

Good a horrible mind:
csis ideological
legitimization of law
enforcement
research...

[Law](#), [Evidence](#)



Crime Scene Investigating (CSI) follows teams collecting and securing evidence, conducting lab experiments, interviewing witnesses and applying forensic evidence to solve crime mysteries. In CSI Miami Season 1, episode 10 (dubbed A Horrible Mind) involved an investigation of a homicide of an unorthodox professor, whose tortured body was found hanged as if by a cult. The victim was a cultural anthropology lecturer, who attracted revulsion from his colleagues and parents, but was well-appreciated by his students, mainly because of his controversy-laden course. In the investigation, which was trained on the professors' cult-like students, the episode brings to the fore entrenched racial/religious tensions in the United States, competency among law enforcement officers and an imputation that crime is reflection on the society more than it is a reflection on the law enforcement agencies. This paper argues that this CSI episode (in common with the rest of the series and other similar crime series) draw on embedded stereotypes about crime (and law enforcement) to create an interpretive perspective that re-asserts the police and other law enforcement officers as indefatigable moral authorities. They create unrealistic beliefs and expectations about evidence collection and criminal justice processes, which have the effect of restoring the credibility of law enforcement agencies as hardworking and determined. In order to understand the motivation behind CSI its scriptwriters' determined approach to legitimize law enforcement agencies, it is useful to understand the public perception of the American public towards law enforcement. Weissmann (2009) offers two defining examples of what has been, and remains to be wrong, with the system. There have been revelations that the FBI failed to process evidence that could have been

instrumental in preventing the 9/11 terror attacks. Similarly, there have been revelations, coupled by courts overturning criminal convictions on account of new forensic evidence, of the failure of the system to gather and preserve evidence, and even more damningly, of the system's deliberate fabrication of evidence. Stereotypical convictions of Blacks on rape charges are not unheard of in the United States' history. Such blame has only served to erode the public confidence in the legitimacy, the capacity or even willingness by the criminal justice system to prevent or punish crime. For decades now, the police is have made headlines for racial profiling, fabrication of evidence, brutality and other injustices (Harcourt 2004; The American Civil Liberties Union 2009). Recently, evidence of police brutality emerged when an unarmed Black teenager was shot dead by the police in Ferguson, Missouri. It is against this background that the CSI plot emerges. In fact, CSI emerged in the immediate wake of the OJ Simpson trial, which dented the image of the criminal justice system.

Culture is important to the human beings' understanding of reality, and according to Cavender and Deutsch (2007), storytelling is among the many aspects of culture. The stories that people tell themselves about themselves. The stories offer an interpretive formula by which people understand different aspects of their lives. This framework reveals shared symbols, beliefs, meanings and the nature of their respective environments. The Horrible Mind episode and other crime series are essentially morality tales that portrays a struggle between good and evil, using heroes that stand for the moral authority, against villains that challenge that very authority.

“ A Horrible Mind”, in common with other similar CSI episodes, exhibits

several key characteristics. These include a primary focus on crime, a determined search for justice, and social change. The industry has however shifted from the private detective scripts where outsiders fix oversights by the system, to scripts where an efficient criminal justice system works to arrest crime. The dominant theme in "A Horrible Mind" is the fact that the victim is essentially a victim of the toxic environment that he created in his classroom and social life, which in turn lead to his demise. He had guest speakers from the KKK and Columbian prison torture perpetrator as guest speakers in his classrooms, and perhaps most crucially, led a poor social life that drew hatred from both his colleagues and parents. It is this hate and toxic conditions that lead to his death and the law enforcement agencies have to pick pieces apart to find him justice. He is not a passive victim, but one who created the conditions for his situation. Similarly, this episode points to the fact that racial and religious tensions, abuse, torture and crime, etc. are a reflection on the society that creates and perpetuates the right conditions for them to occur, as against the law enforcement agencies. Horatio, Calleigh and Speedle among other law enforcement officers are depicted as heroes, with the parents, extremist movements and social processes serving as villains. Interestingly, while the professors' lessons and approaches show what is wrong with society and law enforcement agencies (including torture of prisoners), the series papers over failures by the system, which in turn represents a failure to portray the reality of criminal justice processes such as resource limitations, lab backlogs and unwillingness by officers, which characterizes actual cases. In fact, entrenched systemic issues such as understaffing, inadequate and poorly

funded labs, and poor training of officers to handle complex evidence collection, preservation and analysis represent the biggest challenges that the criminal justice system faces. According to the CSI, however, these problems do not exist.

