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**GENDERED CRIMES, GENDERED FANS:
INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND FANDOM
IN THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN TELEVISION
CRIME DRAMA**

BY

MELANIE A. CATTRELL

B.A., English, Kent State University, 2001
M.A., English Literature, Bowling Green State University, 2003

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

American Studies

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Francis and Brenda Cattrell, whose love and encouragement is unparalleled; to Frank, Judy, and Nate Kooistra, for being an excellent “second family” to me for the last decade; to Roger Jerabek, for his encouragement and humor throughout the entire grad school process; and, finally, to my cat—and future Internet/TV star—Angel/us, for keeping me company during countless hours of writing and televiewing.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the changing representations of gender and sexuality in American network crime dramas over the last thirty years. It also examines the growing Internet fan communities that have developed to discuss these shows. Specifically, it provides a feminist and queer textual analysis of a variety of television crime dramas, comparing 1980's crime dramas such as *Cagney & Lacey* and *Hunter* to contemporary programs *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and *Bones*. This textual analysis is followed with an analysis of the contemporary shows' surrounding fan communities. Thus, this work charts the relationship between television studies, audience studies, fan culture, and gender and sexuality, arguing that today's crime dramas encourage participatory viewing.

This work builds upon feminist television studies. It discusses the contradictory manner in which lead female characters in crime dramas are

positioned within their respective series, since they are placed in the role of victim far more frequently than their male counterparts. Furthermore, it examines the way in which the female crime-solver is often placed outside of normative familial structures, leading to suspicions of lesbianism. Overall, it argues that the female crime-solver remains a complex figure in the television crime drama. This dissertation also discusses the representation of queer bodies in contemporary crime dramas, analyzing how these bodies are interpellated through the law and forensic science. It focuses on the role of the queer guest character in crime dramas, analyzing the way in which this guest character challenges the main characters' definitions of gender and sexual orientation. These characters show how regulatory structures attempt to contain and identify sexuality and gender, and the problems which arise when a person does not fit into these constraints.

Along with a historical and textual analysis of the crime drama, this dissertation provides an analysis of fan production by examining gendered fan responses to crime dramas. Specifically, it discusses the way in which viewers queer the texts through fan fiction, as well as through the conversations fans have on multiple discussion forums. It examines the convergence of production and fan culture, showing that the dichotomy which used to exist between fan and producer is blurred by the use of new media. It makes a contribution to several critical areas of study: contemporary ethnography, new media, television studies, feminist theory, and queer reading.

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Introduction

On any given day, there are hours of TV programming dedicated to the crime drama. The current proliferation of cable channels allows syndicated reruns of *Law & Order*, *CSI*, *NCIS*, *Cold Case*, *Criminal Minds*, etc., to dominate the airwaves. Yet, despite its popularity, the television crime drama is often dismissed by academic study. The crime drama has much to tell us, however, about cultural norms, regulatory practices, constructions and representations of gender and sexuality, and societal expectations and priorities. The crime drama is also formulaic, often presenting stock characters and prescribed situations. Despite this predictability, or, perhaps, because of it, the crime drama remains a television staple. What keeps viewers watching? How has the representation of women in crime drama, both as detectives and as victims, changed over the last thirty years? How are queer bodies portrayed and discussed? Beyond representation, how do audiences respond to crime dramas? What is the difference between a viewer and a fan? How do fans fill in the gaps they perceive in the rarely discussed personal lives of their favorite detectives, and how (and why) do they form online communities solely to discuss these characters?

My study of television is firmly rooted in the textual analysis of television, combined with a feminist and queer reading. This work is not only a textual analysis, however, but an audience study. Scholarship which simply identifies the portrayal of female (or gay, or a variety of other identity categories) characters often falls short of critical analysis. It often falls into mere description and offers only one point of view—that of the author. Within this dissertation, I am

also interested in audience response and fan communities which form around the crime drama. Similar research exists in the fan communities of science fiction programming, cult programming, and soap operas. Specifically, such research appears in Camille Bacon Smith's *Enterprising Women*, a text to which fan studies and this dissertation is immeasurably indebted, Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* (1992), which is foundational in understanding the position of the academic within the study of participatory fan culture, and Nancy Baym's exploration of gender, soap fandom, and Internet communities in *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community* (2000). However, the intersection of gender studies and the fan communities of crime drama viewers has yet to be explored in depth. While not an ethnographic study, this dissertation, like many fan studies, utilizes the ethnographic practice of participant observation as a way to discuss the role of the researcher in fan communities. Like most fan-scholars, in Jenkins' tradition, I identify as a fan of the shows I write about, and I am a participant within their fan communities.

This dissertation calls for the academic analysis of crime dramas. Specifically, I will be addressing the impact of gender, fan communities, and queer/coded readings and representations in the television crime drama. Unlike soap operas, which are often studied for their relationship to women's communities, or traditional "quality" dramas, which are studied because of their similarity to film, or science fiction programs, which are studied because of their obvious relationship to cult fandom, crime dramas are often neglected. There have been a few attempts at the scholarly analysis of crime drama; for example,

Maria Siano's *The People Are Represented: A Discourse Analysis of Contemporary Programs in the Television Crime Genre* (Siano 2008). Within her text, Siano uses the famous *Law & Order* introduction to begin an analysis of crime depictions of TV. As she explains:

The scope of this research will include representations of legal authorities and criminals, and specifically will examine how personal relationships and group membership are depicted in the genre as influencing criminals, either to commit crimes or to rehabilitate their lives. Further, I will point to depictions of social structures as a motivator for crime, as well as portrayals of a flawed justice system. (12)

Siano's work is important, but its focus is the representation of the legal system (and the criminal) within recent television. While this analysis is needed, I argue that the crime drama is evolving beyond the procedural, and should be analyzed as such. It is my contention that Siano does not focus enough on the growing representation of women in crime dramas, although this topic may be outside of her scope. Lisa M. Dresner's *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (2007) does address women in television crime dramas, but it is part of a larger project on the representation of female detectives. While Dresner's work includes a discussion of *Remington Steele* and *Hunter*, two programs I find essential to 1980's crime drama—and to this dissertation—she does not offer a complex reading of the lead female detectives within these shows. Most importantly, neither work considers the fan culture which surrounds

current crime dramas and the impact this fandom has on shaping the way scholars discuss crime drama's representations of identity.

