

# Original law and order english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



4. 1. Introduction Law & Order: Special Victims Unit is a spin-off series of original 'Law and Order' which is loosely based on true crime stories from the headlines. It mainly follows the detectives of the Special Victims Unit who investigate and prosecute offenders in the New York City Police Department with the help of District Attorneys and Medical Examiners. The show includes a number of women in fairly powerful positions such as Olivia Benson, portrayed by Mariska Hargitay (Detective), Amanda Rollins portrayed by Kelli Giddish (Junior Detective), Alexandra Cabot portrayed by Stephanie March (Assistant District Attorney), Casey Novak portrayed by Diane Neal (Assistant District Attorney) and Melinda Warner portrayed by Tamara Tunie (Medical Examiner). This chapter presents the findings of the research question with the help of discourse analysis which is applied to representative samples from L&O: SVU.

4. 1. 1. Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay) Olivia Benson, portrayed by Mariska Hargitay, has solved crimes for almost 14 years. She is presented as strong, compassionate and a workaholic with a non-existent love life. Seeing as she was a product of rape herself, and assaulted whilst undercover in season 9, she sympathizes with the victims of sexual offenses. At the beginning of Season 13, Detective Benson tries to deal with the loss of her partner Elliot Stabler (Christopher Meloni) who decides to retire. She is seen as being more insensitive and confrontational, which is suggestive of feminine traits. Even though she had on and off relationships throughout the show, she has been single more often than not. Furthermore, she has shown colossal compassion and nurturing instincts, with strength as well as susceptibility.

4. 1. 2. Amanda Rollins (Kelli Giddish) Amanda Rollins is the new junior detective who has been transferred to the Special Victims Unit

from Georgia, Atlanta. Rollins is extremely antsy in her police work, regularly being advised not to lose track of the main issue at hand by Detectives Benson, Nick Amaro (Danny Pino), and Captain Donald Cragen (Dann Florek). She seems to have a great affinity with her partner, Detective Fin Tutuola (Ice T) and soon builds camaraderie with other detectives. She seeks Detective Benson's advice to deal with emotional situations during the cases. When Rollins ends up being distressed over a case where an actress is assaulted by someone known to the actress, Rollins asks Benson how she can believe in any man in the wake of working this work. Benson consoles Rollins and lets her know that she believes in her partner. With respect to Rollins' private life, she lives alone in an apartment and has a troubled sister with drug problems. Furthermore, Rollins had a personal predicament of problem gambling, which was featured in detail in the episode "Home Invasions".

4. 1. 3. Alexandra Cabot (Stephanie March) Alexandra Cabot is the third longest-serving Assistant District Attorney in the Law & Order franchise who prosecutes the sexual offenders after their arrest with the help of NYC Police. she conducts herself with decorum, wears glasses connoting to her intellect and has graduated from Harvard Law School. Cabot follows a strict code of legal doctrine even if she sympathizes with the victims, setting aside her personal beliefs. She gets well with Detective Benson and helps in investigating the perpetrators with her knowledge of the law. Cabot is represented as a head-strong woman with a high success rate who would pull in favours if she had to in order to win the case.

4. 1. 4. Casey Novak (Diane Neal) Casey Novak is the longest running Assistant District Attorney in the Law & Order franchise. She is characterised as a young and determined

senior ADA in the NYDA bureau. She does not often disclose her feelings even when she feels compassion towards the sexual assault victims. Novak gives a positive message to the audience since she used to serve tables to put herself through college and now lives in an apartment in the Upper West Side of New York City. As a young ADA she quickly learns about cruelty whilst dealing with sex transgressions which makes her mature, however, she is apprehensive of the extent of human vindictive misdeeds.

4. 1. 5. Melinda Warner (Tamara Tunie) Melinda Warner is an African-American medical examiner who helps the detectives in solving the cases with forensic evidence support. She is portrayed as a no-nonsense, intelligent and articulate ethnic character with diligence which contrasts with stereotypical representations of African-Americans in media (Holtzman 2000, p. 237). She plays a very vital role in solving the crimes as her forensic evidence guide the detectives in the right direction.

