker and more dangerous side of the drug business that she had previously been immune to while drug dealing solely in Agrestic.

Heylia: “…[T]he girl just had her shooting cherry broke” (Lude Awakening, 9/5/2005).
This statement also speaks to the fact that shootings are an inevitable and expected component of living in Heylia's neighbourhood whereas Nancy has never experienced it before. There is also a physical contrast between Nancy and Heylia. Nancy is white, thin and from the affluent part of town while Heylia is black, overweight and living in a rough, urban neighbourhood.

5.3 Episode Theme Summaries: The Sopranos

5.3.1 Opening Scene

The opening theme centres on Tony Soprano's sense of isolation and removal from the world. He is shown driving in his Suburban through the New Jersey turnpike. Tony is smoking a cigar and the camera focuses in on the various street and road signs that he passes. Most of the view outside of Tony's window is bleak and industrial. He drives past a cemetery and Satriale's pork store. He leaves the urban sprawl and enters a residential area filled with large houses. He arrives at his own home after driving up a long driveway with a gate at the bottom.

It is significant that the show is set in New Jersey rather than New York. In the first few episodes of the series, Tony comments that the 'golden' era of the mafia is over. The mafia is traditionally associated with Italians who immigrated to the United States and lived in New York. Living in New Jersey could be viewed as the smaller or lesser version of New York.

5.3.2 Character Portrayal

The audience learns the majority of information about Tony Soprano through his therapy sessions with Dr. Jennifer Melfi. Tony has been referred to a psychiatrist after he collapsed and the medical tests he received found no physiological cause. He describes himself as a 'sad clown', someone who is happy on the outside but crying on the inside.
Despite showing up for his first appointment, Tony is extremely reluctant to speak with Dr. Melfi. Tony is very sceptical of the entire psychological profession.

Tony: “I have a semester and a half of college so I understand Freud. I understand therapy as a concept...Here we go, here comes the Prozac” (The Sopranos, 10/01/1999).

In an attempt to understand Tony’s collapsing that may be panic attacks, Dr. Melfi asks him to re-visit the day when he first collapsed. Tony begins describing a family of wild ducks that had been living in his pool. Every morning he would feed the ducks and marvel at the baby ducks trying to fly. The ducks then flew away and that was when Tony began feeling depressed. As he is describing the story, he gets very emotional.

Tony: “It was such a trip to have those wild creatures come into my pool and have their little babies...Those god damn ducks...I was sad to see them go” (The Sopranos, 10/01/1999).

Dr. Melfi suggests that when the ducks gave birth it became a family and the real reason that Tony was so distraught over the ducks leaving was because he is afraid of losing his family. Tony is a parent wanting to maintain control over his family in a troubled world. Dr. Melfi also prescribes Prozac for Tony that he reluctantly takes.

At a young age, Tony knew that his father was involved in illegal operations. He may not have been able to articulate his feelings at that point. He simply knew that he did not want to endure his father’s violence after witnessing his father and Uncle Junior assault a man in the street. Tony’s reflections on his childhood lead him to question the role of nature vs. nurture. He wonders if he even had the chance to be anything else in life, besides being in the mafia, given that both his father and his uncle were involved.

Tony makes the decision to tell his three aides that he is in therapy in order to avoid having secrets once he realizes that secrets are what led to the
attempt on his life (see punitiveness). The men have a mostly sympathetic response to the news.

Silvio: “I’m sure you did it with complete discretion”

Pauly: “I was seeing a therapist myself about a year ago. I had some issues. Enough said. I lacked coping skills”

Christopher:”...was it like marriage counselling?...” (*I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano*, 04/04/1999).

### 5.3.3 Punitiveness

#### 5.3.3.1 Legal

In the pilot episode, *The Sopranos*, Tony refers to RICO (Racketeer Influences and Corrupt Organizations Act) that was passed in 1970. This act allowed the admission of government wiretaps and surveillance in court. The legislation was passed to assist the government in the investigation and prosecution of individuals involved with organized crime (*Yacowar, 2003*).

When Tony first mentions RICO to Dr. Melfi she asks,

Dr. Melfi: “Is he your brother?” (*The Sopranos*, 10/01/1999).

Dr. Melfi is completely unaware of the Mafia world, which is partially why Tony feels comfortable talking to her.

The local police force does not appear to be a threat to Tony or his associates. He does, however, fear being caught by the FBI. His lack of concern for the local police can partially be attributed to the fact that he has a police officer, Detective Makazian working for him. The reasons behind Detective Makazian’s involvement with Tony are revealed in the episode *Meadowlands* (1/31/1999). The detective has gambling debts and two alimonies which he supports by doing investigations for Tony. One of these investigations includes stalking Dr. Melfi.
In the episode 46 Long (1/17/1999), Tony and his crew are counting money at Bada Bing (the nightclub/strip club where they do business) and a television is playing in the background with gangster-turned-author Vincent Rizzo being interviewed by U.S. attorney Braun. Braun states that the heyday of the mafia is over due to drugs and 'squealers'. Rizzo counters that as long as there is gambling, drugs and pornography there will always be organized crime. He seems to be arguing that organized crime serves a distinct purpose. His television interview is a foreshadowing of how Tony and his crew feel about 'rats'.

When acting boss Giacomo ‘Jackie’ Aprile dies in Denial, Anger, Acceptance (1/24/1999), the decision is made to promote Uncle Junior to boss with Tony and others being ‘capos’. This choice is party determined by Uncle Junior’s age and the belief that if someone is to get caught the crew would rather it be Uncle Junior than Tony. There is an unspoken understanding that Tony is really in charge.

In Nobody Knows Anything (3/21/1999), Detective Makazian tells Tony that a member of his crew, Big Pussy, is wearing a wire and has made a deal with the FBI. He mentions that Pussy is a favorite target of the FBI because he loves his family above all else. The thought that Pussy might be a traitor is extremely difficult for Tony to comprehend. When Makazian asks Tony if he likes Pussy Tony replies

Tony: “Like him, I fuckin’ love him” (Nobody Know Anything, 21/03/1999).

Tony confronts Pussy at his home, reminding him that he always has options and that he has friends who would die for him. Before he has the opportunity to gain any more information, Makazian kills himself by jumping off a bridge after he is suspended from duty for being found in a brothel.

In the final episode of the season, I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano Uncle Junior is arrested by the FBI. While in prison he staunchly refuses to make a deal that would implicate Tony.
The FBI agent tells Junior that they really want Johnny Sack and his superiors. Junior replies;

Uncle Junior “I want to fuck Angie Dickinson. See who gets lucky first” (I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano, 04/04/1999).

The above examples demonstrate the importance of loyalty in the mafia world. Part of being in the mafia family means being loyal until death.

5.3.3.2 Extra-Legal

The concept of punitiveness takes on a very different meaning in the context of The Sopranos. Enforcement and punishment are part of the job description for members of the mafia. Tony and his crew are often responsible for brutal acts of violence.

From the first episode, the audience witnesses Tony’s capacity for brutality when he runs down Mahaffey, who has unpaid gambling debts, in an office park and assaults him. Mahaffey is then persuaded to take Hesh as a partner in order to cheat medical insurance companies by billing for fictitious procedures.

Tony’s nephew, Christopher, is difficult to control. He is constantly seeking approval and recognition from the other men in the crew. Christopher robs a company that is under the protection of Uncle Junior. After Tony handles the situation, Brendan (an associate of Christopher) again robs a truck under protection and accidentally shoots the driver (46 Long, 01/17/1999).

Uncle Junior is frustrated that Christopher and Brendan are hiding behind Tony. When his associate Mikey suggests swift violence, Junior replies

Uncle Junior: “Take it easy, we’re not making a Western here” (Denial, Anger, Acceptance, 24/01/1999).

Junior’s retribution for the robbing of the trucks occurs against the backdrop of Meadow’s choir recital.
Mikey to Brendan; “Hijack, bye Jack” (Denial, Anger, Acceptance, 24/01/1999) as he shoots him between the eyes.

Christopher is roughed up in a mock execution. He admits that he gave Meadow drugs before befouling himself.

While Tony is escorting his daughter Meadow to visit prospective colleges, he spots Fabian Petrellio now, ‘Fred Peters‘. This man was a former associate turned state witness who entered the Witness Protection Program. Christopher offers to kill the man telling Tony that he is his ‘soldier’ but Tony declines informing him that this is personal.

Tony to Fabian as he is strangling him: “You took an oath and you broke it” (College, 07/02/1999).

The murder of Fabian is seen as justified because he violated the loyalty of his mafia family.

In Pax Soprano, many of Uncle Junior’s decisions are being challenged by Tony and Junior’s crews. They view his recent moves of over-taxing Hesh, killing a drug dealer who sold his tailor’s grandson drugs and not sharing profits with his ‘capos’ as unilateral. Tony has enough respect to not openly confront his uncle. He attempts to advise Junior using the historical parallel of Augustus Caesar who enjoyed a long and peaceful reign because he shared power with his captains. During this episode, Junior begins to realize the extent to which Livia wants to punish Tony for putting her in a home.

Junior is feeling vulnerable and grows increasingly anxious about Tony’s visits to the psychiatrist. Mikey suggests that Tony might be meeting with the FBI and Junior informs him that Tony is seeing a therapist. Junior, spurred by humiliation, goaded by Livia and sensing Tony’s possible weakness, seriously considers killing Tony.

In Nobody Knows Anything, Livia is still providing Junior with malicious information and subtly suggesting the need to have Tony killed. She mentions that Tony meets with the other ‘capos’ at the retirement home.
Livia to Uncle Junior: “I suppose he would have found it harder to have his meetings at my house than in the nursing home...maybe it was you they were talking about, who knows?...Now I just don’t like being put in the middle of things” (*Nobody Knows Anything*, 21/03/1999)

Junior decides that he must kill Tony ‘blood or no blood’.

Two men are hired by Uncle Junior to kill Tony. The first assassination attempt is unintentionally thwarted by Christopher who, in his concern for Tony, follows him and blocks the car of the would-be killers. (*Isabella*, 28/03/1999). The hired men continue to stalk Tony but their first shot only grazes his ear. Tony is able to fight back and kill one man and seriously wound the other. This attempt on his life helps bring Tony out of his depression. Earlier in the episode he has wanted to die but after the shooting:

Tony: “...every fuckin’ particle of my being was fighting to live” (*Isabella*, 28/03/1999).

Tony had been battling depression throughout the series but after an attempt on his life, he realizes that he really does want to live.