Within this dissertation, I identify three distinct types of crime dramas. Firstly, I discuss the procedural crime drama, which typically solves a single crime per episode. These episodes are self-contained, and the viewer does not need to be familiar with the show in order to follow the action of the episode. I am particularly interested in the episodic crime dramas with male/female partnerships, since these often focus on issues of gender and sexuality in ways that their same gender counterparts do not. As examples of this genre, I examine the NBC drama *Hunter* and NBC's *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*.

Secondly, I focus on the romantic comedy crime drama. Shows in this genre are similar to the first, but they are often more lighthearted. They also tend to be more serialized, because they frequently focus on growing (romantic) relationships among the lead characters. Again, these shows typically focus on a heterosexual male/female pairing, but unlike the first type of show, there is more in-text time given to the romantic development of that relationship. As examples of this genre, I examine NBC's *Remington Steele* and Fox's *Bones*.

Thirdly, I discuss the "exceptional lone female" crime drama. This type of crime drama subverts the masculinity typically associated with the genre by positioning a lead female detective/investigator at the helm of a crime-solving team. Typically, this woman is exceptional; a loner whose intuition and intelligence is unequaled by the men and other women who surround her. Within this category, I will be examining NBC's *Profiler* and CBS's *Cold Case*.

There are, of course, more television programs that fit into each of these categories. I have chosen the above because of their endurance, their popularity, their surrounding fan culture, and their familiarity among TV viewers as a whole. I am also focusing primarily on network television, although in the last few years, cable television has produced a number of crime shows which deserve mention, including *The Closer*, *Covert Affairs*, *Rizzoli & Isles*, and *SouthLAnd*. *Rizzoli & Isles* is particularly useful, and will be discussed in chapter two as a contrast to its obvious predecessor, *Cagney & Lacey*.

With so many crime dramas to choose from, my textual choices can be called into question. As previously mentioned, I am in the position of both scholar and fan (what Jenkins has deemed the “aca-fan”), and as a result, I have chosen programs and fan communities that I feel a strong connection with. Certainly, this position is a precarious one, and one I often struggle with when approaching texts from a new perspective. For example, when Dresner asserts *Hunter’s* Detective Dee Dee McCall, is “hardly a feminist icon” (2007, 106), my initial reaction as a fan is to defend my childhood heroine. As a scholar, however, I must consider Dresner’s claim that Dee Dee’s frequent victimization is a significant issue, “perhaps reflecting the late-eighties/early-nineties anti-feminist backlash” (2007, 109). If this assertion is true, how do we negotiate the current treatment of women in crime dramas, since they, too, are also often placed in the role of victim?

Although I am a fan of the programs I am speaking about, I am also a critical viewer. In order to select the appropriate programs to discuss in this

dissertation, I have attempted to view at least one episode of every network crime drama airing from 2005-2011, as well as many of the original series which have appeared on cable channels such as USA and TNT. I have also viewed a significant portion of earlier crime dramas, particularly those which are readily available through DVD or Internet streaming sites, since those have the potential to gain new audiences through this new media distribution. I have chosen not to discuss *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and its spin-offs, because I believe they do not address the issues of gender representation I discuss throughout this text. Similarly, I have chosen not to address shows like *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *NYPD Blue*, and *Hill Street Blues*. While these shows make significant statements about masculinity, class, and race, they are outside the scope of my research. Because there are so many crime dramas to choose from, I have selected those which speak to issues of the representation of women, the representation of queer bodies, and the active fan response to both.

After establishing my criteria, I systematically re-viewed each episode of *Cold Case*, *Conviction*, *Hunter*, *Cagney & Lacey*, *Profiler*, *Remington Steele*, *Without a Trace*, *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Bones*, and *Rizzoli & Isles* through the 2010-2011 television season. Viewing these episodes chronologically, I was struck, for example, by the lack of diversity in early *Law & Order* episodes, which were primarily focused on white, male police officers. As the show continued, more racial and gender diversity appeared; this diversity is absent not only in the original series, but also in the other series within the franchise. Furthermore, I

was struck by the insensitivity often exhibited in early shows, such as early episodes of *Law & Order*, to queer victims. In more recent years, I have noticed a change in the response of leading characters to the representation of queer characters, but as I discuss in chapter three, these characters are still typically criminalized or medicalized when they do not fit into the law's definitions of gender or sexuality. Furthermore, I remain excited about the growing participation of crime drama Internet fan communities, something I have witnessed as both a scholar and a fan throughout the process of this dissertation. While crime dramas such as *Cagney & Lacey* did not benefit from organized fan communities in the same way that recent shows do, they still encouraged participatory behavior. This is evident in viewer responses to *Cagney & Lacey*, a show that was threatened with cancellation several times, but saved because of fan response.

Much like my systematic re-viewing of shows, I have also engaged in participant observation of the fan communities surrounding these shows. This study is particularly limited to *Law & Order: SVU* and *Bones* fan communities, as I discuss in chapters four and five. In doing so, I have chosen to narrow my analysis to several sites in which these shows are discussed, such as specific public Yahoo! Groups, the Internet forum Television Without Pity, public Live Journal communities, public Twitter accounts, and fan fiction published at both Live Journal and Fanfiction.net. My participant observation of *SVU* online fandom began in January, 2005 and continues to the present day. (Archived postings and fan fiction have allowed me to access discussions prior to this date, however.)

Similarly, while my participation in *Bones* fan communities began in May, 2008, archived postings allowed me access to fan responses prior to this date. Certainly, during the course of my participation in these fandoms, I have encountered a variety of discussions which were short-lived or are no longer applicable; I have chosen to not to include these within the dissertation. All of the sites quoted in chapters four and five are available to the public. While I am also a member of several closed forums, I have chosen not to include posts from these forums within this dissertation. As previously discussed, while this dissertation does not claim to be an ethnographic study of crime drama fans, it borrows from ethnographic methodology to read fan fiction and online fan conversations.