4. 2. Women Driving the Plot: Gauntlett, and Hill (1999) describe the state of women's representation in 70s and 80s as stereotypically passive and subordinate to men (211). Gauntlett (2008: 47) discerns that female characters were represented as housewives and were unlikely to work. In addition, women were more often depicted as weak, incompetent, victims, supportive, laughable or merely "token females" (Gunter, 1995). The audiovisual media has significantly influenced the processes of "gendering" and construction of gender concept which emphasises on gender ideology of chief agents who drive the narrative forward (Gymnich, Ruhl, and Scheunemann, 2010). "Law and Order: SVU" generally constructs narrative which revolves around women whether they are represented as victims or protagonists. Female characters have been

used to motivate and drive the plot, playing roles such as victims, detectives, medical examiner and attorneys, which are the main focus of my study. These central female characters not only move the narrative along but also actively participate, thus displaying female agency (Gymnich, Ruhl and Scheunemann, 2010: 12).

### **Season 13 Episode 21: 00: 21: 22 - 00: 21: 46-**

Detective Munch: No record, no prior complaint? Amanda Rollins: He did become a teacher, this year. Nick Amaro: To me, he seems genuinely blindsided. Olivia Benson: And I have seen that affect on paedophiles a hundred times. ADA Cabot: How credible is Luca's story? Olivia Benson: He was awkward and uncomfortable. His grades have been slipping, I mean, something is going on with this kid. Amanda Rollins: Then we should go back to the family. See when they noticed changes in his behaviour. ADA Cabot: Before you do that. Go back to the school, who did Luca outcry to, when, why, vet the details. The above transcript is from season 13 episode 21 " Learning Curve" of Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, where the investigators expose a scandal involving a teacher who allegedly sexually abused a student at a prep school. The scene take place right after Olivia Benson and Nick Amaro interrogate the suspect, who completely denies any wrong doing. In this scene, women are portrayed as the active agents in propelling the narrative by providing solutions. When Nick Amaro (who is a new rookie partnered with Olivia Benson) declares that he believes the suspect could be innocent, she quickly responds that she has seen paedophiles behave like that " a hundred times". Here the discursive codes used reinforce her superior position in the narrative as she points out that

she has been working in the squad more than Nick Amaro asserting her power. Detective Munch's character is shown to be less involved and merely shares his opinion. On the other hand, Amanda Rollins, a newly transferred detective provides the answers and resolution, symbolizing an active agent in a patriarchal police department. Her response " He did become a teacher, this year", also illustrates the fact that she is a smart, intelligent and proactive detective who has fully done her research on the suspect, countering the frequent depiction of women as passive characters (Feasey, 2008: 139). Similarly, Benson's description of the alleged victim signifies the vigilant and conscientious attributes of her character as a detective. In addition, Rollins's suggestion to question the victim's family illustrates a discursive practice of an active agent rather than a silenced partner. ADA Alexandra Cabot is depicted as a strong character who knows what she wants. She asks Benson if the victim's allegations were credible. In addition, the " When? Why? Vet the details" discourse is uttered as an order rather than a suggestion, which demonstrates her power. The discursive codes used to represent ADA Cabot illustrate her authoritarian and no-nonsense characteristics and show that she is excellent at her job and deals with cases rationally. Here the discourse exhibits a cohesion which renders her a power in the context which is mostly associated with masculinity (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002: 59). In this scene, the dominant discourse creates a gender identity for the female characters and constructs equivalent conventions, causing the subjugation of patriarchal discourse. Female characters used to be depicted as insignificant and dispensable in the plot appearing as distractions or hindrances for the male hero (Gymnich, Ruhl

and Scheunemann, 2010: 13). However, in this scene, the women are represented as active agents who partake in the narrative more than the male counterparts (white, 2007: 4). " These are women with voices, women who don't seem to suffer insecurities about their gendered identity" (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003: 59).