In the season finale, *I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano*, Tony exacts his revenge against those who plotted to have him killed. Pauly and Christopher kill Uncle Junior’s henchman Mikey Palmice and Tony kills Chuck Signore. Before he has a chance to meet with Uncle Junior he is arrested.

### 5.3.4 Vigilantism

There is the one clear example of vigilantism explored in the series. It involves Tony’s reaction to learning about the sexual indiscretion of his daughter’s soccer coach and another member of the team.

Tony is supportive of Meadow’s athletic pursuits with the belief that girls who participate in sports are less likely to be involved with drugs and/or become sexually active. She has joined a soccer team and many of her friends’ fathers
are associates of Tony. The fathers are overly involved in the games and after a win take Coach Hauser for a drink at Bada Bing.

When Tony and the other fathers find out that Coach Hauser has taken a position at a university they begin a campaign of bribery. Pauly arrives with two men and a free fifty-inch television that they leave in his driveway. Christopher knocks on his door late at night stating that he is 'returning' the Hauser’s dog.

Coach Hauser: “Don Hauser will not be intimidated” (Boca, 07/03/1999).

One of the girls on the team, Allie, slits her wrist and the fathers mistakenly believe that she is distraught over the loss of the coach. They soon learn that, in fact, Allie has been seduced by the coach. Meadow confides in Tony and Carmela who inform the other fathers.

Tony’s long time friend Artie Bucco and his wife Charmaine figure prominently in this episode and in illustrating the concept of vigilante justice. Artie and Tony have known each other since elementary school and played little league together. Artie is one of Tony’s few ‘legitimate’ friends. The Buccos operate a restaurant that is patronized by all of the gangsters. Meadow and Artie’s daughters also play together on the soccer team.

After an intense conversation with Charmaine concerning the soccer coach, Artie determines that he cannot sit idly by while Tony gives Coach Hauser an ‘after school special’. Artie has recently witnessed the power of Tony’s crew as their influence shifted from praise to fury. He confronts Tony at Bada Bing in an attempt to dissuade him from carrying out vigilante style justice because their revenge would only satisfy themselves.

Artie: “Don’t think this is justice...this is wrong!” (Boca, 07/03/1999).

Artie then encourages Tony to contact the police but Tony fears that the Coach will only receive a light sentence and will “…go to Saskatchewan and teach girls soccer there” (Boca, 07/03/1999). The conversation turns heated and Tony throws out Artie, wondering how he had the audacity to challenge him.
When Artie discusses the situation again with Charmaine he confides that he wishes he were tougher and had ‘the balls’ to punish Coach Hauser himself.

Charmaine: “Arthur you do have balls. That’s why you’re not like them!” (Boca, 07/03/1999).

While considering the situation with Dr. Melfi she pointedly asks why Tony feels a sense of responsibility for rectifying the problem.

Dr. Melfi: “I continue to ask the question – why do you think Anthony Soprano has to set things right?” (Boca, 07/03/1999).

The question that Dr. Melfi poses to Tony relates back to Dexter and how he also feels that it is his mission or burden in life is to ‘balance the books’.

Even though Tony throws Artie out of the club, it is still unclear to the audience whether or not he has ordered the hit. The decision is revealed through a television news report indicating that an anonymous friend of the victim (presumably Meadow) reported Coach Hauser and he was arrested. Later that evening, Tony stumbles home and dances around the living room singing and crashing into furniture. He is clearly very intoxicated and when Carmela enters the room, he begins singing and dancing with her. Before passing out at Carmela feet he mumbles;

Tony: “Carmela, I didn’t hurt nobody.” (Boca, 07/03/1999).

5.3.5 Family

5.3.5.1 Tony and Livia

Tony has a difficult relationship with his mother. He tries very hard to be a good son. Despite his best efforts, his mother constantly finds flaws. His mother is also instrumental in the attempted assassination of Tony. Tony has very conflicting emotions about his mother. He views her as a helpless old woman but Dr. Melfi continues to point out that she is psychologically manipulative. The catalyst for moving Livia into the retirement home occurs during the episode 46
where she accidentally runs over her friend because she had the car in drive rather than reverse.

His mother is not as helpless as she would like people to believe. She frequently has meetings with her late husband’s brother Corrado (Uncle Junior) and appears to be giving orders from behind the scenes. Livia’s bitterness and resentment of Tony placing her in the retirement home continues to grow throughout the first season

Livia: “A son who throws his mother in an asylum” (Meadowlands, 31/01/1999).

While A.J. is visiting Livia at the retirement home, he innocently mentions that Tony has been seeing a psychiatrist. He is confident in this knowledge because he overheard his parents discussing it. Livia is extremely sceptical of this information. She immediately determines that Tony must go there to complain about her. In the following episode, The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti, she informs Uncle Junior that Tony is now seeing a psychiatrist.

Livia: “I’m sure he’s told the psychiatrist it’s all his mother’s fault...God only knows what he says...But I don’t want there to be any repercussions” (The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti, 28/02/1999).

At this point, it is not entirely clear what Livia wants Uncle Junior to do with this information however; it is clear that Livia is extremely unhappy with Tony for both placing her in the retirement home and for now telling family secrets to a psychiatrist.

One of the most illuminating episodes concerning the relationship between Tony and his mother is Isabella. Tony has fallen into a deep depression and is spending the majority of his time in bed. The only motivation that he has had for emerging from his room appears when he gets out of bed to shut the blinds. Through the window he sees a beautiful young woman in the yard next door who is later revealed to be a fantasy brought on by Lithium. Tony approaches her and learns that she is a dental exchange student, house sitting at the Cusamanos.
Tony and Isabella run into each other downtown where he offers to take her out for lunch. During their conversation, she correctly guesses that his people are originally descendants from Avelino. While she is speaking, the camera focuses in on her mouth and Tony daydreams picturing Isabella in a rural home nursing a baby. He discusses the daydream with Dr. Melfi. He describes that in this daydream Isabella is nursing and cooing to a baby Antonia telling him that he does not have to worry, everything will be all right and that she loves him. Dr. Melfi suggests that the fantasy reflects Tony’s desire for a loving and caring mother.

By this point, the plot to kill Tony is well underway (refer to punitiveness; extra-legal punishment). A scene, possibly real or fantasy shows Livia and Uncle Junior outside of a movie theatre waiting to buy tickets. Livia describes Tony’s depressions stating that he acts as though he is already dead and is behaving like an absent father. Uncle Junior snaps at her,


While watching the news with Uncle Junior, Livia responds with shock at the report that Tony has been shot in an attempted carjacking.

Livia: “How could this happen...My son got shot-and he got away!...He’s my only son” (*Isabella*, 28/03/1999).

She shifts from surprise to disappointment to feigned maternal concern. When she first sees Tony after the shooting she exclaim “Your ear! – it’s disfigured!” (*Isabella*, 28/03/1999). She also questions Meadow’s identity acting as though she does not recognize her. Uncle Junior chastises her about her convenient memory loss to which she replies in her now familiar refrain “I don’t know what you’re talking about” (*Isabella*, 28/03/1999).

In the first season finale, Tony is distraught over the attempted assassination orchestrated by his uncle and his mother.

Tony: “What kind of person can I be if my own mother wants me dead?” (*I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano*, 04/04/1999).
Tony reluctantly meets with the FBI agents in a remote location. They have been trying to persuade him to enter the Witness Protection Program stating that his life is in danger after being shot. The FBI then provides recorded tapes of conversations between Livia and Uncle Junior that have been recorded at the Green Groves retirement home. Tony now has no doubt about the plot to have him murdered.

A livid Tony storms into the nursing unit of the retirement home. He walks with a pillow bunched up in his hands with the clear intention of smothering his mother. An attendant approaches him in the hall asking if he received the message that his mother has had a stroke. Tony leans over his mother as she is being wheeled away by the paramedics.

Tony: “I know what you did. Your only son...I heard the tapes!” (*I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano*, 04/04/1999).

The orderlies inform him that she cannot understand what he is saying. Tony fights them off, getting more agitated.


He continues to scream and struggle against the security officers, eventually composing himself as he watches his mother being taken away.

5.3.5.2 Tony and Carmela

Carmela and Tony's relationship is built on a foundation of understanding that Tony's position within his business is accompanied by certain costs. For example, Tony has a ‘goomah’ or girlfriend on the side. Carmela is well aware of the other women in Tony’s life but she views herself as the head of household and these women as simply disposable pleasure.

During the pilot episode *The Sopranos*, Tony confides in Carmela over dinner that he is seeing a therapist. Carmela is extremely happy and supportive of this decision. She is a devoted Catholic who fears for Tony’s soul and hopes
that his decision to see a therapist will help him start on a path towards moral salvation. While sitting out by the pool, Carmela joins Tony and they share an intimate moment.

Tony: “There’s nothing to this Melfi thing... Carmela, you’re not just in my life. You are my life”. (Pax Soprana, 14/02/1999).

Their marriage is still not perfect and the problems have not actually been resolved but, for the moment, Tony and Carmela have found a sense of peace with each other.

5.3.5.3 Tony and Meadow

Tony’s oldest daughter, Meadow, is a young teenager who is trying to exert her independence and often does not follow the rules of her household. The pivotal point in her relationship with her father occurs in the episode College where Tony accompanies her on a road trip to visit prospective colleges. Originally, Carmella was to join them on this trip but she came down with the flu.

While in the car, Meadow looks at Tony and says

Meadow: “Are you in the mafia?”

Tony: “No! It’s a stereotype and it’s offensive... There is no mafia... [he then admits that some of his money] comes from illegal gambling and whatnot...”

Meadow: “At least you don’t deny it, like Mom.”

Tony: “My father was in it, my uncle was in it. Maybe I was too lazy to think for myself. There was a time when the Italian people didn’t have a lot of options” (College, 07/02/1999).

Bolstered by Tony’s honesty with her, Meadow admits over dinner that she and her friends had taken drugs.

Meadow: “We did speed. Kind of a lot for awhile.”

Tony: “Why did you tell me?”
Meadow: “You were honest with me. I won’t be doing it again. It got too scary.”

Tony: “I’m glad you told me.”

Meadow: “I’m glad that too, glad we have that relationship” (College, 07/02/1999).

In this episode, Tony discovers the man who used to be involved in the business and had turned state witness and joined the witness protection program. While Meadow is touring the last campus, he stalks and murders this man. Even though Tony and Meadow have just established that they have an open relationship, clearly there are elements of Tony’s life that he has no intention of sharing.