This dissertation is, in part, a conscious discussion of the representation of white women and white women's televised sexuality. Consequently, one could argue that this dissertation lacks diversity, since it focuses almost exclusively on the representation of and conversations about white women. Ironically, upon first glance, the contemporary crime drama appears to have the most racially and ethnically diverse casts of any shows on television. However, crime-fighting lead female detectives are almost always white. Thus, non-white women on detective shows are shown in either peripheral positions like medical examiners (Dr. Melinda Warner on *Law & Order: SVU*), rarely seen supervisors (*Law & Order's* Lieutenant Anita Van Buren) or both (Dr. Camille Saroyan of *Bones*). Women of color also exist as friends and/or supporting team members of an exceptionally talented leading white female character (*Profiler's* Angel Brown, *Bones'* Angela

Montenegro, and *Cold Case*'s Kat Miller). While non-white men have been portraying lead detectives for decades, leading female characters in detective dramas are overwhelmingly white. Although this is slowly changing, crime dramas are not as racially harmonious as they may first appear.

Finally, I define my methodology, as well as other terms used throughout this dissertation. As previously mentioned, this dissertation combines queer and feminist readings of the television crime drama with a study of the shows' surrounding fandom. As Matt Hills discusses in *Fan Culture*, it is difficult to define "fandom"; for my purposes, I use the term to describe a community of viewers who are so invested in a televisual text that they spend a great deal of time and energy viewing the text, viewing and/or producing their own interpretations of the text through fan fiction and/or fan art, and discussing the text with a larger community of fans, either in person or on the Internet. Certainly, there are many types of fandom, but for this project, I am concerned with television fans. The key element to this definition is *community*; I am not interested in one single interpretation of a text, but how that text is interpreted and discussed within a network of viewers.

Furthermore, I am particularly focused on the manner in which TV fans interpret and challenge concepts of gender and sexuality within crime dramas. Often, fans "queer" the text by creating fan fiction which addresses a subtextual queer relationship between characters. I use the term "queer" throughout this project to describe a variety of forms of non-normative gender identity and sexual orientation. While this term often loses meaning in its over-inclusivity, I find it

useful when discussing characters who do not fit into established categories of sexual or gender orientation.

Within the first chapter, “Television Studies, Gendered Audiences, and the Queering of Television Fandom,” I chart the relationship between television studies, audience studies, fan culture, and gender and sexuality. In the subsequent chapters, I build upon this relationship to argue that today’s crime dramas are worthy of study, have significant implications for the way in which we study representations of gender and sexuality, and have produced their own fan culture.

In the second chapter, “From *Cagney & Lacey* to *Rizzoli & Isles*: 30 Years of Gendered Crime Drama,” I examine the representation of women in crime dramas, beginning with crime dramas from the 1980’s. Specifically, I am interested in the contradictory manner in which lead female characters are positioned within their respective series, since they are placed in the role of victim far more frequently than their male counterparts. Furthermore, I examine the way in which the female crime-solver is often placed outside of normative familial structures, leading to suspicions of lesbianism. Overall, I argue that the female crime-solver remains a complex figure in the television crime drama.

In the third chapter, “From ‘Strange Women’ to ‘Amazing Trannies’: Crime Drama and the Queer Other,” I explore the representation of queer bodies in contemporary crime dramas, and the way in which these bodies are interpellated through the law and forensic science. Specifically, I focus on the role of the queer guest character in crime dramas, and analyze the way in which this guest

character challenges the main characters' definitions of gender and sexual orientation. To this end, I consider guest characters who operate outside binary constructs of gender and sexual orientation—characters who are bisexual or transgender. These characters show how regulatory structures attempt to contain and identify sexuality and gender, and the problems which arise when a person does not fit into these constraints.

In the fourth chapter, “The Lesbians Will Rejoice Tonight”: The Cyberculture of *Law & Order: SVU* and *Conviction*, I move from the historical and textual analysis of the crime drama to an analysis of fan production by examining gendered fan responses to crime dramas. Specifically, I discuss the way in which viewers queer the texts through fan fiction, as well as the conversations fans have about the shows on multiple discussion forums, by analyzing the relationship between *Law & Order: SVU*'s Detective Olivia Benson and ADA Alexandra Cabot. This relationship, though subtextual, has spawned a large fan following. I argue that this fandom, often neglected by academic study, has a great deal to say about fan interpretations of subtextual lesbian relationships.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, “‘Nothing Happens Unless First a Dream’: The Future of TV Fandom and Crime Drama,” I examine the convergence of production and fan culture, as I explore the similarities between episodes of the crime drama, *Bones*, and compare them to fan fiction. Furthermore, I focus on conversations between Hart Hanson, the creator of *Bones*, and *Bones*' fans, both at a fan convention and online through Twitter. In doing so, I show that the dichotomy which used to exist between fan and producer is blurred by the use of

new media. Finally, I discuss how fan fiction, which is a form of writing associated with women, is co-opted within Hanson's typically male narrative.

When read as a whole, this dissertation shows the connections between the representation of women in crime dramas in the 1980's and those representations today; the way in which queer characters are represented as Other in shows which thrive on legally established categories; and the way in which fan responses to these representations of gender and sexuality serve as a commentary on the power of fan communities and fan responsiveness. In doing so, it makes a contribution to several critical areas of study: contemporary ethnography, new media, television studies, feminist theory, and queer reading. Overall, this work argues that television viewing, now more than ever, is a participatory experience filled with meaning, and that viewers consistently utilize new forms of technology to discuss, interpret, and re-interpret it.

Chapter 1

Television Studies, Gendered Audiences, and the Queering of Television Fandom

Watching television is often dismissed as a waste of time; an activity that anyone can do, regardless of intelligence level, age, or class. Unlike a play or film, the viewer does not have to leave her house (and pay) to watch; instead, she can view a TV program for free in her own home. How is it, then, that what some dismiss as low culture can, in fact, have a significant impact upon the way in which we as a society view identities of gender, race, and sexual orientation? Indeed, it appears that TV's appeal to the masses is what has given it such strength and influence.

Within this chapter, I will be examining the tension between film and television scholarship, the impact of gendered audiences on television programming, and the changing representations of gender and sexuality on television. I will also focus on the growing body of literature on television fandom—literature which often merges feminist and queer readings with ethnographic research methods. Overall, I argue that television is a medium worthy of study apart from film, since it not only serves as a vehicle for creating active audience communities, but it also challenges conventional notions about identity.

Reading Television

During the 1970s, critics of visual culture began to realize that the methods used to study film were not easily transferable to the study of television. Raymond Williams, seeing the need for a theoretical approach to the study of

television, recounts a variety of ways in which television can be analyzed. Beginning by deconstructing the premise that “television has altered our world” (1974), Williams interprets this phrase in a number of ways, giving credence to both those who view the history of television’s place in our society as a form of technological determinism—in short, “that new technologies are discovered, by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress” (5)—or as “symptomatic technology,” which “assumes that research and development are self-generating” (6). These views depend upon how much agency one lends to technology—does television make the man (5), or does man make the television? Certainly, when discussing the impact of any technological advancement in society, such questions must be investigated.