### **Season 13 Episode 22: 00: 09: 30 - 00: 10: 32**

Amanda Rollins: You said we had to see this for ourselves. Melinda Warner: Just came in an hour ago. A young woman's left leg, freshly severed. Olivia Benson: With an octopus tattoo on her ankle. Melinda Warner: Some guy fishing off his boat on the Gowanus canal reeled in the leg. Description matched Nina's tattoo, we are running the DNA. Amanda Rollins: Pretty clean cuts. Melinda Warner: I'd say it was done with a surgical saw. And there is still evidence of living response to trauma in the bony tissues. Amanda Rollins: You mean Nina could have been alive when her leg was amputated. Melinda Warner: There was anaesthetic in the marrow, why go to that trouble for a corpse? Olivia Benson: So a healthy leg cleanly severed from a living person. Amanda Rollins: I've heard of that in drug wars, but I don't think that what this is. Olivia Benson: No. There is something else. A fisherman reeled it in, nobody fishes in the Gowanus canal it's so polluted. It's a super fungi site. The above scene takes place in Season 13 Episode 22 " Strange Beauty," where the kidnapping and homicide of a young woman is depicted whose newly amputated leg leads detectives into the body modification culture. In this scene, the importance and competence of Dr. Melinda Warner's character is emphasized, as she provides the main clues to solving the case to the detectives. She is shown to be a vital team member who has

experience of working with the detectives and knows how the procedure works as: " Description matched Nina's tattoo, we are running the DNA" represents that dominant discourse. Detective Rollins's discourse is used as dialogic repetition to simplify Dr. Warner's examination findings of the body as well as highlights the fact that Rollins is familiar with the medical jargon. Detective Benson sums up the discourse and also immediately reflects that " nobody fishes in the gowanus canal". The last dialogue where Detective Benson suggests to Detective Rollins to visit the crime scene site not only denotes their dependency on vital information given by Dr. Warner, but also her astuteness and resolve in connecting the dots to solve the crimes. The narrative consistently demonstrates the attributes of independent women working in a male-oriented police procedural (Gray and Jurik, 2012: 18). For instant Detective Benson doesn't call her captain to ask what her next move should be. She gets the information and decides to take action on her own accord without needing the help of a man demonstrating signs of active agent. The narrative and aesthetic devices such as camera angle, composition and mise-en-scene work together to construct the images of these women as independent and smart (Gray and Jurik 2012: 21).

4. 3. Women as Heroes: In the past, women in media were typically portrayed as weak, unintelligent and damsels in distress who are incapable of saving themselves (Knight, 2010). In Law and Order: SVU transgressing gender codes are employed in representing female lead characters who function as progressive role models. This representation of female heroism is illustrated in the episode 13 of season 13 where the son of an accused producer holds a



mother and daughter hostage. The producer is accused of casting couch after a woman is sexually assaulted and abandoned in a park.

### **Season 13 Episode 13: 00: 32: 32 - 00: 34: 12 (tries to control a hostage rescue situation)**

Olivia Benson: Eddie I'm gonna call outside and tell'em to come in and take Jess out. Eddie: No no no no no. You can't do that. Olivia Benson: Eddie we can't just leave her here. Listen to me, you can put the gun on me, okay. I'm gonna have my partner come in here. He is not gonna let me get shot. It's gonna be ok I promise. Eddie put the gun on me and let Lily go sit down please. (Eddie point the gun at Olivia). Here we go, okay, ok. Nick (calls to her partner)The above discourse takes place when Eddie shoots Jess in the leg, who is then left bleeding on the floor. Detective Benson is allowed to come inside the apartment by Eddie, who tries to negotiate with him. Hands raised she tells Eddie that they need to get Jess help before she bleeds to death. Detective Benson shows him that he is in control but also informs him what he should do. The discursive code " put the gun on me" illustrates the dominant reading that she is someone who doesn't care about herself. With the help of literature review we have established that women are portrayed in more heroic roles opposing the notion of women as damsels in distress as the options for women are broader than before (Synnott, 2009: 80). Olivia Benson's character exhibit similar codes as Ripley's character from Alien franchise who has become an epitome of strong female characters. Knight (2010: 98) describes Ripley as powerful, intelligent, confident, tough as nails and void of sexual and sexist overtones which can be applied to Olivia Benson's character on Law and Order: SVU. Furthermore, detective Benson is

represented as using the same codes as a male hero as she doesn't back away and tries to save herself but selflessly offers herself and saves the victim contravening gender codes, traits akin to Buffy's character (Reid, 2008: 144). Through this discursive practice, she does not come across as a submissive, immobile and tangent female character (Hills, 1999: 38).