5.3.5.4 Tony and Anthony Junior (A.J.)

Tony’s youngest child, A.J. is mostly interested in playing on his computer and video games. Tony often threatens A.J. with violence but the audience never sees any evidence of abuse. A.J. comes under intense scrutiny from his parents during the episode Down Neck (2/21/1999) when he and a few friends steal a bottle of sacramental wine and become intoxicated during gym class.

At a meeting with the school authorities, it is suggested to Tony and Carmela that A.J. be tested for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and learning disabilities. After the tests have been conducted, the parents are called back for a meeting with Dr. Galati the school psychologist. He informs them that A.J. is a borderline ADD case.

Tony, as earlier witnessed in his session with Dr. Melfi, is sceptical of psychology and objects to A.J. being referred to as a ‘case’. Despite Tony’s dismissal of the psychologist’s diagnosis, he is intensely concerned over A.J.’s welfare. He confides his fears to Dr. Melfi and questions whether A.J. is doomed to his fate since Tony followed the example of his father.
Tony: “You’re born to this shit. You are what you are” (*Down Neck*, 21/02/1999).

Tony worries that his son will also become part of the mafia if he is exposed to ‘the life’. While Tony has accepted his position in life, he wants A.J. to be free to pursue any career in life and not feel trapped or forced to stay in the mafia way of life.

5.3.6 Normalcy

The theme of normalcy is not very prominent in this series as compared to *Dexter* and *Weeds*. Tony states that he is in the business of ‘waste management’ but he does not go to any lengths to overtly hide his true profession.

In one episode, *A Hit is a Hit*, the theme of normalcy is explored through the contrast of Mobster Italians and ‘Wonder-Bread Wops’ (Tony’s father’s expression for assimilated Italians, not Caucasians). Carmela puts pressure on Tony to expand their social circle by socializing with non-mob Italian people. They attend a neighbourhood barbeque.

The other men are uneasy around Tony, as they abruptly halt their stock market conversation when Tony asks financial questions. Later in the episode Tony plays golf at their private country club where the men proceed to ask him various mob related questions. The disclaimer of ‘you don’t have to answer this’ is followed by ‘how real was the godfather?’ (*A Hit is a Hit*, 14/03/1999).

At first, Tony is visibly uncomfortable with their questions but then decides to one-up them when they ask if he had ever met John Gotti. He invents a story about how Gotti outbid him at an auction for an ice cream truck. Gotti gave Tony a ride home in the truck ringing the bell the whole way. The men are hanging on to his every word, sure that they have just learned a true and poetic story but unsure of its meaning. Tony reveals to Dr. Melfi that he was like a ‘dancing bear’ at the golf club, only there for the amusement of others.
6: ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The thematic categories were designed for use with all three television shows however, certain themes were found to be more prominent in certain shows than others. The following analysis section will draw connections between the major theories explored in chapter two and the examples provided in chapter five. This chapter is divided by the specific research questions that were introduced in chapter four. A conclusion and future research directions will also be presented.

Chapter two explored theories related to entertainment and enjoyment. Those theories can now be applied to gain insight into what features make the crime dramas Weeds, Dexter and The Sopranos popular. A key component of media enjoyment is the relationship between the audience and the characters. Disposition theory describes the specific emotional alliances that an audience member may develop with a fictional media character. “...[I]t is generally held that we evaluate more favourably – which can be reasonably associated with ‘liking’ – those with whom we share some commonality” (Raney, 2004, p. 358). Some of those commonalities include family and the desire for normalcy. The exploration presented here will try to ascertain the reasons behind the ‘liking’ of the characters and how that liking translates into favourable viewing.

The likeability of the protagonists of each show must be established within the first episode of the season. Once a viewer has concluded that a character is worth liking, he or she will begin to develop an emotional bond with that character. That viewer promptly develops an emotional bond in order to be sufficiently interested to continue viewing the program. The audience will very quickly be able to establish positive feelings towards specific protagonists (Bryant and Miron, 2002). In traditional crime dramas, as explored in chapter three, the specific protagonist is most often a member of the criminal justice system while
the antagonist is most often a one-dimensional criminal character. The new crime dramas represent a shift because the identity of ‘good’ protagonist vs. ‘bad’ antagonist is not as clearly defined. The criminal lead characters are multi-dimensional and difficult to confine to a binary definition of good or bad.

For all three shows, certain themes assist the audience in being able to relate to these characters. The protagonists are immediately shown as complex characters that do not easily fit within regular crime drama archetypes. The premise of each show also challenges typical belief structures and general knowledge about criminals.

### 6.1 Application of Criminological Theories

Research question one asked whether certain criminological theories could be used/applied to understand the characters on these shows. The following section selects the theory that was most applicable for the theme that was most prominent in each series.

#### 6.1.1 Dexter: Functional Deviance, Due Process Model of Justice and Vigilantism

Einstadter and Henry (2006) state that according to Durkheim, “[c]rime...is also a barometer or indicator of broader social conditions” (p. 160). Crime is comparable to pain in that it is an unpleasant experience but normal and required for notification that a problem needs attention (Einstadter and Henry, 2006). In the case of *Dexter*, his crimes indicate dissatisfaction with the current model of justice.

This sense of dissatisfaction can be rooted in the ideological differences between liberal and conservative models of justice. These terms are useful in providing a framework for categorizing individuals, ideas and policies (Lenz, 2003). The two models of justice include crime control and due process. The crime control model emphasizes the control of criminal behaviour as the principal
function of the criminal justice system. This model supports the belief that the “...key to the effective administration of justice is a decision making process that efficiently produces a result” (Lenz, 2003, p. 31). Executive discretion exists to allow police officers and lawyers the ability to accomplish their job without intense legal scrutiny.

The due process model places more emphasis on the protection of individual rights. The primary elements of due process are “...the importance of the presumption of innocence” and a legal system “...with elaborate legal procedures to protect against convicting an innocent person” (Lenz, 2003, p. 31). Discretion is limited to ensure overall fairness and consistency.

There is a connection between the media’s portrayal of the due process model and vigilante sentiments.

The way legal fiction depicts government officials (political figures, bureaucrats and legal officials) provides valuable insights into popular thinking about crime control (Lenz, 2003, p. 41).

Support for vigilante justice is increased when “...the fact that things seem to be spinning out of control is blamed on the due process model of justice...” (Lenz, 2003, p. 42).

The significant theme on Dexter that makes the series particularly appealing to an audience is the concept of vigilante justice. Vigilantism is a theme that is rooted in history and has been prominently explored through media representations. The main feature of both the historical and fictional stream of vigilante justice portrayal is that it represents an alternative to the formal criminal justice system and individuals take the law into their own hands (Karmen, 2004). Vigilantes, similar to Dexter,

...call for action whenever ‘honest, upright citizens’ became enraged and terrified about what they considered to be an upsurge of criminality and a breakdown of law and order (Karmen, 2004, p. 353).
Throughout the first season, Dexter’s choice of victims reflects gaps or inadequacies in the justice system. Dexter is guided by the rules of his father, Harry Morgan, who told Dexter as a young child that there are many bad people in the world and the police are unable to catch them all. Dexter sees himself as filling in those gaps left by the justice system, specifically issues surrounding procedural justice. Working independently, Dexter does not require search warrants, or any other form of permission to investigate his suspects. Through his personal investigations, the audience is shown that the suspect has evaded justice and Dexter has taken it upon himself to ensure that justice is restored.

If duly constituted authority [can] not be relied on for protection, they [vigilantes] would shoulder the burden of law enforcement and the obligation to punish offenders (Karmen, 2004, p. 354).

Dexter believes that it is his duty to channel his murderous feelings towards these individuals who have not been given adequate punishment. The satisfaction that the audience may receive after Dexter has punished one of his victims can be understood in terms of media enjoyment theories. Raney (2002) suggests that a primary factor in the enjoyment of a television program is the resolution of conflict. That conflict resolution is linked with justice being served.

*Dexter* is different from more traditional crime dramas because the person achieving justice is doing so through criminal means rather than through the formal channels of the justice system. Regardless of who is restoring balance and justice, the result is the same for the viewer. Raney’s (2002) research indicates that viewers will evaluate the show against their personal levels of morality in order to determine if justice has been restored. His research demonstrates that a viewer’s moral judgements will be based on how deserving the criminal’s punishment was and the level of sympathy held for the victim.

Research conducted by Raney and Bryant (2002) examined the concept of retributive justice and the restoration of order after social norms or rules have been violated. There is a perception that justice has prevailed when a criminal receives what he or she deserved or was owed. The victims selected in *Dexter*
are usually considered the worst kinds of criminals that violate every social norm. While there may not exist a true consensus on which crimes are worse than others, the portrayal of these victims on *Dexter* demonstrates that certain crimes can be deemed unforgivable. The show also explores the concept of ‘lesser evil’. Dexter is murdering these people but the moral issue is posed to the audience of whether or not Dexter is justified in his actions.

Raney (2004) also makes the statement that “[a]t times, it seems our liking precedes our moral judgement” (p. 353). A viewer may be aware that murder is legally and morally wrong: however, the likeability of Dexter overshadows those initial reactions. A viewer may extend the moral boundaries of what is normally allowable in order to continue the relationship and strong feelings that have developed for a particular character.

6.1.2 The Sopranos: Punitiveness and Morality

*The Sopranos* “…enable[d] viewers to get to know a show’s characters more fully – and with deeper emotional engagement – than a one-shot drama or even a mini-series allows” (Yacowar, 2003, p. 13). From the first scene, it is clear that Tony Soprano is not a typical member of the mafia. He is a man suffering from panic and anxiety attacks who has made the decision to see a psychiatrist. The concept of a gangster requiring therapy is intriguing because criminals are commonly portrayed as being callous and unfeeling. There is more to Tony than being a ‘wiseguy’. He is a husband and a father dealing with the pressures of raising teenagers and having a difficult mother.

In determining positive or negative sentiments towards a character, viewers will utilise moral reasoning. When a character is well liked, more leeway is afforded in terms of questionable moral or ethical behaviour (Raney, 2002). *The Sopranos* is unique because it has the ability to challenge typical moral reasoning and judgement. In typical crime dramas, there is often an underlying moral agenda through a demonstration of right and wrong or good and evil. Crime dramas can serve the function of providing an audience with the
reassurance that the social order will not be undermined by crime and justice will prevail (Davis et al, 2001).

Within the context of *The Sopranos*, this function is challenged because the categories of right and wrong are not as straightforward. The world of *The Sopranos* can be viewed as

...an exercise in moral relativism. Its hero hoods are not so bad – because we know them so well. That makes this series an exercise in moral judgement. As it betrays our knee-jerk responses, it tests us...The viewer’s rejection of the gang is itself complicated by their touching values of honor, family and individualism (Yacowar, 2003, p. 18).