Williams also illustrates one of the crucial problems built into television—that of financial control. While television proposes to broadcast to the masses, producers (and viewers) are continually reminded of the price one pays for this “free” service, both in commercials and in programming choices determined by financial reasons (24-25). Such a top-down look at the programming and reception of television becomes important later when discussing the possible impact of fan input to the construction of television storylines. Furthermore, it is important because the commercial aspect of television cannot be dismissed.

Williams, along with John Fiske, John Hartley, and a handful of other television scholars emerging in the 1970s, all proposed the development of a nuanced reading and understanding of television. However, Kristin Thompson

argues that there is still a “dearth of close analysis” of television. She offers three reasons for this lack:

Some hold a lingering prejudice against taking television seriously as an art form. Alternatively, some scholars would subsume individual programs into the broader field of cultural production, encompassing many media. And third, many scholars have relied—extensively, I shall suggest—on the televisual “flow,” or overall scheduling, rather than on single programs. (2003, 3)

All of these arguments are valid, and all relate back to the larger idea of audience participation in television viewing. Although television studies is becoming a more accepted field, it often still lingers in the shadow of film studies. This status is obvious in the number of books which attempt to validate their in-depth study of television by comparing the medium to film. Such is the case with Robert J. Thompson’s *Television’s Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER*, for example, as he argues that many dramas in the 1980s are of the same “quality” as feature films. For [Robert] Thompson and others, “quality television” becomes a phrase which seems to mean “television worthy of academic study,” or, more precisely, “television that is almost as good as a film.” He even provides a list of criteria by which to determine if a show is, indeed, “quality television.” He begins the list with a simple statement: “Quality TV is best defined by what it is not. It is not regular TV” (1996, 13). He continues, “The worst insult you could give to Barney Rosenzweig, the executive producer of *Cagney & Lacey*, was to tell him that his work was ‘too TV’” (13). It seems as though even those who write about

and produce TV feel that it is inferior to film, or, as [Kristin] Thompson asserts, “a poor cousin of film that cannot be studied on its own” (1).

Robert Abelman and David J. Atkin begin *The Televiewing Audience: The Art and Science of Watching TV* (2002) by offering a variety of reasons why “televiewing is not taken seriously” (6), such as: “television is a stepchild of other media” (7), “televiewing is an informal activity” (8), “televiewing is not an activity that has been embraced by the intellectual community” (12), “television is popular art and nothing more” (15), and “televiewing requires no skill” (20). Abelman and Atkin must refute these and similar claims before they can begin to write a text about “the televiewing audience.” One need only to read a handful of books which address television to see that the authors appear to face an uphill battle—before they can begin to present an academic analysis of a televisual text, they must convince the reader that their subject matter is worthy of academic discourse

In *Reading Television* (1978), Fiske and Hartley work to elevate the study of television by incorporating foundational principles of cultural theory, such as Stuart Hall’s concept of encoding/decoding texts. Television is not a simplistic medium, they assert, but one worthy of the same attention given to works of literature. “We should not mistake an oral medium for an illiterate one,” they argue. “We have the example of Shakespeare to remind us that non-literate entertainment can be as demanding, and satisfying, as the most profound works of literature” (16-17). Fiske and Hartley argue that despite the arguments that

television is “commercial, conventional, and conservative” (19), it still merits a close reading. Such criticisms are

only another way of saying that as a medium it is [...] a casual part of everyday experience. In fact, it is the very familiarity of television which enables it, according to our analysis, to act as an agency for defamiliarization. It is, indeed, more suited to this role than many of the great critical works of literature because contradictory perceptions are structured into all its messages, and we are not encouraged by any shaping artistic vision to learn to live with them. (19)

It is interesting here that television’s accessibility to the public, which many argue to be one of the aspects of television which prevents it from being taken seriously as “art,” is actually a positive characteristic. “Contradictory messages” must exist in television programs, however, because they need to appeal to a wide audience. These messages, as Fiske and Hartley explain, allow for the viewer/reader of the text to construct multiple meanings of it.

Another central difference between film and television is that television is constructed for a specific audience, based on genre (Mittel 2004) and programming (K. Thompson 2003). In their detailed analysis of the history of television viewing, Abelman and Atkin argue for a closer analysis of the audience. The audience is not passive, as some may argue, but instead is actively engaged in the process of watching television. Although “physically

segregated from the performance” and “physically separated from the other members of the audience,” television viewers do still constitute an audience, just as those who attend “live performances, such as the theatre or a concert” (3). Although this audience is “mass” (3), it is still carefully targeted. Certainly, there are few products which appeal to everyone; because television must always operate under financial constraints, as Williams reminds us, television programming schedules must be created in order to maximize the profits received through advertising.

The Viewing Audience

At this point, it becomes crucial to go into more detail about television audiences. What is constructed in our minds when we picture a television viewing situation? Is it one that takes place in the home or in a public sphere? Is the viewer alone or with a group? If the viewer is in a group, is she with her family, or with strangers? Certainly, all of these variables come into play when discussing the impact of television upon the viewer. Of course, scholars such as Lynn Spigel (1992) have reminded us that, although the placement of television within the home has led to a variety of different issues, the television is not *always* inside the home. Indeed, Anna McCarthy’s *Ambient Television* (2001) offers a variety of examples in which the television exists outside the home—from the sports bar to the waiting room. In this situation, a small audience does share physical space together. Placing the television set outside the home both creates a number of new types of audiences (for example, those who leave the house to gather at a bar to watch a sporting event), and takes it out of the private

sphere of the home. For the most part, however, the television exists within the home.

Perhaps because the television is situated primarily in the home, much discussion exists about the female television viewer. As Spigel explains, women were not originally considered to be ideal TV viewers. She comments that “although television was often promoted as the great instrument of family togetherness, it was just as often depicted as a divisive force. This was especially true in the case of women, who were typically shown to be isolated from the group watching television” (1992, 13). Indeed, many articles directed toward women were focused upon the placement of the television set within the home. It is interesting to note that Spigel’s analysis focuses on the notion that women’s lives would change simply because of this new introduction of a piece of furniture. As the head of the domestic sphere, the woman would be in charge of the arrangement of the furniture—but, tension is created when she realizes that the furniture has gendered implications. As Spigel points out, a 1948 issue of *House Beautiful* made this tension clear when it claimed, “Most men only want an adequate screen. But women alone with the thing in the house all day, have to eye it as a piece of furniture” (1992, 12). The message is clear; the television exists as something that a woman dusts, but a man watches.