Detective Benson contravenes cultural gender codes and demonstrates strength, bravery, independence, which are all correlated with male heroes.

### **Season 13 Episode 13: 00: 39: 05 - 00: 41: 10**

Eddie: No, I'm just like him. (point the gun at his own head) I am a monster.

Olivia Benson: Eddie that's not true. Eddie: You'll say anything now. Olivia

Benson: No I won't. You are not a monster Eddie. You have to listen to me.

Eddie... put the gun down (voice cracking) Eddie: You are right. Olivia

Benson: Eddie (whispers) Eddie: Let them do it (goes towards the window

where sniper has a perfect shot on him) Olivia Benson: What? No. No Eddie

don't. Sniper: I got a shot. Olivia Benson: No Eddie don't do this. (pulls him

away from the window) Officer: Hold your fire hold your fire (on radio) Eddie:

Why do you care? Olivia Benson: Because I know what you're feeling. Eddie:

No you don't. Olivia Benson: Yes Eddie, I do. My father did terrible things to

women, to my own mother. Eddie: You are making this up. Olivia Benson:

Eddie you have a choice. I am nothing like my father. You don't have to be

like yours. I want you to give me the gun (whispers) give me the gun. (Eddie

hands her the gun) The above scene takes place when Eddie lets Jess and Lily

go after Detective Benson convinces him. Eddie finds out that his father is

not an angel that he thought he was. When Eddie tries to kill himself with the

gun she tries to stop him, telling him: " Eddie you are not a monster."

Detective Benson's bravado is further illustrated when he goes to the window so the sniper can shoot him. Immediately not caring about her own safety she grabs him and pulls him away from the window. Here, Detective Benson claims the authority to make the choice to save the perpetrator, who is just a teenager. Detective Benson breaks the limitations of the convention of biologically prearranged for women which is the security of the domestic unit contradictory to the well-being of the social order, an archetypal heroic characteristic where the hero selflessly fights for the rights of others. The conventional view of the gender binary is opposed as Detective Benson acts as a hero demonstrating strength, independence and courage. Another traditional male action hero trait is lack of emotion associated with masculinity (Knight, 2010). Here Detective Benson brings a new sensitivity to heroism " My father did terrible things to women, to my own mother", she stays in control of her emotions but reveals her compassionate side, exhibiting feminine traits. She remains calm and tells Eddie he has a choice to do right or wrong whilst exhibiting male action hero traits of not losing her cool and keeping her emotions in check (Knight, 2010). The fact that she could've saved herself and left the room illustrates archetypal heroic quality who fights for other people, hence, synthesising feminine and masculine characteristics redefining heroism (Knight, 2010). Smith and Ximena (2006) explicate the characteristics of Ripley pertaining to Olivia Benson's character in the discourse: " Hero is a woman - a most courageous, bright and entirely logical - overturning of SF pulp fiction's most sacred canons: all heroes are men, sometimes accompanied by clinging cardboard women characters who must be saved or protected." (p. 21)Olivia Benson

not only saves herself demonstrating male hero traits but also conventional post gender heroism. Knight (2010) states that female action heroes wore revealing power suits which objectified women such as Wonder Woman, Catwoman, Xena and Selene from Underworld franchise (2003, 2006, 2012). These costumes and feminine attributes of long legs, cleavage and loose hair underpin male gaze<sup>1</sup> but at the same time exposed female hero's "natural" female build (Schubart, 2007: 229). Schubart (2007) further explains the concept of wardrobe for action female hero as observed by Inness(1998) that the masculine clothes represent a toughness in female action heroes who are not objectified rendering their cross-dressing a costume (229). Olivia Benson's character does not conform to the conventional traits of a female action hero as she is not dressed in skimpy clothes which is seen as an oppression, but in fact wears modest casual clothes like pants, full sleeves shirt, jacket etc (Thornham, 2007: 77). By combining masculine and feminine traits, Olivia Benson exerts both physical and social power in the context (Brown, 2013: 14).