Weissmann (2009) observes that CSI often avoid representations of racialized underclasses such as Blacks in Missouri, and instead emphasize the fact that criminals are predominantly whites and almost without exception, come from the middle classes. In this episode, the KKK, Columbian torturer, hateful family, racial and religious tensions that cut across the population are the actual villains. A focus on white, middle class villains is in part driven by a sense of guilt by both Hollywood and law enforcement agencies for their respective roles in creating and perpetuating the stereotypes, which is why they feel that they want to correct them. It is for the same reason that television shows often tend to depict strong women and idiot fathers, to atone for the stereotypical perceptions that women are weak and subservient to men. Similarly, the "A Horrible Mind" plot seeks to decouple personal and collective responsibility for crime, which in turn serves to avoid negative feelings about the system. Even the cult-like students are seen as different and distinct from each other, with the investigators relying more on what scientific evidence points them, as against falling back to racial, religious and other stereotypes.

This episode's (and other CSI episodes') deliberate efforts to paint the law enforcement agencies in good light also comes through in the manner in which they employ crime stereotypes, while at once avoiding those that are negative to law enforcement agencies. For instance, Cavender and Deutsch

(2007) established that more than 70% of crimes depicted on the show were violent crimes (murder, rape violent robberies). However, according to FBI statistics, these crimes only comprise about 30% of all crimes committed in the United States. CSI uses cult-like murder, serious crimes and movements such as the KKK because they fit in with the stereotypical image of crime and the threat to the social order. Effectively, CSI uses such crimes as emotional hooks to grab the interest of the audience, but once the show achieves this goal, it moves away from stereotypes, to create new ones that paint the law enforcement agencies in a positive light. This is patently manipulative.

Amidst cases of murder and rape, the show introduces cases of officers that true heroes. In this episode, the lead characters Gill Grissom, Horatio, Calleigh and Speedle are depicted as committed and competent father figures, who are determined to find justice for the victim, who is deeply hated by those around him (Pineda-Volk and Philbin 2007; Cavender and Deutsch 2007).

A further evidence of CSI acting as a public relations tool for the police comes from the shows pretend portrayal of the officers' lives and the challenges that they encounter in numerous other experts. In one episode of CSI Miami, investigators are depicted arguing among themselves after one of the officers decided to put up posters of a suspected criminal to help arrest him. The bitter disagreement creates the perception of dedicated officers making genuinely difficult decisions (and genuine mistakes) in the course of trying to protect the public interest, even when in episodes 103 and 109, they fail to make arrests. This ploy also serves to make the characters appear human nature of the officers and the need for the public to

appreciate them as such. This theme comes through even more strongly, when the show's message appears to show that unlike the law enforcement agencies, the public itself does nothing to help them. There are countless episodes in which witnesses refuse to give evidence for the prosecution, which has the effect of redirecting the public's misgivings about the criminal justice system away from the system and blame themselves instead.

Perhaps the strongest the strongest vindication of the assertion that CSI serves to legitimize the criminal justice system stems from the fact that their strategies. According to a study by Sheldon, Kim and Barak (2006), which investigated the possibility of a "CSI Effect" on the public, judges, journalists and prosecutors believe that shows such as CSI have lead to wrong expectations of the system. They have contributed to suspects being wrongfully acquitted, in the cases where there is inadequate forensic (scientific) evidence to prove the crime. Jurors want to see the DNA evidence; they want to see CSI reenactments and gunshot residue evidence, which they believe is necessary and easy to procure, when actually, this is not the case. A survey of upwards of 1024 respondents revealed that jurors had developed unrealistic expectations about the law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system. Whether or not this is true, is immaterial, but the fact that it points to the fact that CSI and other similar shows socializes the law enforcement agencies proves the existence of an ideological leaning towards achieving just this goal.