Lynne Joyrich (1996) argues that Fiske and Hartley’s characterizations of TV open up room for a gendered critique:

Fiske and Hartley construct a theory of television’s difference, echoing a position frequently found in contemporary literary theory

which has also aligned textual difference and ideological subversion with figures of the Woman. The cultural denigration of television is thus related to the marginality of an unnamed femininity—as Fiske and Hartley claim, TV is scorned merely for being TV: nonlinear, illogical, and unmasculine. (73-74)

Joyrich's reading of Fiske and Hartley is significant, because she illustrates why TV is devalued, and places this devaluing in a specific context. This critique focuses on the very nature of television; unlike some critics who may assume that television will "improve" simply through stronger representations of women or through different approaches to gender representations, this critique states that the very nature of television is feminine, and therefore seen as less valuable. Such a critique cannot easily be changed.

Incorporation of technology and the advancement of television and computer usage also comes into play here. As Anne Friedberg discusses in "The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change" (2004), the availability of VCRs, cable television, and computer technology has allowed viewers the opportunity to watch films within the comfort of their own homes, thus disrupting some early theories about film spectatorship. "As new technologies trouble the futures of cinematic production and reception," she explains, "'film' as a discrete object becomes more and more of an endangered species, itself in need of asserting its own historicity. In the past decade or so, first with the VCR and more recently with on-line and digital technologies, the methods and source material for film and television scholarship have been radically transformed" (922-923).

Because technology is always changing, theories of film and television must be constantly revisited and revised in order to remain applicable.

Furthermore, critics such as Joyrich and Spigel build upon ideas of visual pleasure and the gaze that are found in Laura Mulvey's work. As Mulvey (1975) explains in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she works to combine psychoanalysis with film theory to analyze the gaze of the spectator: "the mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has so consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy" (839-840). It seems as though this description could be applied to television viewership as well. However, she continues, "the extreme contrast between the darkness of the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one other) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation" (840). Certainly, this isolation becomes difficult to apply to discussions of the television set, a piece of furniture within the domestic sphere. Mulvey's text reminds us that the spectator is constructed as male—"the bearer of the look"—while woman is constructed as the "image" (841). When placing notions of spectatorship and the gaze within this context, it becomes easier to apply Mulvey's notions to television viewership. Spigel does confirm that the spectator of the television was constructed as a man; many print advertisements for television sets focused upon men watching television while women were busy with domestic chores.

Soap Operas and the Female Viewer

Although Mulvey's writing is about film, many of the terms she uses have been adapted to study women's relationship to television. In "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas" (1979), Tania Modleski works to combine Mulvey's theories of spectatorship with the study of soap operas, which are traditionally seen as television shows produced for a female audience. Modleski argues that, unlike the film viewer in Mulvey's piece,

the subject/spectator of soaps, it could be said, is constituted as a sort of ideal mother: a person who possesses greater wisdom than all her children, whose sympathy is large enough to encompass the conflicting claims of her family (she identifies with them all), and who has no demands or claims of her own (she identifies with no one character exclusively). (14)

Instead of film, which always displaces women (Mulvey would argue) by casting them in the role of the subject, soap operas allow women to identify with the agents of the narrative. As Modleski explains, soap operas are typically based around family tales and secrets, not desire. Because she knows the secrets which are discussed in the show, the television viewer is not displaced; she is situated firmly in the role of caring overseer to her favorite characters. The analysis of the soap opera continues to be one area where feminist theory and television studies are useful.

It becomes clear then, that from the outset, television has been fraught with gendered applications. The soap opera, while not deemed "quality

television” by most critics, is important, however, because it allows for two essential elements of television criticism—the representation of women, and the images portrayed to a gendered audience. More than any other genre, soap opera producers are highly aware of their dedicated fan base and of their role in the lives of women—not simply as television shows, but as stories which bind generations of families together.

Although soap operas have long been dismissed by television scholars, television producers, and even those interested in women’s studies, many authors are now revisiting them as a site of resistance. Nochimson argues that her reasoning for doing so is to “resist media marginalization of feminine discourse” (1992, 2). She reasons that the assertion that “soap opera is a resistant feminist discourse...flies in the face of strongly defended assumptions, both conventional and radical” (2). Placing soap opera within a context of marginalization, Nochimson’s work is clear: the dismissal of the soap opera is a dismissal of the feminine. Furthermore,

soap opera’s contextualization of gender distinctions marks it as a text worthy of study. By exploring its use of essential gender, we will discover a fascinating and only barely suspected truth about daytime serial. Soap opera is too often viewed as a cheap version of the most melodramatic and conventional movies. This derogation bespeaks not the real nature of soap opera but a combined denial or anxiety shared by otherwise unlikely allies: most power brokers, most academics, and some feminists. (4)

She explains that “to understand the reaction of the soap opera audience and the potential of television technology to influence gender, we must see soap opera as it really is: an ironic recovery of the feminine through a most unexpected means” (4). Such a statement is an important validation of the genre of soap opera, and her text works to claim it as one that offers a powerful commentary on gender, not as simply “mindless entertainment.”

As will become apparent, many who write in both television studies and in fan ethnographies are, for better or worse, fans themselves. Nochimson’s text is unique in that she is both a fan of soap opera and has worked as a writer or a consultant on five different daytime dramas. It is her nuanced reading of the character of Nancy Grahn’s Julia Wainwright from the now-defunct *Santa Barbara* that drew me to her text. Nochimson’s text is interesting in that she takes the character of Julia—who was technically a supporting character, always in the shadow of Marcy Walker’s Eden—and analyzes her with the same detail as she does the characters of *One Life to Live*’s Vicki Lord and *General Hospital*’s Laura Spencer, who are characters who have existed for decades. It is to Nochimson’s credit as a fan and as a writer that she has thoughtfully considered the character of Julia, since she would have gone unnoticed by many casual soap viewers. Nochimson’s detailed reading of Julia’s identity as an independent, intelligent feminist is certainly long overdue and much needed.