### **Season 13 Episode 4: 00: 34: 08 - 00: 34: 46 (Brian is assaulting Rollins)**

Nick Amaro: Police put down your weapon now. Put it down. Amanda Rollins: (Punches Brian) Nick Amaro: Get up (starts punching Brian) Amanda Rollins: Alright Amaro. Hey enough. Enough (yells) (Another detective grabs him) Nick Amaro: You ok? Amanda Rollins: Yeah I am fine. Nick Amaro: You were suppose to stay close. Amanda Rollins: I had my shot and I took it. Wha.. What the hell was that? You trying to ruin this case? (walks away) Another illustration of heroism takes place when Detective Amanda Rollins offers

herself up as a bait to catch a serial rapist. The above dialogue ensues when Detective Amaro arrives where the perpetrator is assaulting Detective Rollins. Detective Rollins punches Brian who is on top of her, depicting her as tough and able to stand front and center in the action (Knight, 2010). The codes are indicative of a toughness which serves as a means of survival within the patriarchal society (Brown, 1998: 45). There is a role reversal in representation of feminine and masculine traits. Detective Nick Amaro demonstrates an emotional vulnerability and starts punching Brian Smith, which rejects the hegemonic notion that man shouldn't show emotion. Detective Rollins tells him to stop in order to avoid damaging the case. Detective Rollins remains calm and focuses on the bigger picture, that is, to capture the criminal and prosecute him. She does not cry considering she was almost sexually assaulted and rebuffs any stereotypical weaknesses or passive traits. The fact that she offered herself to be used as a bait to capture the serial rapist displays her resilience and independence, which strengthens this show's feminist position. The constructed codes redefine the female action heroism that selflessly puts other people's lives first whilst going through the dangerous spaces. Rollins is seen as a skilled detective who takes advantage of her antagonist's stereotypical perception of her being a weak and passive woman who needs saving and swiftly transforms into an independent agent (Brown, 2013). Brown (2013) describes the representation of the character at symbolic level that "the action heroine is a radically different character and the exact opposite of being passive, weak and in need of saving... as she takes on the role of shining armour" (Brown, 2013). 4. 4. Maternal Instinct: There is a repeated theme of maternal instinct

used to represent Detective Olivia Benson in many episodes. According to Tasker (1998: 70), the facets of masculinity, mother or others are used to construct a female hero within the narrative where the maternal recur as a motivating factor".

### **Season 13 Episode 6: 00: 08: 12 - 00: 09: 10 (examination of rape victim)**

Jen: It's my job to ensure the survivors know everything about this process. I don't sugar-coat. Olivia Benson: And you have been a councillor for how long? Jen: Yeah you have been doing this longer, but I have fresher eyes. The reality is the system doesn't always work. Olivia Benson: I understand that, but that girl has just been robbed of all her power and all her humanity and your best advice is pretend it never happened and walk away. The scene represents two representations of women one as a victim and the other Benson who exhibit maternal instinct. At symbolic level, my focus is on Benson's representation of dealing with the victim. This scene takes place in a hospital where a newly appointed advocate to a young rape victim suggests that the victim has an option of not filing the charges. Benson gets visibly upset and asks if she can speak to her alone. Here Jen (advocate) is represented as someone devoid of emotion but Benson's position in the narrative reinforces her as an authoritarian figure, " you have been a councillor for how long?" she asserts her position. Her nurturing nature and maternal instinct leads her to defend the teenage victim, " robbed of all her power and all her humanity", it highlights a connection with the victim. It is representative of the positive depiction of Detective Benson, who is not merely doing her job but actually empathizes with the victim as a woman.