*The Sopranos* has the ability to make the audience “...sympathize with the Mafia killer”. This is achieved “...[b]y immersing us in Tony’s life, by rooting the fiction solidly in his perspective...”(Yacowar, 2003, p. 18). Nabi and Krcmar (2004) suggest that media enjoyment includes three main factors including affective and cognitive information. Empathy is a component of affective information, where a person is able to adopt the psychological perspective of a character and imagine the thoughts, feelings and mentality of that character (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006).

As discussed in Chapter two, Robert Snow (1983) explored the concept of media culture. Snow described specific features and attributes of information being classified as entertainment. Behaviour that is atypical or outside or the norm is the first attribute. Crime dramas are a major source of entertainment specifically because they are outside of the realm of daily life. As media enjoyment theories indicate, one aspect that is appealing in crime dramas is the access to a criminal world. *The Sopranos* has an authentic feel that supports viewers’ desire to have characters behave in a consistent manner. The show provides an “...unflinching probe of its criminal characters private and business lives, the candid dramatization of family problems, and the hypocrisies in church, school, and government, and the complexity of its moral positions” (Yacowar, 2003, p. 14). The characters are believable, while at the same time highlighting
for the viewer the inner workings of the mob. In order to identify with the characters on the show, the audience must be given an illusion of reality. The audience, while aware that a fictional world is being portrayed, still want the characters to behave and act in a manner consistent with real life (Valkenburg and Peter, 2006).

The show even takes the opportunity to make fun of an individual’s desire to learn about the mob world. In *A Hit is a Hit* (03/14/1999), Tony goes golfing with his neighbour and his friends. The men are delighted to be in the company of a real life mobster and ask him a series of questions about the authenticity of media portrayals of gangsters such as *The Godfather*. The scenes on the golf course illustrate the intense desire to gain knowledge into a hidden facet of life.

Tony has the last laugh when he gives his neighbour a box of sand wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. Tony informs him that he needs to leave the box with him for a while and he will come back for it at some point. The episode concludes with his neighbour, Cusamano, and his wife staring at the box uncertain of what it contains. This particular episode is ironic, given that the majority of the audience is specifically watching the series with the same intention as the men asking Tony questions on the golf course.

### 6.1.3 *Weeds*: Normalcy and Strain/Anomie Theory

Nancy’s decision to pursue drug dealing can be explained using Merton’s Strain theory. Merton (1938) theorized that crime is a natural adaptation to an abnormal circumstance. Aberrant or criminal behaviour can “...be viewed as a symptom of dissociation between culturally defined aspirations and socially structured means” (Merton, 1938, p. 674). The culturally defined aspirations in the series, *Weeds*, are clearly demonstrated in the planned community of Agrestic. In this community, everyone drives expensive cars and; wears designer clothing - their children attend a multitude of after school activities. Nancy’s desire to maintain her current lifestyle without the means to do so has
led her to drug dealing. Merton classifies those who accept the cultural goals but reject the institutionalized means as innovators.

As described by Einstadter and Henry (2006) in chapter two, there are three main elements of society within the strain perspective, structure, culture and social order. Structure refers to institutions and social classes including law, family, religion and education. On Weeds, the members of the community of Agrestic belong to a higher social class, as evidenced by the types of homes in the neighbourhood and the cars being driven. Family and education also play a major role on the program. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) plays a prominent role in controlling the behaviour of the students as well as the other mothers. The series opens with Nancy and Celia debating the merits of removing sugary drinks from the school’s vending machines. Celia argues that diet soda does not constitute a ‘sugary’ drink and that since many girls in the school are dieting, they should not be denied diet drinks. Nancy argues that the oldest girls in the elementary school are 11 and should not be concerned with diet. From the intitial scene, it is made clear to the audience that within this community, appearance and conformity are of utmost importance.

The second feature of society, culture, proposes that members of a society are taught the basic norms and standards of conduct, which includes societal values and goals. The larger societal goals and values become internalized and viewed as personal goals by members of the society (Einstadter and Henry, 2006). Nancy and the other members of Agrestic have internalized the goal and value of monetary success.

On Weeds, marijuana use by members of the community is normalized. Nancy’s clients include her financial advisor, her neighbour who is a lawyer, and her son’s karate teacher. The overall message is that marijuana usage is acceptable and commonplace. Despite the frequency of drug usage on the show, Nancy still does not want to be known as a drug dealer. With the help of her financial advisor (Doug Wilson) and her lawyer (Dean Hodes) she opens up a
bakery as a legitimate business front to prevent arousing suspicion about the source of her income.

   It is interesting that Nancy has only chosen to open a small business as a cover for her illegal business rather than pursuing a small business as a first option to support her family. It is Doug Wilson who points out that small businesses often struggle and that her bakery is only successful because she has the money from drugs to cover operational costs.

   The third feature of society in the strain perspective is social order or a system of maintaining order. One mechanism that assists in the maintenance of social order is class and the differentiation of wealth (Einstadter and Henry, 2006). The members of the neighbourhood maintain the social order of the Agrestic community. There are very few secrets within this community and Nancy realizes that the private business of her neighbours is actually common knowledge. This fact becomes apparent when the affair of Celia Hodes' husband Dean is revealed. Everyone except Celia was already aware of the affair and Nancy acknowledges that she is going to have to work extremely hard to keep her drug business private.

6.2 Attractive Components of Deviance

   Research question two asks are there identifiable components that make deviance interesting and attractive. The field of crime and media stands on the premise that the viewing public is interested in the criminal justice system. Within the social construction framework, it has been established that the media are extremely influential in an individual's perceptions of crime and deviance. Chapter two provided an overview for how deviance is defined and what purpose it can serve in society. A key feature of deviance is that it can serve to reinforce previously held and accepted notions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Watching deviant behaviour on television serves as reinforcement for making the correct (pro-social, law-abiding) decisions in life. Aberrant behaviours are
collectively determined to be unwanted and are subsequently banned. The guidelines for what is acceptable or not are most often dictated by the law.

The role of the media includes the reinforcement of public norms and the denouncement of deviant behaviours. Deviance, in this perspective is a reflection of the numerous interactions amongst members of a society. A specific behaviour may, at different times, be seen as deviant or acceptable. Merton describes the ways by which individuals internalize the societal goals and the methods they use to achieve those goals. In the past, the frequent portrayal of criminals on television illustrated the immediate consequences of attempting to violate social norms. Crime and deviance is interesting for so many people by virtue of the fact that the majority of society does follow the law and subscribes to widely held social norms. There is a sense of voyeurism when viewing crimes even if those crimes are fictional.

The three programs explore the idea that the definition or boundaries of deviance may be changing as the portrayal of criminals on television is changing. They examine how both definitions of deviance and who is a criminal may be changing within society. On Dexter, the most attractive component of his deviance is his swift and efficient method of justice. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Dexter is not bound by the due process model of justice and is therefore capable of exacting a more satisfactory brand of justice. On Weeds, deviance is attractive because many individuals do not believe that marijuana should be illegal and are interested and curious to view a world when a woman would have the ability to make her living as a drug dealer. The Sopranos can be more closely linked with Dexter in that Tony Soprano follows his own laws and is largely unconcerned with being a criminal.

6.2.1 Dexter’s Victims

Part of Dexter’s charm and appeal is that he has taken it upon himself to remove from the world individuals who no one would miss. As well, part of what makes deviance attractive is the selection and execution of victims by Dexter. His
selection and execution of victims is viewed favourably because of the types of crimes that his victims commit. By highlighting the faults of the victim, murders are not seen as heinous but rather they are welcomed. The following chart details the name of the victim, the victim’s crime, an exemplar quote and the relevant social or political issue that the choice of victim raises.

Table 2: Dexter’s Victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dexter’s Victim Name</th>
<th>Victim’s Crime</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Relevant Social and/or Political Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike Donovan</td>
<td>Child abuser/molester</td>
<td><em>Dexter: “That’s right beg. Did these little boys beg? Mike Donovan: “I couldn’t help myself” Dexter: “Children, I could never do that. Not like you, never kids. I have standards”</em> (Dexter, 01/10/06)</td>
<td>Stranger danger, child abduction and molestation, predatory pedophiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime Joworski</td>
<td>Sexual deviant who operates a rape website entitled ‘Scream, Bitch, Scream’</td>
<td>Right before his death <em>Joworski to Dexter “I’m not sorry”</em> After his death <em>Dexter: “One less amateur filmmaker polluting the internet”</em> (Dexter, 01/10/06)</td>
<td>Violence against women, internet pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Chambers</td>
<td>Drinking and driving</td>
<td><em>Dexter: “Matt Chambers may have found a way to beat the system but so have I”</em> (Crocodile, 08/10/06)</td>
<td>Drunk driving, individuals evading punishment, unjust court system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Jeremy Downs | Murder while a juvenile | Dexter is shown driving in his car and stopped outside of a prison.  
Dexter: “Florida prisons kick free 25,000 prisoners a year. They don't do that for me but it sure feels like it. I search for the ones who think they've beat the system” (Popping Cherry, 15/10/06).  
Jeremy Downs is then described as someone who;  
Dexter: “..[G]ot off easy. Four years in a juvenile facility for manslaughter” (Popping Cherry, 15/10/06). | Lack of harsh penalties for juvenile offenders, perpetrators of crime can also be victims of crime. |
| Jorge and Valerie Costillo | Human trafficking | Dexter discussing the latest body found on shore: “Chalked up to another inner-tube mishap” (Love, American Style, 29/10/06) | Immigration policies, racism and human trafficking |
| Dr. Emmett Meridien | Encouraging suicidal patients to commit suicide | Dexter to Dr. Meridian: “Sorry doc, actions have consequences” (Shrink Wrap, 19/11/06) | Abuse of power, unethical individuals in the medical profession |
| Paul Bennett | Dexter’s girlfriend Rita’s ex-husband who is causing problems in Rita’s life. | Dexter: “Let’s face it Paul, you’ve been a problem. Time for you to go away...Harry didn't believe in pre-emptive killing but maybe I can bend the rules just this once” (Seeing Red, 03/12/06).  
Dexter: “Death wasn't the answer. Life in prison will do just fine” (Seeing Red, 03/12/06). | Three strikes laws |
The above chart illustrates that Dexter is very particular about whom he selects as victims. Each victim speaks to a larger social, moral or ethical issue, as well as pointing out potential flaws in the criminal justice system. Dexter may be a serial murderer but he is very selective in his choice of victim. A clear distinction is made by Dexter between himself and his victims. Child molestation is deemed, by many people, to be an unforgivable crime. By selecting a victim who is a predatory paedophile as his first victim, the audience is able to look past the fact that Dexter is committing murder and focus on the faults of the victim.