CSI expertly blends old and new programming techniques to create a perception of cutting-edge technology, combined with the dedication, commitment and hard work of by law enforcement agencies. It is evident

that while CSI's scriptwriters are eager to use any stereotypes about crime, including creating a perception of prevalence of violent crime, it is unwilling to use stereotypes that portray law enforcement agencies in a poor light. The show goes further, to create and perpetuate unrealistic images of the law enforcement agencies being indefatigable, technologically empowered super heroes combatting crime. Further, CSI's plot is consistent with an ideological persuasion that there is little context to crime, where individual responsibility for crime is emphasized. Crime is both normal and opportunistic and when officers combat it, they then must not face resistance from people that feel unfairly targeted by the system. This gives legitimacy to the system, and it gives legitimacy to the individual law enforcement officers, while at once papering over the inherent problems with law enforcement officers. CSI avoids raising issues about controversial practices such as racial profiling and miscarriages of justice because they go against the very definition of the show's ideology.

References

- Cavender, G., & Deutsch, S. K. (2007). CSI and moral authority: The police and science. *Crime Media Culture* 3 (67), 68-81.
- CBS. (2009). CSI Miami: A Horrible Mind. Retrieved Oct 29, 2014, from cbs: <http://www.cbs.com/shows/csi-miami/video/bIKFI0ukI60SIkM6rYExjGYrIAr17sti/csi-miami-a-horrible-mind/>
- Finnegan, W. (2009, July 20). Sheriff Joe.(Arizonasheriff Joe Arpaio). *The New Yorker*, p. 42.
- Gabbidon., S., Penn, E., Jordan, K., & Higgins, G. (2009). The Influence of <https://assignbuster.com/good-a-horrible-mind-csis-ideological-legitimization-of-law-enforcement-research-paper-example-research-paper-samples/>

Race/Ethnicity on the Perceived Prevalence and Support for Racial Profiling at Airports. *Criminal Justice Policy Review* September vol. 20 no. 3 , 344-358 .

Harcourt, B. E. (2004). Rethinking Racial Profiling: A Critique of the Economics, Civil Liberties, and Constitutional literature, and of Criminal Profiling More Generally. *UNiversity of Chicago Law Review* Volume 71, Number 4 , 1275-1322.

Madrigal, A. (2014, June 29). Dads on Sitcoms. Retrieved Oct 27, 2014

McNeely, C. L. (1995). PERCEPTIONS OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: Television Imagery and Public Knowledge in the. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 3(1), 1-20.

Monk-Turner, E., Martinez, H., Holbrook, J., & Harvey, N. (2007). Are Reality Television Shows Continuing to Perpetuate Crime Myths? *Internet Journal of Criminology*, 1-15.

Parker, S. (2013). The Portrayal of the American Legal System in Prime Time Television Crime Dramas. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* Vol. 4, No. 1 , 108-115.

Pineda-Volk, R., & Philbin, K. (2007). Investigating CSI: Ideology and . *National Social Science Association Journals*, Retrieved from <http://www.nssa.us/journals/2010-33-2/pdf/33-2%2016%20Pineda-Volk.pdf>.

Sanchez, R. (2014, Aug 15). Michael Brown shooting, protests highlight racial divide. Retrieved Sept 13, 2014, from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/14/justice/ferguson-missouri-police-community/>

Sheldon, D. E., Kim, Y., & Barak, G. (2006). A Study of Juror Expectations and Demands Concerning Scientific Evidence: Does the 'CSI Effect' Exist? .

<https://assignbuster.com/good-a-horrible-mind-csis-ideological-legitimization-of-law-enforcement-research-paper-example-research-paper-samples/>

Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment & Technology Law, Vol. 9, 330. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=958224.

The American Civil Liberties Union. (2009). The persistence of Racial and Ethnic Profiling in the United States: A follow-up Report to the U. N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. New York: The American Civil Liberties Union.

Walsh, J. (2004). Prosecutors: Crime Shows Blur Reality . Phoenix: Arizona Republic.

Weissmann, E. (2009). Two Versions of the Victim: Uncovering Contradictions in CSI: Crime Scene Investigation Through Textual Analysis. Dartmouth University Journal Volume 2 Issue 1 .

Wilson, C. (2000). Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth Century America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.