Maternal instinct functions as a motivation for Detective Benson's behavior in the narrative (Hall and Bishop, 2009: 82). The discourse "never happened and walk away", is reflective of the dominant ideology where the rape victims are made to feel ashamed and don't come forward. It is also indicative of the hardships of what a victim has to go through in society, which Benson is all too well aware of.

### **Season 13 Episode 6: 00: 39: 12 - 00: 39: 55 (after " not guilty" verdict)**

Olivia Benson: Sara. Sara: Don't. Don't you dare tell me that was worth it. That was so ugly. Olivia Benson: Sara you didn't let him get away with it. You accused him in public. Sara: So what? He is going home with his family (crying). I would have never let anyone go through that. Olivia Benson: That's true. And I know that that's how you feel right now (voice cracking) Sara: You have no idea how I feel. Olivia Benson: Sara listen to me. Sending him to prison isn't gonna heal you. Healing begins when someone bears witness. I saw you. I believe you. The above scene from the same episode exemplifies Detective Benson's nurturing nature and empathy for the victims. When the young rape victim Sara hears the not guilty verdict she breaks down. Before she runs out, Benson grabs her and tries to console her, revealing her maternal instincts. She reminds Sara of her courage, " You accused him in public", emphasizing her protective nature. Detective Benson's response, " Healing begins when someone bears witness. I saw you. I believe you" not only denotes to her motherly and emotional nature in the discourse, but also connotes to the empowerment of the victim Sara through female bonding (Ferriss and Young, 2007: 93). Detective Benson is

represented with a traditional nurturing feminine trait which interlaces with the masculine traits of independence and freedom a divergent of the stereotypical depiction women where maternal instinct symbolizes selflessness and sacrifice. The codes employed in the discourse to represent Detective Benson showcases toughness, intelligence of this female character who not only fights for her beliefs but also triumphs over hardships and not afraid to stand up against prejudice (Ezra, 2008). Olivia's character is depicted as empathetic and her impulse to protect the vulnerable exemplifies her feminine traits (Ezra, 2008). 4. 5. Friendships: Friendship among the female characters and their working partners is another recurring theme in the Law and Order: SVU discourse. For instance, the friendships between Olivia Benson and Amanda Rollins, Olivia Benson and ADA Cabot, Amanda Rollins and Detective Tutuola showcase their support for each other in a patriarchal society. In construction of a woman these bonds are based on their mutual support to cope in a man's world during the progress of the narrative (Seger, 2003: 173).

### **Season 13 Episode 8: 00: 27: 05 - 00: 27: 43**

Olivia Benson: This is going to be an uphill battle. Amanda Rollins: That's why we do it. You told Gia that you were assaulted. Olivia Benson: Yeah. Amanda Rollins: Something happened to me on the job. It was part of the reason why I had to leave. Olivia Benson: Somebody you worked with? Amanda Rollins: Its... something not worth pursuing. Olivia Benson: It's how they win. We are not gonna let that happen to Gia. The aforementioned scene takes place in season 13 episode 8 where the detectives investigate an alleged rape in a mental hospital. However, it makes it difficult for the



investigators as the alleged victim, Gia Eskas denies being assaulted. This scene reveals that Detective Amanda Rollins had been assaulted as she confides in Benson. These two main characters who work in a patriarchal society were both assaulted which renders them weak. However, the words in the discourse such as " uphill battle", " that's why we do it", " not gonna let that happen to Gia" demonstrate the strength, power and determination of these women in a patriarchal society. These women did not let it hold them back but in fact used it to empower themselves and help other women in similar situation. Through their female bonding, not only the position of women is highlighted in modern society but also focuses on social inequity. The friendship theme can be seen as code of female progression as they dislodge the patriarchal prototype of the lonely male hero who is portrayed as lacking any friends, family and other emotional connections (Knight, 2010). This also gives rise to the connections between language, power and ideology where the social injustice and inequality is constructed in the discourse, must every female character be sexually assaulted rendering gender reality tenuous (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002: 19). However, Gauntlett (2008) believes that women can prevail over oppression by standing united as a group, the ideology represented by the female characters on L&O: SVU. Furthermore, this realist friendship discourse corresponds to D'Acci's (1994) notion that it is crafted with chronological settings and events that holds a form of truth. Benson and Rollins do not only embody their personal tribulations but are representatives of real social challenges which women have to face in this patriarchal society. Moreover, their compassion correlates with Ross's (2004) notion of representing a new