Nochimson’s text is not without flaws; she frequently compares her heroines to characters from films in what appears to be an attempt to validate them in the world of television. While this is, of course, sometimes warranted—

for example, Victoria Lord is based on Katharine Hepburn's character in *A Philadelphia Story*, and clearly borrows from Sally Field's performance in the TV film *Sybil*—it is at other times a stretch. For example, while there are distinct parallels between the storyline of Julia and Mason Capwell, both lawyers, and the Tracy/Hepburn film *Adam's Rib*, these parallels did not directly influence their storyline. Furthermore, by making such comparisons, she seems to privilege film above television, which contradicts her overall purpose.

Charlotte Brunsdon (2000) offers an analysis of soap opera criticism throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing from feminist theory, ethnographic approaches, and critical theory, Brunsdon explores how the study of the soap opera continues to be dismissed within an academic context. As part of an interview with Ellen Seiter, a feminist scholar who has written about soap operas, she examines the dynamic that Seiter's work has created for her both within academia and within her own family. Brunsdon concludes that Seiter's work is connected to larger questions of women in academia: "Just as the study of soap opera disrupts the classroom, it manages, for exactly the same reasons (popularity with women and illegitimacy as an object of study) to bridge the gap between Ellen the academic and her mother and sister" (167). Because Seiter's academic work was about a subject that the women in her family could relate to, they felt more included in her efforts. However, she still faced exclusion from the academy for studying soap operas instead of a different form of communication. Brunsdon's work is essential, since it makes connections between what women do inside and outside of the academy, what areas of study are acceptable within

the academy, and how sexism still can impact academic research. Furthermore, it shows the way in which television—in this case, the soap opera—often binds generations of women together, despite being viewed as trivial or meaningless.

Gay and Lesbian Television Images

As we have seen by analyzing the gendered implications of the soap opera, television serves as a tool for understanding the way identity categories function and are performed in our society. This statement holds true not only when speaking about gender, but sexual orientation. In recent years, several authors have attempted to chronicle the history of gay representation on television, since it is continually shifting and changing based upon changing attitudes in the society as a whole. Several questions are raised when recounting such history. For example, does increased visibility of gay men and lesbians on television help to decrease discrimination against gay men and lesbians in everyday life? What influence do gay and lesbian viewers have upon the way they are seen on television? Do gay and lesbian villains promote negative attitudes about gay men and lesbians? What is at stake when a show includes a gay character?

Clearly, these issues show how important television visibility can be in the lives of some viewers. In *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (2000), Steven Capsuto begins his text by stressing suicide rates in gay teens, explaining that television has a greater impact than one may realize. His desire to validate television is not motivated by the acceptance for television as a serious art which deserves to be studied in the

same way as film—such as previously mentioned critics who work specifically in defining “quality” television. Instead, his goal is to show that television’s seemingly endless presence in our lives can be used to change viewers’ minds about serious issues such as homosexuality.

Capsuto presents the history of queerness on television as a never-ending struggle, a fight for visibility that ebbs and flows based upon societal viewpoints of sexual orientation—or, at least, what they perceive these views to be. He traces the appearance—and disappearance—of queer characters on television, often linking these appearances to social movements of the time: “Around 1967, TV sponsors started clamoring for shows that might appeal to urban, college-educated young adults. TV executives responded with topical programs that dealt with the youth counterculture, the antiwar movement, racial conflicts, the Sexual Revolution, feminism, and countless once taboo issues” (4). During this time, television executives also began to “experiment” with gay and lesbian storylines:

Certain patterns quickly emerged, and continued unchanged into the 1980s. Most of the gay characters were white men in their twenties or thirties. When a lesbian did appear, she typically was carrying a smoking gun or a bloody knife. Other acceptable roles for a lesbian were as a victim of violence (often at the hands of other lesbians) and as a woman mourning her lover’s death. As these descriptions suggest, gay women seldom appeared in

comedies. By contrast, gay men were considered *very* funny, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. (4)

As we will continue to see, simply adding a gay character to the cast of a show—or more likely, having a gay character in a guest appearance—did not mean that the television show was necessarily doing something positive. Instead, tropes were being developed about how to handle gay and lesbian characters—the women would be seen as violent or as victims, the men as comic relief.

As Capsuto explains, the image of the “sissy” on television was not new. In fact, “Television’s first major ‘queer’ character,” he explains, “was wrestler Gorgeous George, one of the biggest video stars of the late 1940s. Although off-camera he was, by all accounts, straight, in the ring he swished and preened. [...] His persona in the ring was that of a stereotypical, self-absorbed gay man, and viewers flocked to TV sets week after week to see him take a beating” (25). (Capsuto takes liberties here by equating queer performance with gay identity, as I will discuss shortly.) He continues: “Sissy characters were safe objects of ridicule who had no friends, relatives, or romantic partners. They were portrayed outside the nuclear family, thus outside TV’s ideal of humanity.” More importantly, “audiences could laugh at a sissy, secure in the knowledge he was no one they knew or needed. By separating implicitly gay characters from the viewer’s life, they remained non-threatening. As a result, gay men saw themselves on television only through the distorted lens of comic stereotypes” (25). Sadly, the “sissy” has long occupied a space not only in television representation, but in film as well. Although much progress has been made over

the past sixty years, one need only to watch an episode of *Will & Grace* or *Modern Family* to learn that the non-threatening “sissy” has not strayed far from our television screens.

After television began to incorporate gay storylines into their shows, it became apparent that producers did not have many innovative ideas for gay storylines. As Capsuto explains, “TV script writers of the early 1970s finally settled on two main genres of a “gay script”: the “coming out” script, in which a show’s regulars learn to tolerate a gay guest character, and the “queer monster” script, in which the sexual-minority guest roles are killers or child molesters (4-5). Both forms of story lack for significant character development for the gay character, and provide little opportunity for the viewer to see the execution of gay relationship occur.

Ron Becker’s (2006) work echoes this notion, as he moves beyond the simple tracing of the history of gay and lesbian characters on television to “understand how gayness operated within a specific circuit of cultural production in the 1990s.” (3) His aim is to understand why such a proliferation of gayness occurred on television when it did, and what impact this has had upon gay and lesbian viewers, as well as the society as a whole. As he explains, the 1990s brought progress, but also more gay stereotypes (190). After discussing the importance of Ellen’s coming out, Becker stresses that throughout the 1990s, “a larger GLBT community was periodically represented on prime time, but only on special gay-themed episodes and in ways that worked to distance the viewer from it” (2006, 181). Becker asserts that gay and lesbian characters often

functioned outside of the storyline of the show, and are still viewed in erotic, stigmatized ways by the lead characters that interacted with them.