There is no better way to unify public support than to rally against a sex offender, specifically a paedophile. The character of Mike Donovan plays into the public fear of not only young children being abused and murdered but of the abuser/murderer not being punished. The fact that Mike Donovan is a respectable choirmaster with a family further heightens the sense of injustice that the audience may feel. When Dexter kills him, after confronting him with his crime, the balance has been restored and justice has been achieved. The concept of ‘justice’ is challenged within this program. Within this context, justice is achieved because Dexter has murdered a criminal who has not been caught or sufficiently punished. Dexter’s view of justice was shaped early on in his life by his father. Dexter’s role as crusader of justice is being established and therefore a relationship between the audience and Dexter is possible.

While a viewer may fundamentally be opposed to murder, the lines of morality are blurred because of the types of crimes that the victims commit. It is difficult to disagree with Dexter’s assessment of ridding the world of an individual contributing to violence against women. The victim Jaime Joworski represents two other prominent social issues; violence against women and internet pornography. Dexter’s murdering of Joworski and subsequent commentary of ridding the world of a sexually deviant pornographer are actions and viewpoints many viewers can support. The audience can now relate to the work of this effective and efficient serial killer. The show is built on the premise that the system does not work for a variety of reasons including issues related to procedural due process, the rights of the offenders, and sentencing concerns.
Dexter’s system works but is actually adding support for a more punitive approach.

The character Matt Chambers explores two key issues; drinking and driving and problems with the criminal justice system. The justice system is shown as flawed in two ways. First, Chambers’ victim’s family (a young son killed while Chambers was driving under the influence) are seen in the court room mourning the loss of their son and watching in disbelief as the main suspect is declared not guilty. Second, Dexter conducts his own investigation revealing that Chambers’ is a serial drunk driver who is wanted in many states. The flaw of the American justice system is pointed out because it is a Florida case and therefore the police assume that Chambers is only a Florida criminal.

When Dexter captures Chambers, he shows him the same video that was played in the court room of the young man who was killed. Rather than taking responsibility at this point Chambers continues to point the blame elsewhere by stating it was because of the alcohol and he was set up by the family. Chambers finally admits to his crimes and begins professing apologizes. The confession that he gives is only one piece of evidence that Dexter has collected in his own investigation into the character of Chambers. There is a poetic sense of justice in the way that Dexter forces the criminals to be accountable for their crimes. There is a perverse sense of satisfaction and justice to see a criminal who is guilty get (what the audience perceives as) his/her comeuppance. This particular murder case was shown in juxtaposition to the courtroom. The Florida legal system was unable to find Chambers guilty but Dexter was able to prove his guilt and punish him.

The concept of remorse is also highlighted. Dissatisfaction with the justice system often stems from a feeling that justice has been violated and not restored. Dexter forces his victims to admit their crimes prior to killing them. The character of Jeremy Downs appears in two episodes and storylines. Downs received an apparently lenient sentence touching on the issue of juvenile violence and justice. The flaws of the justice system are highlighted in the belief that four years
is not an appropriate sentence for manslaughter. While people are often made aware when a high profile criminal goes to prison, there is less attention given to less-serious offenders who are inevitably let out of prison.

A consistent theme throughout the show is that the punishment does not suitably fit the crime. Dexter states that he specifically targets individuals who believe that they have evaded justice. Youth crime is a criminal justice issue that the media often focuses on by stating that youth sentences are too lenient. The character Downs also sets the stage for the audience to see a perpetrator of a crime as a victim. It is revealed that the man who Downs murdered had sexually abused him. This character is important because in later episodes the idea of Dexter as a victim is developed. Downs character assists in challenging the stereotypical definitions of a criminal. Dexter also feels a connection to Downs. When he learns that he murdered his abuser, Dexter comments that Downs did not commit murder but rather ‘took out the garbage’. Dexter has rationalized and justified Downs’ crime the same way he does for his own crimes.

The issues explored in the episode with the Costillos speak to specific location concerns in Miami. Miami, Florida is in very close geographical proximity to Cuba. Many individuals attempt to escape Communist Cuba and illegally enter the United States. Other individuals then take advantage of the desperation of those fleeing Cuba. Costillo is portrayed as a coyote a person who illegally brings immigrants into the United States for money.

When Dexter attempts to talk to an immigration officer, the officer immediately concludes that he must be asking on behalf of his house cleaner. The stereotypical view of Cubans in Miami is often that they are only involved in manual labour. Human trafficking is often attributed to developing countries and not as a problem within the United States. *Dexter* demonstrates that there are always people who will find an opportunity to profit from other people’s misfortunes.

There is an element of creativity to the way that Dexter confronts his victims. In this episode, Dexter lights a path of candles in Jorge’s junkyard that
leads to an abandoned trailer. On the walls of the trailer are pictures of Costillo’s victims. When he is about to kill Costillo, Valerie Costillo arrives at the junk yard. Previously, Dexter assumed that she knew nothing of her husband’s illegal operations but soon discovers that she is as much a part of the ‘lucrative operation’ as her husband. Dexter then makes the decision to kill them both.

The episode featuring the character of Dr. Meridien touches on the inherent distrust that some individuals have of the psychiatric profession. This concept is also explored in \textit{The Sopranos} with Tony’s relationship with Dr. Melfi. Dexter seeks out anyone whom he believes is getting away with a crime and evading punishment. He (representing the audience) wants to hold criminals accountable.

Paul Bennett is one victim that Dexter decides not to kill. He makes the decision to exploit Florida’s three strike laws by framing Paul. Rather than murder Paul, Dexter gets Paul back in prison by creating a crime scene. The police find Paul with a needle in his arm, heroin and a gun (stolen from the evidence locker). Paul had already been in prison and this arrest violated Florida’s three-strike rule.

\textbf{6.2.2 Vicarious involvement}

Vicarious involvement is the ability to suspend reality and allow for the possibility of committing crimes and not being caught. Some people do not follow the law out of a sense of moral or ethical obligation but out of fear of being apprehended. These shows provide a fictional landscape to explore the question of what if you could get away with a crime and living a successful life as a criminal? \textit{Dexter} examines what if a person could murder the individuals who the police are unwilling or unable to catch? \textit{Weeds} examines what if being a drug dealer was a feasible and lucrative career choice? \textit{The Sopranos} what it might be like to be a mob boss in New Jersey. Essentially, these new shows represent a new type of escapist fantasy where the hero is recast as a successful criminal.

A feature of media culture is the concept of vicarious involvement which Snow (1983) defines as the ability to suspend reality and become immersed in a
particular situation. *The Sopranos* represents these facets of media culture. Life within the mafia is not a typical for the majority of viewers. There is an intense desire to become immersed in a world that has been so prominently featured in entertainment but is very much removed from daily life.

### 6.3 Victimology

In addition to challenging preconceived notions of morality, these shows also bring into question traditional definitions of victimology. Research question three enquires as to whether or not the characters on these three new programs are seen as more or less morally blameworthy in comparison to criminal characters of the past. In order to address this question, a definition of what is a victim must first be established.

What does legitimate victim status mean? Christie (1986) puts forth the notion of the ideal victim. The ideal victim is someone who “…when hit by a crime – most readily is given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim” (p. 18). The ideal victim will possess five key attributes. The first concerns strength. An ideal victim is weak, or at least weaker than the offender is. Individuals who are very old, sick or very young make good victims. The second attribute is that the victim was engaged in a reputable activity such as walking a neighbour’s dog. Third, the victim was in a location that he/she could not possibly be blamed for being at, such as a park during the day. The offender in question should possess dangerous or ‘evil’ attributes. Finally, there is no personal relationship between the offender and the victim. The offender was unknown and a complete stranger to the victim (Christie, 1986).

It would appear, for certain types of crimes, that society is more likely or willing to assign blame to the victim. In specific circumstances, the victim can be seen as more complicit in the crime. Within the above classification, victim is very narrowly defined. In real life, there are many shades of grey where incidents can involve two individuals who are both victims, both offenders and both victim and
offender concurrently. Victims are not always weak and defenceless and offenders are not always cunning and vicious (Karmen, 2004).

Ideally, criminals are held accountable and brought to justice. *Dexter* highlights the fact that the criminal justice system is not always capable of dealing with the vast number of criminal offenders. Each time Dexter points out a flaw in the justice system, the audience grows to appreciate him and his work. Dexter’s particular brand of justice is based on retribution, with the goal of evening the score and righting wrongs (Karmen, 2004).

Both Tony Soprano and Dexter Morgan represent individuals who can be seen as both victims and offenders. Tony is guilty of a myriad of violent offences but he is also the son of a menacing and malicious mother. Dexter is a serial killer targeting individuals who have gotten away with a crime, but he is also the victim of watching his mother murdered in front of him. It is worthy to note that both of these male protagonists have deeply rooted psychological issues stemming from their mothers. In Chapter two, the research of Cuklanz and Moorti (2006) described the term ‘monstrous maternal’ referring to those mothers who have so critically failed in their role as maternal caregiver to have harmed or caused the death of their child or children. These ‘monstrous maternal’ women are seen as violating the law but also the social norm of women’s role of caregiver. In previous crime dramas, the women who embody this concept were the characters prominently featured. In the new crime dramas, the main characters are the individuals who have been affected by the role of their mothers.

Part of the reason why these shows signify a shift in the media portrayal of criminals is that neither Tony or Dexter fit neatly into the ‘boxes’ of criminal or victim. Nancy Botwin, on *Weeds*, is portrayed as a different kind of victim. Nancy embodies the concept of victimless crimes. A victimless crime or public order offence includes gambling, prostitution, pornography, vandalism, substance use/abuse and hate crimes. These categories of crimes are considered victimless because there is no ‘complaining’ victim (Winterdyk, 2000). The
negative consequences of the drug trade are minimized and the people who Nancy sells drugs to are upstanding citizens and members of the community.

Nancy is also a victim but not in the criminal justice or victimology definition. She can be classified as a victim of circumstance. Her husband has suddenly died and she is left with the emotional and financial burden of caring for her two sons.

These shows have served to expand the previously limited definition of victim. The three title characters break free from the one-dimensional criminal as evil or bad stereotypes. They are complex individuals who are simultaneously offenders and victims. They illustrate that people can be defined by more than what they do. An audience may be able to relate more to the characters because, by being victim and offender, they are more dynamic.