breed of archetypical hero who possesses strong psychological and emotional characteristics, relying on others, a flexible approach to a toughest hero (233). The female bond between the main female lead characters on L&O: SVU motivate and structure their position in the narrative involving women and femininity found expression (D'Acci, 1994: 182).

### **Season 13 Episode 11: 00: 29: 32 - 00: 30: 07**

Amanda Rollins: Hey, Can I ask you something? How long have you worked at SVU? Olivia Benson: Ahhh... don't ask. Amanda Rollins: No it's just... how do you trust any man, ever? After working in this job day and day out? Olivia Benson: I trusted my partner. Amanda Rollins: Yeah, Okay. Olivia Benson: I haven't given up hope. There are good guys still out there. The female bonding is further highlighted in Season 13 Episode 11 where the detectives investigate the rape of a young actress who recently moved to New York City. When every man in the young woman's life turns out to be a suspect, Detective Rollins is affected by mistrust of men. The discursive codes here represent Rollins' doubts, and she turns to Detective Benson for support. Benson is the only other female character in the squad and Rollins is aware that Benson has been on the job for a long time. She looks for reassurance from the only other female who has been working in a patriarchal society. Throughout the season 13, the discourse helps mediate the growing friendship between these female characters. According to Ross (2004) Rollins turns to Benson in order to comprehend these entrenched patriarchal experiences and helps to make life better as a woman. Benson's response, "don't ask" makes her come across as a woman who has lived for her job, but she also sees the positive side "I haven't given up hope". The ideology that

all men are same in society is opposed with the help of Benson's characterization. Benson and Rollins bond opposes patriarchy on a symbolic level where men hold the power over women, thus, transforming them from victims to heroes (Ross, 2004). 4. 6. Personal Life After viewing and analyzing scenes from Season 13, I have discovered that these female characters play a vital role in the progression of the narrative as strong, independent and successful career women who are married to their jobs. However, the chase of a professional career has jeopardized their love life giving rise to the hegemonic ideology that women can't have it all i. e. a career and a love life (Kaklamanidou, 2013: 28).

### **Season 13 Episode 17: 00: 41: 25 - 00: 42: 37**

Olivia Benson: So where does that leave us? DA David Haden: In conflict. I'm going to be looking into cases that you handled. Olivia Benson: And we never disclosed. DA David Haden: It's not too late. If that means that I have to resign. Olivia Benson: Well that's ridiculous. You can't do that. It's what you lived for. DA David Haden: Says who? Olivia Benson: Says you. The first time you walked in our squad room. DA David Haden: I'd be assigned to your cases. You know.. that.. that means.. Olivia Benson: I know (cries) Us. This.. never happened Olivia Benson has a short lived romance when District Attorney David Haden joins the show in the Season 13 for a four-episode arc. However, when the Conviction Integrity Unit is created to investigate past cases for wrongfully imprisoned convicts DA Haden and Benson have to pull the plug on their short lived romance. The above scene takes place when DA Haden is appointed the head Conviction Integrity Unit, which makes it impossible for them to continue their relationship. Benson knows how

important his job is and sacrifices her relationship for it. This reinforces the notion of her career hindering her love life. Olivia Benson's representation corresponds to Cuklanz & Moorti (2006) description of a powerful woman who is self-determining, assertive but consumed by her work lacking any love life except for some on and off short-lived romances beyond the workplace.