Similarly, Stephen Tropiano's (2002) analysis of sitcoms is also divided into tropes: the "coming out" episode, the "mistaken identity" episode (a straight character is wrongly assumed to be gay), the "pretend" episode (a straight character pretends to be gay), and "a very special episode." Stock gay characters are also mentioned, such as "the gay teacher," and "the gay co-worker" (185-252). It is clear that those who study gay representation on television can agree on one thing: storylines and characters are predictable, easily categorized, and non-threatening—although, perhaps during sweeps months, they are slightly edgy.

One of the most prevalent terms in the discussion of gay and lesbian representation on television is that of "visibility." Should we, as queer viewers, simply be content with the images that we are given, since they are better than nothing? More importantly, does visibility actually produce social change, or does it simply pacify gay viewers? The "Puppy Episode," or the "coming out" episode of *Ellen* in 1997, is a landmark in the history of gay and lesbian television. Indeed, the popular website "AfterEllen.com" serves as a constant reminder that lesbian representation on television owes a debt to *Ellen*. Although it does follow the "coming out" trope listed by the aforementioned critics, it is useful in that in the past, the character who was "coming out" was never the star of the series. (And furthermore, the character was coming out at the same time that Ellen Degeneres herself was coming out.) In the past, the character's

“coming out” could never be followed; and the audience could not see him/her negotiate sexual orientation on a daily basis. As Suzanna Danuta Walters explains, this episode profoundly impacted the lives of many who watched it:

While I am reluctant to call any televisual moment a “watershed event,” it does seem clear that the *Ellen* hoopla opened doors previously cut off. And it is also clear, and must be stated time and time again for the hopeless cynics among us, that having openly gay and successful and “happy” folks on TV can and does alter the life course of many gay Americans, as this caller to *Larry King Live* noted when she called in to a program on “homosexuality in television” to say “I’m 14, and I’m a lesbian, and I would just like to thank Chastity Bono—and Ellen and Betty DeGeneres, because I think they personally have saved my life, because I knew I was gay before I even heard of Ellen, but without role models like them, I would have killed myself.” (2003, 92-93)

Walters follows this example by providing e-mails from other people who have expressed their gratitude for the episode, stating that it gave them the courage to come out to friends and family. In this case, much as Capsuto’s earlier statement about gay teen suicide, one is reminded that gay visibility on television has profound implications on the lives of many gay and lesbian people.

Decoding Television

Up to this point, I have been discussing a very straightforward analysis of television. One can simply view television as a form of transmitting uncoded,

simplistic messages, or, as Fiske and Hartley argue, a television text, like a literary text, can be “read” in a variety of different ways, thus promoting a variety of different views for the individual audience member. While such readings are commonplace for film and literary texts, they are rare for television, perhaps because of its commercial nature. After all, as fans of low-rated shows are constantly reminded, one must never forget that the purpose of television is not only to entertain, but to sell products.

Aniko Bodroghkozy (1992) allows for a nuanced reading of race and gender in her discussion of the 1968 series *Julia*, starring Diahann Carroll. Furthermore, she gives a voice to the viewers of the show, because she includes audience opinions (through the form of letters to the network) alongside those of the show’s producers. As she explains, “Recent work in cultural studies has demonstrated that meanings are not entirely determined by the text or by its producers. As Stuart Hall’s ‘encoding-decoding’ model has shown, readers of a text are active agents and need not accept the means constructed by a text’s producers. Readers can oppose or negotiate with the meanings that the text promotes as the correct or preferred interpretation” (146).

This notion of plural interpretations is crucial to understanding the relationship between the audience and the television text. As Stuart Hall explains in “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse,” the moment of production is only the beginning of the “communicative event” (2) that is the televiewing experience. “Production, here, initiates the message : in one sense, then, the circuit begins here,” Hall continues (3). However,

Before this message can have an “effect” (however defined), or satisfy a “need,” or be put to a “use,” it must first be perceived as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which “have an effect,” influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences (3).

In a move that is similar to texts which incorporate the ideas that fans have posted about television shows on Internet fan groups, Bodroghkozy includes viewers’ opinions about the show by citing several letters written to the network about the portrayal of an African-American woman on television. While not all of these viewers were “fans” of the show—indeed, many were offended by it—her desire to include their voices alongside the opinions of those who produced the show and of television critics is an important move, since it shows that she takes the opinions of the audience seriously. As she explains, the letters reflect the racial ideals of the time: “These letters indicate how besieged some people were feeling in the midst of the turmoil of the late 1960s. In *Julia*, some viewers may have seen the ‘new Negro’ as one who threatened their racially hierarchized universe” (1992, 155). While the text of the show itself may not have been threatening, it was clearly read as so by many audience members:

All the anxiety-producing mechanisms employed by the program’s creators to defuse notions of difference merely exacerbated anxiety for these viewers. They did not need to see explicit interracial sexuality dealt with on the television screen to see miscegenation

as the logical (and inevitable) outcome of the erasure of racial difference. Such letters show the ideological extremes viewers could go to in their meaning-making endeavors. *Julia* as a text certainly did not encourage these interpretations. But since meanings are neither entirely determined nor controlled by the text and since viewers are active agents in the process of constructing their own meanings, we can see how disturbing this process can be. (1992, 155-156)

Bodroghkozy relies on the same theoretical principles used by cultural theorists in order to analyze the various tensions that exist when identity categories are discussed within a cultural text. As she explains, “Cultural studies theorists analyzing oppositional reading strategies have generally focused on how such viewers position themselves against dominant ideology. By implication such reading positions are often seen as positive evidence of cultural struggle against the constraining policies, perspectives, and practices of the ruling social order or ‘power bloc.’ However, as these letters show, an oppositional reading strategy need not be a liberatory or progressive strategy” (155-156). This comment is very interesting, since we tend to think of “oppositional readings” as being held by those who are in an oppressed position—whether it is through race, gender, or sexual orientation. Her work shows that this assumption is not always the case; viewers may provide oppositional readings to a text that do not have underlying implications of resistance.