In the past, criminals were repeatedly shown as bad or amoral individuals who essentially deserved whatever punishment they received. The division of criminal and victim is no longer as clear-cut. The police and members of the criminal justice system have historically been on the right side of the law, which meant that any person who broke the law would have to be on the wrong side. Having a criminal lead character on a television program upsets the previously held balance of right and wrong.

6.4 Why Now?

There is a cyclical nature to the emergence of criminal lead characters on television. Prior to Westerns, there was a romanticized view of crime and the police were seen as the villains (Stark, 1997). Westerns began the shift to viewing the police and the criminal justice system as heroic. The new shows are shifting public attitudes back in the direction of criminal as hero. Westerns still represented the concept of an outsider or an outlaw being responsible for upholding justice. On those programs, the man apart was usually a Sherriff or a cowboy who would still be considered a ‘good guy’.
The traditional police and crime drama ideology has been that the criminal justice system can and should be trusted to deal with crime and criminals. Occasionally the system is seen as corrupt or failing and criminals might play a minor role as informants, but overwhelmingly the role of justice has remained within the realm of the police.

As previously discussed in chapter three, the roots of in-group bias were laid in the era of Westerns. The process of ‘othering’ involved determining those individuals who are desirable members of society and casting out those who are not. Traditionally those individuals who have been cast out are criminals or those who violated social norms.

When television crime dramas premiered, crime and criminals were viewed as a product of social problems. The solutions to crime lay in rehabilitative programs and targeted poverty. By the 1970s, this viewpoint had shifted dramatically to a ‘get tough’ on crime approach, where individuals who committed crimes were a separate class of people and the solution was removal from society.

6.4.1 Revisiting Race and Gender in the Media

Chapter two established that the portrayal of both members of the criminal justice system and the criminal justice system itself has relied heavily on stereotypical portrayals of certain ethnic minorities and gender roles. One aspect of the shows which makes deviance attractive and interesting is that the stereotypical portrayal of criminals is challenged. As previously discussed, African-American individuals are often portrayed as the criminal on television crime dramas. While the three new shows are pushing the boundaries, some stereotypes remain.

Dexter is set in a Miami police department and features many Hispanic officers in prominent positions for example Lieutenant LaGuerta. Many times the officers speak to each other in Spanish and there are no sub-titles for non-Spanish speaking viewers. While Spanish is the second language of many
Americans, the decision to not include sub-titles creates a reverse in-group bias. The officers of Hispanic descent have a sense of solidarity. The police department is ethnically diverse following the trend of other crime drama shows to have a multi-cultural cast. Dexter’s victims are predominantly white males. Dexter has a few female victims but overall his victims, who are criminals, fit the criminological stereotype that the majority of crimes are committed by white males.

On *The Sopranos*, the majority of the characters are Italian. This is also a stereotype that Italian-Americans are most likely to be involved in the mafia. The show takes the opportunity to explore this issue. In the episode *The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti* (2/28/1999) the show attempts to deal with some of the criticisms that it is perpetuating a negative media stereotype about Italians. This episode featured many of the characters discussing their views on Italians and the mafia. Ethnic slurs are often used against themselves (Christopher refers to himself as a ‘skinny guinea’) but are also aimed at all other minorities. The slurs give the show an air of authenticity because it is common within one ethnic group to make in-jokes but also to be negative to those outside of the group.

Numerous references are made concerning the fact that Nancy is a Caucasian, attractive woman and the luxuries that are afforded to her based on those qualities. There are frequent allusions to the role that gender and race play in the drug dealing world. Nancy buys her drugs from African American dealers and the majority of the families in Agrestic have Hispanic house keepers.

Heliya and Conrad frequently call her ‘Barbie’, ‘snowflake’ and ‘over-privileged white woman’. These terms are often used endearingly but they serve to highlight the racial differences in the show. When Nancy expands her business and begins baking with marijuana, Heylia calls her ‘Betty Cracker’ and ‘Lady Saltine’. Nancy never blanches at these names and takes them in stride as part of her interactions with Heylia and Conrad.

Nancy’s house keeper, Lupita, frequently calls her the ‘skinny white lady’ and comments ‘how bad could her troubles possibly be given that she is a white
woman?’. During her confrontation with Alejandro, he tells her to ‘know her place lily white’ and refers to her as the ‘pretty housewife’.

Nancy’s appearance is worth noting because it serves the purpose of allowing her to remain relatively undetected as a drug dealer within her community. She lives up to the majority of the ideals and standards set by the other mothers and women in her social circle. As a result, they are not suspicious of her.

6.4.2 Nature vs. Nurture

One theme that emerged as common among all three shows was the concept of nature vs. nurture. Are individuals a product of their genetics or a product of their environment? Each show, in different ways, explores this socio-biological question. Advances in technology and science have had a huge impact on society but also in media representations of society. These advances have led to a greater widespread understanding of genetics and the role that they may play in criminality. The topic of genetics would not have been successful in crime dramas of the past because the audience would not have had a high enough level of comprehension. This is also demonstrating that these shows are targeting an educated audience.

When examining why these shows have emerged, the issue of what is an audience willing to accept also surfaces. Initially, Dexter is shown as a psychopathic killer who has a bloodlust and receives great pleasure from killing. By the conclusion of the first season, Dexter is an individual who has suffered a traumatic event in his past that caused him to repress memories and may have influenced his desire to kill (even though science has raised significant concerns about the legitimacy of repressed memory). Dexter is shown in contrast to his brother who was raised in foster care and mental institutions while Dexter was raised by a loving father and had a family. Brian is someone who kills without rules and the audience is less willing to accept that kind of killer as opposed to Dexter who appears to be killing with a purpose.
During his sessions with Dr. Melfi, Tony questions whether he had the opportunity to be anything besides a member of the mafia given that his father and uncle were involved. His concern has now shifted to whether or not his son will consider any alternative career options.

Neither Tony nor Dexter was shown as being abused in their childhoods. This is worth noting because there is a pervasive belief that many criminals are the product of childhood abuse.

An audience is also able to accept a woman who is dealing marijuana over any other drug. The status of marijuana within society will be further discussed in the following pop culture section. Nancy is portrayed as fiercely maternal and maintains that she is only a drug dealer in an effort to support her family. Nancy is also not shown engaging in marijuana use. This makes her character more likeable because she is not in the drug business to fuel her own drug needs.

### 6.5 Popular Culture and Criminality

Within the social constructionist framework, reality is a product of social interactions and outside influences. It has been established that one of the main outside influences on the construction of reality are the media. Media dictate elements that become part of popular culture. This can be achieved through certain characters, language and catch phrases or images. While the shows refer to specific elements that are a part of popular culture, including the use of craigslist on *Dexter* and the mention of the Kobe Bryant case on *Weeds*, the programs themselves are now a part of popular culture.

It has also been demonstrated that the majority of individuals garner information and knowledge about crime and criminals through the media. This, in turn, indicates that the media mainly shape the popular culture definitions of crime and criminality. Research question five inquires as to what these new crime dramas demonstrate about popular culture’s ideas about criminality. Einstadter and Henry (2006) state that according to Durkheim, “[c]rime...is also a
barometer or indicator of broader social conditions” (p. 160). This can be extended to the portrayal of fictional crime on television being an indicator of social conditions.

_Dexter_ represents the conservative ideology that criminals need to be punished for their crimes and that punishment is complete removal from society. The premise of that type of punishment is that no members of society would miss those criminals if they were to be murdered. Dexter, as a character, symbolizes the desire for harsher penalties. While the show at first appears to be on the cutting edge of justice it is actually a throwback to the ‘get tough’ approach to crime first espoused in the 1970s. The flaws of the current justice system are repeatedly highlighted throughout the first season of the series. The police are not shown as necessarily incompetent but rather ill equipped to deal with criminals in an appropriate manner.

Dexter has the ability to hold criminals accountable for their actions. Within the current court system, an individual may be found guilty of a crime and then sentenced to a term in prison. On _Dexter_, that form of punishment is not nearly as satisfying as watching Dexter force his victims to face their crimes through pictures and videos. The justice system is a faceless institution doling out sentences for as many cases as possible. Dexter has a more individualized approach. As previously described in the vicarious involvement section, Dexter is carrying out the morbid fantasies that many victims of crime may harbour, those individuals who feel that a sentence of prison is not sufficient punishment.

Dexter’s selection of victims is also an indicator of popular sentiments towards specific types of crimes. The show is pushing the boundaries in terms of who the audience can accept as a vigilante hero but there are certain crime taboos that cannot be crossed. His choices of victims are criminals for whom the audience would be hard pressed to find any redeeming qualities. These individuals have committed crimes that violate some of the most important and widely held social norms. The show indicates that the public may be dissatisfied
with the current punishment and sentencing guidelines available. It would also indicate support for capital punishment.

The personal rationalization that Dexter uses is that he is not committing murder but is ‘taking out the trash’. The trash referring to his victims who have already been deemed unworthy of society and life. In the past, criminals were portrayed as a separate class of people. On *Dexter*, that idea is still present but there is a distinction being made between different types or breeds of criminals. Dexter is viewed positively because his crimes are seen as positively helping society while those individuals whom he kills are harming society.

Part of the success of *Weeds* can be attributed to the socially ambiguous nature of marijuana. The ‘war on drugs’ does not differentiate between different types of drugs and their potential lethality. *Weeds* supports the stance that marijuana is a relatively harmless drug and has medicinal benefits in certain contexts. Prominent and affluent people are frequently shown engaging in marijuana use, which serves to normalize its consumption. The show would most likely not be as appealing to audiences if Nancy was a dealer of heroin or cocaine. There is less ambiguity about these harder kinds of drugs in popular culture.

*Weeds* reflects the popular culture sentiment that marijuana does not need to be illegal when its purpose is solely personal use. The view of marijuana, succinctly stated by Andy, is that marijuana makes a person hungry and happy. The use of other drugs is scorned. Prescription medication is described as ‘frying your brain’ and turning those individuals who take it ‘into zombies’. When Silas consumes the drug ecstasy, it is described as taking ‘ice cream scoops’ out of the user’s brain. A clear division is made between the use of marijuana and many other drugs.