### **Season 13 Episode 22: 00: 02: 07 - 00: 03: 06**

Captain Sam Reynold: Ahem.. So you making any friends in big city? Amanda

Rollins: You just met my partner. Captain Sam Reynold: I said friends.

Anybody that calls you Rollins is another cop not a friend. And you know I worry about you. Because I know how squarely you can get. Amanda Rollins: I'm fine papa bear. (Sam leans in to kiss her) Ah.. captain... you forget you are married. (pushes him away) Captain Sam Reynold: Separated (shows his

finger). I mean you can't say we both haven't thought about it. Amanda

Rollins: I know but you catch me by surprise right now. Amanda Rollins's

character is represented with similar codes as a woman who is single and career driven. The above discourse identifies Rollins as a loner who is always ready to do her job (an attribute of her personality trait highlighted in introduction of her character in season 13 episode 1). She also embodies the moral code as she stops her ex-boss who she thinks is still married. There are apparent flaws in representation of Rollins's character in Episode 14 of Season 13 (00: 24: 32 - 00: 27: 20) where she is revealed to have a gambling problem. Even though Olivia Benson and Amanda Rollins epitomize strong, independent and successful career driven women, they fail in their personal lives underpinning the ideology that a woman can be sexual or smart, but

not both. Chapter 5: Conclusion The objective of my study was to investigate the representation of female characters in Law and Order: Special Victims Unit with the help of discourse analysis. After my analysis I have deconstructed the codes employed in the discourse to depict Olivia Benson, Amanda Rollins and other female characters in the narrative. In conclusion, the female lead characters are represented as strong, rational, level-headed, independent and successful career women in a patriarchal society who constantly negotiate their position through gender binary (Cuklanz & Moorti, 2006). However, the revelation that Olivia Benson and Amanda Rollins were sexually assaulted and their lack of successful personal lives render them weak women. But if you interpret the alternative meaning in representation of these flaws you could say that the writers use Law and Order: SVU as a platform to bring forward real life adversities that women have to face. Law and Order: Special Victims Unit directly addresses issues that surround women who work in a male dominated society through dialogue and storyline. In addition, through characterization of these female leads, contemporary social issues are brought to the forefront in a hegemonic society. These women represent a new archetype of hero with traditional "masculine" attributes as well as adding "feminine" traits such as maternal instinct, compassion and empathy. The discourse of friendship between female characters also redefines heroic archetype where the characters share their power ensuing in empowering other people which is a positive representation of women integrating femininity and masculinity. Olivia Benson and Amanda Rollins do not seek protection from their male partners i. e. Benson is partnered with Nick Amaro and Rollins is partnered with

Tutuola. In fact Benson and Rollins are paired together to investigate a crime in some episodes which represent emotional reassurance. 5. 1. The Significance of the Study: I believe my study is significant in bringing the positive and negative representations of the main lead female characters. There has been studies regarding the victimization and representation of women but there have not been a focus on the other female characters as yet. This has also provided edification for me through as I have a better understanding of how women are constructed in the media. Even though L&O: SVU represent a dominant tone that is morally ambiguous, the female characters are allowed to renegotiate women's position by voicing the societal moral and ethics (Ortner, 2013). 5. 2. Limitations of the Research: I haven't been able to analyze some other aspects of the female representation in the narrative. I would have liked to examine other relationships between female leads and also the dynamic of male and female partnerships in the discourse, if given more space and time. In addition, I would have liked to examine the construction of Detective Amanda Rollins and other main female characters in regards of female heroism in the discourse. Furthermore, this research can be extended to other types of genre and programs featuring female lead characters such as Brenda Lee Johnson of "The Closer", NYPD Detective Kate Beckett of "Castle", Olivia Dunham of "Fringe" and Carrie Mathison of "Homeland". My findings reveal that women in Law and Order: SVU drive the plot and succeed in a male dominated environment without much help from the male partners. These women are level headed, rescue victims, negotiate with criminals and stay in control whilst facing adversities themselves but never letting it empower

them. The representation of this new female heroic archetype with feminine and masculine attributes can be further developed by examining other portrayals of women on TV.