Popular culture definitions of crime and criminality are being expanded as a result of these programs. Criminal characters are being humanized and the audience has the ability to view crime from a different angle. On *The Sopranos*, the message is that for members of the mafia their activities are part of a lifestyle
rather than just crimes. The violence on the show is not gratuitous and the impact that the violence has on the individuals is shown and explored. Previous depictions of criminals and of members of the mafia show them as callous with no regard for anyone else. The lifestyle is not seen as glamorous when the mundane minutiae of day-to-day life seep into the mafia world. The men involved in the mafia are violent but they are also shown as fathers, brothers and husbands. The pressure of this lifestyle has affected Tony to the point that he is having panic attacks and requires psychiatric help.

The show may also have served to de-stigmatize certain elements of mental illness among men. Tony is extremely resistant to taking medication and to talking about his problems with anyone. As the first season unfolds, Tony begins to see the usefulness of therapy and he values his relationship with Dr. Melfi. A mob boss represents the height of masculinity and it is symbolically significant that Tony seeks help.

_The Sopranos_ also had an impact on the popular lexicon. While the show was on the air, avid fans would jokingly describe how they were going to have someone ‘whacked’, a direct reference to the mafia killing off individuals causing trouble for them. Similar to _Dexter_, certain phrases are spoken in Italian and no sub-titles are provided. This adds a realistic feel to the show because it is common within an ethnic or racial group to use familiar terms. The HBO website provides an online dictionary to allow viewers access to the terms used by characters on the show.

All three shows indicate that the definitions of what is a crime and who is a criminal are being expanded. The previously held definitions have had to shift in order to accommodate these three new lead characters. These shows demonstrate that a life of crime is not necessarily the easy way out. In the past, criminals have been portrayed as lazy individuals who are not prepared to put in the hard work needed to achieve socially accepted goals. Crime is realistically portrayed as messy, full of mistakes and driven by the reality that plans do not always turn out as expected. This realistic nature of the shows is what makes
them accessible to a viewing audience. Life, whether criminal or not, is difficult but it is also funny. These characters are not all bad or all good, they are somewhere in the middle, which is where the majority of the audience also falls.

6.6 Conclusion

This thesis has explored key issues and concerns using five specific research questions. The television dramas The Sopranos, Weeds, and Dexter were used as examples to demonstrate a shift that has taken place with the realm of fictional crime dramas. The purpose of the analysis chapter was to examine each research question individually in order to gain insight into the emergence of these new crime dramas.

The application of criminological theories demonstrated that certain themes were more prominent and relevant in one show over another. In Dexter, the theme of vigilante justice and conservative justice ideologies were the foundation of the relationship between the character of Dexter and the audience. The show also provided insight into attitudes surrounding crime and appropriate punishments. The Sopranos challenged typical moral reasoning that a viewer may engage in when watching a crime drama on television. Typical conceptions of justice are redefined in light of involvement within the mob world. Weeds exemplifies the concepts of strain theory and the inherent desire to belong. The show is set in a fictional community in California where normalcy is valued above all else.

The second research question explored whether or not there are certain components of deviance that an audience may find attractive. This concept was most evident in Dexter. Through the selection of criminal victims, Dexter is able to carry out justice in a satisfying and efficient manner. Through an examination of Dexter's victims, specific moral, ethical and social issues were explored that spoke to the audience's ability to admire Dexter and the work he was doing. A second component that makes deviance attractive is the notion of vicarious involvement. Viewers are given the ability to be immersed into the worlds of a
serial killer, a drug dealer and a mob boss. This ‘backstage pass’ to a world that is not typically known or revealed heightens the attraction to these shows.

One area that these new shows push boundaries is within the traditional definition of victim. Research question three asked whether or not these characters can be seen as more or less morally blameworthy. This questions was examined through the use of the definition of traditional victim and then challenging that definition by noting that the main characters on these programs can be seen as both victim and offender. The previously narrow definition of victim had to be expanded in order to encompass these new roles on the new crime dramas.

Research question four examined the issue of why have these shows emerged at this specific point in time. The cyclical nature of crime dramas was presented as an alternative to the idea that these shows were a completely new and groundbreaking genre. Prior to televised Westerns, the criminal character was revered and supported as discussed in chapter two. The issues of race and gender within the media were also used to assist in understanding the emergence of these shows.

Finally, research question five discussed the link between popular culture and criminality. The important and significant role that media play in shaping attitudes towards crime has been established throughout this thesis. Individuals’ main source of information regarding crime and criminals are media based. These shows both incorporate elements of popular culture while simultaneously becoming a part of the larger popular culture.

Historically, crime dramas that focus on the criminal justice system are told from the perspective of law enforcement officials or prosecutors. The consistent theme has been that the concept of ‘justice’ is mainly achieved through an offender being apprehended (Eschholz et al, 2003). The three crime dramas, *Dexter, Weeds* and *The Sopranos* represent a distinct shift in the portrayal of criminals. The traditional notions of justice are contested through intimate character portrayals. Moral boundaries tend to be clearer when the
criminal justice system rather than a serial killer is carrying out justice. Drug dealers seem more heinous when they are from marginalized groups rather than an affluent widow. Gangs and the mob are impersonal notions until a relationship is developed with a mob boss stricken with anxiety, and under the care of a psychiatrist.

It is worth investigating this shift in the portrayal of criminals on television, given the reality that the majority of individuals attain knowledge of the criminal justice system through media. The traditional crime dramas still exist on television, however, these new shows represent a niche market of change. By dedicating entire programs to the lives of criminals, previously held ideas about who is a criminal are being challenged. The entertainment function of these shows may be of primary importance to most viewers. From a criminological perspective, however, it is important to make note of trends and shifts concerning public attitudes surrounding criminals.

6.7 Future Research Directions

The current research project only examined season one of the three television series. The Sopranos series has concluded and ran for six seasons. Dexter is still on the air in its third season and Weeds is still on the air in its fourth season. Upon the completion of Dexter and Weeds, the entire series' could be compared. The original thematic code sheet could be applied with the possibility of new themes emerging in different seasons. Each series could also be examined individually in detail. The current research focused on North American crime dramas; further research could explore the similarities and differences among North American and British crime dramas. That information could also be compared against national crime rate data.

The current research was limited by the fact that only one researcher completed the thematic coding. Further research could involve additional researchers and the possibility of participant involvement. Another study, using
the information gained from this project, could create a survey measuring enjoyment based on communications theories.

One aspect of research that could not be explored in this project is the concept of appearance and criminality. Early researchers in criminology sought to create a direct link between physical features and propensity to commit crimes. Biological or positivist theories were primarily concerned with investigating predisposing factors to criminality located within an individual, factors that would be externally visible. While focused on the external appearance of an individual, these theories did not wholly discount the influence of outside environment. Theorists wanted to show scientific proof that criminal and non-criminals were inherently different (Einstadter and Henry, 2006).

Theories in this vein are divided into the two sub groups of biologically based and psychologically based theories of criminality. The biological stream focused on the “...direct effect of physical and psychological processes on behaviour...” (Einstadter and Henry, 2006, p. 76). There is also the indirect influence of environment of an individual's brain which in turn controls behaviour. The psychological stream focused on the mind and mentality of the individual and cognitive affect (Einstadter and Henry, 2006).

Research in the realm of social psychology focuses on the perceptions of attractiveness and criminality rather than searching for an objective measure of criminality based on physical characteristics. Enjoyment of media programs is based on identification with characters on the program. One method of identification is through appearance. Individuals are more likely to view a character favourably when he/she has is more attractive.

Research within social psychology views criminality as not limited to the propensity to commit crime but also “... the extent to which a person’s appearance triggers stereotypes about criminals” (MacLin and MacLin, 2004, p. 145). This suggests that a criminal appearance stereotype or face of a criminal does exist. Furthermore, there is a link between a criminal face and
unattractiveness and the belief that people who are good looking or aesthetically pleasing are not criminals.
APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Television Viewing Guide

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Thematic Category</th>
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Appendix 2

Dexter Episode and Cast Guide

Adapted from (www.epguides.com)

**Cast**

Michael C. Hall as Dexter Morgan
Jennifer Carpenter as Debra Morgan
Julie Benz as Rita Bennett
Lauren Vélez as Lt. Maria Laguerta
David Zayas as Angel Batista
Erik King as Sgt. Doakes
C.S. Lee as Vince Masuka
Devon Graye as Teenage Dexter
James Remar as Harry Morgan

**Episode Guide**

**Episode Title:** Dexter  
**Original Air Date:** 10/1/2006  
**Episode Summary:**  
Dexter is a forensic expert in blood patterns who works with the Miami Police Department. He is also a serial killer, who kills people that the police can't bring to justice. He has to hide his double life from his sister, his girlfriend and his co-workers. He is intrigued by a killer who has found a way to kill girls without leaving blood behind.

**Episode Title:** Crocodile  
**Original Air Date:** 10/8/2006  
**Episode Summary:**  
Being wrapped up in preparing for his next victim, Dexter finds out that the Ice Truck Killer is aware of Dexter's dirty little secret.

**Episode Title:** Popping Cherry  
**Original Air Date:** 10/15/2006
**Episode Summary:**
Dexter's on the trail of a recently released murderer who plans to kill again when he's sidetracked by the Ice Truck Killer's latest crime - a cut-up hooker found in a hockey ice rink.

**Episode Title:** Let's Give the Boy a Hand  
**Original Air Date:** 10/22/2006
**Episode Summary:**
The Ice Truck Killer leaves severed body parts from his victims at locations that are linked to memories from Dexter's troubled childhood, which begins to get into Dexter's head.

**Episode Title:** Love, American Style  
**Original Air Date:** 10/29/2006
**Episode Summary:**
The homicide division is handed an unbelievable lead when the Ice Truck Killer’s latest victim is found alive but mutilated; Dexter is on the trail of a person who traffics in humans.

**Episode Title:** Return to Sender  
**Original Air Date:** 05/11/2006
**Episode Summary:**
The Ice Truck Killer leaves Dexter a clue at the scene where Dexter has dispatched his latest victim.

**Episode Title:** Circle of Friends  
**Original Air Date:** 12/11/2006
**Episode Summary:**
The squad identifies the Ice Truck Killer; Rita’s ex-husband, an abusive addict, is paroled.
**Episode Title:** Shrink Wrap  
**Original Air Date:** 11/19/2006  
**Episode Summary:**  
Dexter suspects rich women’s shrink of murder. When he visits the shrink, he is surprised by a dark secret from his past.

**Episode Title:** Father Knows Best  
**Original Air Date:** 26/11/2006  
**Episode Summary:**  
Dexter receives notification that his biological father has recently passed away. Dexter is named as the sole heir of all his possessions including his house. Dexter goes for a weekend away with Rita, Deb, and Rudy.

**Episode Title:** Seeing Red  
**Original Air Date:** 3/12/2006  
**Episode Summary:**  
The Ice Truck Killer is back. He leaves a crime scene that brings back some horrifying repressed memories for Dexter. Paul sues Rita for sole custody of Astor and Cody.

**Episode Title:** Truth be Told  
**Original Air Date:** 10/12/2006  
**Episode Summary:**  
The Ice Truck Killer puts Dexter in a life changing position when he takes someone close to Dexter hostage. Doakes begins to suspect that Dexter's odd behavior is something darker than he originally thought.

**Episode Title:** Born Free  
**Original Air Date:** 12/17/2006  
**Episode Summary:**
Dexter follows clues left for him by the Ice-Truck Killer in an attempt to find the hostage. Paul tries to convince Rita that she and the children are not safe around Dexter.
Appendix 3

The Sopranos Episode and Cast Guide

Adapted from (www.epguides.com)

Cast

- James Gandolfini as Tony Soprano
- Lorraine Bracco as Dr. Jennifer Melfi
- Edie Falco as Carmela Soprano
- Michael Imperioli as Christopher Moltisanti
- Nancy Marchand as Livia Soprano
- Dominic Chianese as "Uncle Junior" Soprano
- Tony Sirico as Pauly Walnuts
- Vincent Pastore as Pussy Bompensiero
- Steve Van Zandt as Silvio Dante
- Jamie Lynn Sigler as Meadow Soprano
- Robert Iler as Anthony Jr.

Episode Title: The Sopranos
Original Air Date: 1/10/1999

Episode Summary:
Tony Soprano, a Capo in the Jersey mafia, begins seeing a therapist because he is stricken by panic attacks. During his session, Dr. Melfi learns of his two conflicted families. Tony is stressed by his unhappy wife, rebellious kids and his demanding mother. On the business side, Tony feels pressure from his willful nephew, while also engaging in a power struggle with his Uncle Junior.

Episode Title: 46 Long
Original Air Date: 1/17/1999

Episode Summary:
Christopher and Brendan take some initiative in a truck hijacking, but their plan backfires when it angers Uncle Junior. Tony's crew does a favor for A.J.'s science teacher. After one too many accidents, Tony forces Livia to move into a nursing home against her will.

**Episode Title:** Denial, Anger, Acceptance  
**Original Air Date:** 1/24/1999  
**Episode Summary:**  
Tony, Paulie and Silvio enter into a new business deal with a Jewish hotel owner, while Tony struggles with the terminal illness of his long-time friend and current Don, Jackie Aprile. Meadow asks Christopher for a favor that could get him in trouble. After consulting Livia, Junior has his triggerman, Mikey Palmice, send Christopher and Brendan a clear message.

**Episode Title:** Meadowlands  
**Original Air Date:** 1/31/1999  
**Episode Summary:**  
When Jackie Aprile loses his battle with cancer, Tony and his crew agree to give Junior what he wants. However, they have ulterior motives. Christopher goes from fear to anger when he discovers Brendan's fate. Tony sends a cop on his payroll to investigate Dr. Melfi, while Carmela gives him an ultimatum about his therapy.

**Episode Title:** College  
**Original Air Date:** 2/7/1999  
**Episode Summary:**  
Tony takes Meadow to Maine on a college tour. While there, Tony stumbles across an ex mobster who went into the witness protection program after ratting out several of Tony's old comrades. Tony and the mobster begin stalking each other while Tony does his best to hide his activities from his daughter. Carmela receives a visit from Father Phil and the two have a close encounter.
Episode Title: **Pax Soprana**  
Original Air Date: 2/14/1999  
Episode Summary:  
Tony's crew is unhappy when Junior refuses to respect old arrangements. Junior shows reckless behavior by taxing long-time members and ordering hits on top earners. Tony brings in Johnny Sack from New York in hopes of tricking Junior into relenting. Already frustrated because Tony was hiding the fact that his therapist is a woman, Carmela's anger grows when Tony is rendered impotent by his medication.

Episode Title: **Down Neck**  
Original Air Date: 2/21/1999  
Episode Summary:  
After A.J. is suspended from school for drinking sacramental wine, Tony begins remembering his own childhood days when he learned of his father's unique lifestyle. Livia learns of her son's therapy during a visit from A.J.

Episode Title: **The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti**  
Original Air Date: 2/28/1999  
Episode Summary:  
The Soprano crew begins to do some frantic house-cleaning as rumors of FBI indictments begin to surface. Christopher gets depressed when he isn't named on the list and it results in some poor decisions. Livia tells Junior about Tony's therapy

Episode Title: **Boca**  
Original Air Date: 3/7/1999  
Episode Summary:  

Tony and Silvio plan drastic action when they hear some disturbing news about Meadow's soccer coach. Tony learns of a secret that Junior would rather keep under wraps. Tensions flare when they begin needling each other during a golf game, and this results in Junior giving up a long term relationship.

**Episode Title:** A Hit is a Hit  
**Original Air Date:** 3/14/1999  
**Episode Summary:**  
Tony has a disheartening experience when he tries to strike up new friendships in the civilian world. Christopher and Adriana try their hand in the music recording business, but their plans backfire in their faces.

**Episode Title:** Nobody Knows Anything  
**Original Air Date:** 3/21/1999  
**Episode Summary:**  
Tony is shocked to learn that his old friend, Big Pussy, may be a rat. He sends Paulie to investigate when Pussy acts suspiciously. Junior reaches the breaking point when he learns that Tony has been working behind his back. He and Livia begin conspiring to take action against Tony.

**Episode Title:** Isabella  
**Original Air Date:** 3/28/1999  
**Episode Summary:**  
Tony is more depressed than ever over Pussy's disappearance. He increases his medication, and only leaves the house to visit a beautiful Italian girl living next door. His son has his own woman troubles, as A.J. stresses over his first formal dance. Meanwhile, Junior and Mikey send two hit men after Tony, but all doesn't go according to plan.

**Episode Title:** I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano  
**Original Air Date:** 4/4/1999
Episode Summary:
Tony begins to retaliate for the attempt on his life, but he is stunned when he learns that his mother and uncle were behind it. Junior tries to escape when he suspects that Tony will come after him, but the Feds intervene before Junior can get away. Livia pits Artie against Tony in a last-ditch effort to save herself. Carmela finally lays down the law with Father Phil.
Appendix 4

Weeds Cast and Episode Guide

Adapted from (www.epguides.com)

**Cast**

- Mary-Louise Parker as Nancy Botwin
- Elizabeth Perkins as Celia Hodes
- Kevin Nealon as Doug Wilson
- Justin Kirk as Andy Botwin
- Tonye Patano as Heylia James
- Romany Malco as Conrad Shepard
- Hunter Parrish as Silas Botwin
- Alexander Gould as Shane Botwin
- Andy Milder as Dean Hodes
- Renee Victor as Lupita
- Allie Grant as Isabelle Hodes
- Tyrone Mitchell as Keeyon
- Indigo as Vaneeta

**Episode Title:** You Can’t Miss the Bear

**Original Air Date:** 8/7/2005

**Episode Summary:**
In the series debut, housewife Nancy Botwin struggles to deal with the sudden death of her husband, while her best friend and neighbor Celia Hodes learns a devastating secret when she tries to catch her daughter in the act with Nancy’s son.

**Episode Title:** Free Goat
Original Air Date: 8/15/2005  
Episode Summary:  
As Celia deals with the other woman in her marriage, Nancy contemplates creating an enterprise to solve the cash-only financial issues caused by her drug dealing. Silas has to come to terms with his girlfriend's sudden departure, while Shane tries to come to terms with missing his Dad.

**Episode Title:** Good Shit Lollipop  
Original Air Date: 8/22/2005  
Episode Summary:  
A mountain lion is on the prowl in Agrestic, but it's the medical marijuana facility that is causing the most havoc in Nancy's life. Faced with the dilemma of having to compete, Nancy has to get cooking. Silas makes a move on Megan causing him some colorful problems of his own and Celia and Isabel's war over weight issues gets dirty.

**Episode Title:** Fashion of the Christ  
Original Air Date: 8/29/2005  
Episode Summary:  
Nancy gets a rude awakening when her brother-in-law Andy comes for a surprise visit. Doug has an idea for a location for the faux bakery, which Nancy may need more than ever with Andy in the way. While Andy wrecks havoc in the Botwin's lives, Nancy is introduced to "The Candy Man" in order to help meet her customer's needs, and Celia drops a bomb.

**Episode Title:** Lude Awakening  
Original Air Date: 9/5/2005  
Episode Summary:  
Nancy gets a reality check about what a life of crime can entail. Andy acts like a fool and gets arrested. Celia tries alternative methods to deal with her breast
cancer. She also steps out of her box and bonds with children. Shane gets in trouble at school. Again.

**Episode Title:** Dead in the Nethers  
**Original Air Date:** 9/12/2005  
**Episode Summary:**  
Nancy attempts to play around in an effort to relieve some stress. Nancy, Celia, and Conrad go out to a club where Celia and Conrad "snuggle up." Meanwhile Andy meets a woman who he lies to as he would anyone else and Lupita starts investigating so that she gain the upper hand in her employee/employer relationship.

**Episode Title:** Higher Education  
**Original Air Date:** 9/19/2005  
**Episode Summary:**  
Nancy hires an employee, and becomes known to a rival in the process. Shane makes a new friend, and Andy gets to know the new friend’s mother. Celia's mother comes to visit after Celia's surgery.

**Episode Title:** The Punishment Light  
**Original Air Date:** 9/26/2005  
**Episode Summary:**  
Uncle Andy acts foolish at a ceremony for Judah. Shane gets in trouble again. Celia and Dean duke it out. Nancy finds out who it is that has been "delivering" pennies onto her car and fountain and she deals with them. Andy and Doug team up to bring more trouble into Nancy's home while trying to flesh out the infestation of a rat. Nancy turns down an interested single father. And yet again Uncle Andy exposes too much of himself.

**Episode Title:** The Punishment Lighter  
**Original Air Date:** 10/3/2005
Episode Summary
Nancy gets busted and Heylia teaches her about a $14,000 lesson. Doug and Celia make kitchen talk. The kids have daddy problems during diversity week. Breadsticks and Scones, Nancy's bakery, opens and doesn't start off so well. And Celia retakes the PTA by way of a technicality.

Episode Title: The Godmother
Original Air Date: 10/10/2005
Episode Summary:
Isabelle experiments, Andy gets drafted, Peter may not be who Nancy thinks he is, Silas gets high, and Nancy cuts out the middleman.
REFERENCES