Queering Television

The ideas presented in Bodroghkozy's analysis of the reading of gender and race become important when examining sexual orientation and television as well. As much as I have stressed the importance of making a distinction between the study of television and that of film, there are two areas in which the media are similar –the representation of gay and lesbian characters, and methods of audience interpretation and coding to subvert dominant production regulations of sexual orientation. This similarity becomes obvious when reading *The Celluloid Closet*, Vito Russo's (1981) groundbreaking history of gay and lesbian representation in film. While gay and lesbian characters did exist in early films (although they were often predatory villains), because of film restrictions such as the "Hays Code," gay characters were not permitted. As Russo states, "when the Code was strengthened in 1934, borderline gay characters fell into well-worn innuendo and reliable sissy credentials, but said the same things" (1987, 31). Such statements reflect back to Capsuto's discussions of the "sissy" on television, beginning with Gorgeous George and continuing today. Clearly, the gender transgression that the sissy engages in serves as a code for homosexuality, even when that homosexuality is not (or cannot be) spoken. Indeed, Russo explains how strong this silence was:

Only once during the reign of the Code, it seems, in Howard Hawks' *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), did an unscripted use of the word gay appear to refer to homosexuality. When Katharine Hepburn's Aunt Elizabeth (May Robson) discovers Cary Grant in a lace

nightgown, she asks him if he dresses like that all the time. Grant leaps into the air and shouts hysterically, “No, I’ve just gone gay...all of the sudden!” This exchange appears in no version of the published script. (47)

This is not to say, however, that because gay and lesbian characters were not permitted to be in the films that they did not exist there. Instead, because of this ban, gay viewers were forced to read films differently, to search for subtextual clues that they were, in fact, being represented on the screen. Viewers began reading films looking for clues about the sexual orientation of the characters, and this form of resistant reading has carried through to television studies.

Combining television studies and queer theory, in *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Alexander Doty (1993) discusses how coding and textual analysis can be used to investigate representations of queerness on the small screen. Unlike the aforementioned authors of the history of gay and lesbian representation on television, Doty is more concerned with a queer *reading* of television. Such a reading allows for characters who would not identify as gay or lesbian but who may, for either textual or non-textual reasons, be somehow coded as non-heterosexual. Doty states that he is making a deliberate choice to use the word “queer” to reflect his resistant act: “By using ‘queer’ [as opposed to ‘gay and lesbian’] I want to recapture and reassert a militant sense of difference that views the erotically marginal as both (in bell hooks’s words) a consciously chosen “site of resistance” and a “location of radical openness and possibility.” (3) This “resistance” is clear when looking at Doty’s text, since he has chosen to analyze

television characters who, although most do not identify as gay or lesbian, actively challenge heteronormativity . (His reading of *Kate & Allie*, for example, addresses the title characters' desire to be considered a family, despite the fact that they are not a married straight or gay couple).

Along with *Kate & Allie*, Doty offers queer readings of a variety of shows, such as *Laverne & Shirley*, *The Golden Girls*, and *Designing Women*. What these shows have in common is a rejection of the standard heterosexual storylines which are all too common on television. Instead, they force the viewer to question concepts about gender, sexuality, and family. Furthermore, they feature women who are not defined by their relationships to men, but to one another instead. Such a description would place definitions of queerness and of queer theory always in transition. Much like feminist authors such as Adrienne Rich, who argued for a “lesbian continuum” (227-254), queer theory focuses upon the rejection of the binary and of the acceptance of multiple categories of gender and sexuality, and the women seen in Doty's work, as he explains (42), can be read through Rich's analysis of the lesbian continuum.

The idea of multiplicity carries over into textual analysis, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick shows in her foundational text, *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* (1985). Within this text, Sedgwick shows how desire can be constructed in a variety of forms, not simply in heterosexual or homosexual relationships. She illustrates aspects of literature which focus on the “homosocial” relationship between men. Often this relationship is seen in literature as “male bonding”—and can even be read as homophobic—but

instead, it is a reflection of a continuum of homosocial desire that exists among men, just as Rich has created for women. Both authors show that sexuality is fluid, not binary. Judith Butler (1989) has extended this work to also challenge our current constructions of gender, arguing that gender is not binary either, and should be regarded as a performative act. When applied to television, such ideas allow viewers to examine characters from a variety of different aspects. Instead of simply waiting for characters to “come out”—an action that, both Butler and Sedgwick argue is not binary—we are able to analyze a variety of non-heteronormative representations in television.

Audience Communities, Ethnography, and Fan Culture

With so much talk directed toward the marketing of television, it becomes difficult to understand how it affects viewers on an individual level. It does, however, and this effect is clear in the communities which are formed through the common viewing of television programs. In *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, Janice Radway (1984) conducts an ethnographic study of a group of women who invest much time and energy into reading romance novels. Through their shared readings of a text—texts which are thought to subjugate or belittle women at times—the women studied by Radway use the texts as vehicles with which to discuss the impact of gender roles within their lives. Furthermore, the women come to alternate readings of the texts—readings which are aided by the community that they have formed (8). This idea of coding appears within the work of Radway, because it is essential to understanding how a group forms a shared language and textual analysis. This

group, then, influences the reading in a way that may not have occurred were the person not within the group.

This notion of group codes and shared readings also exists within the work of Camille Bacon-Smith (1992). Like Radway, she is concerned with a gendered audience, although her focus is on women who are fans of the show *Star Trek*. Although not physically connected in the same way that Radway's group is, the women do form a strong group through conventions, regular meetings to view taped episodes of the show, and mailing lists. Like Radway, Bacon-Smith's approach to the group is only one of ethnographer; she is not a fan of the show. Furthermore, Bacon-Smith is not solely concerned with the practices of the fans (such as creations of fan videos, fan fiction, and conferences), but also by the fact that, while *Star Trek* (and science fiction texts in general) is often thought to have a male audience, this fan base consists primarily of women. Bacon-Smith's text serves as an excellent guide to fan fiction, fan art, and a variety of other traditions within fan culture that many believe to exist only because of Internet technology.

Finally, in *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins (1992) combines many of the ethnographic approaches that are used within the work of Radway and Bacon-Smith and applies them to a fan community of which he is a member. Jenkins—who is, among other things, a *Star Trek* fan—traces the history of fan culture from an insider perspective. His work echoes that of Radway as he discusses the impact that groups have upon the reading of texts: "Fan reception cannot and does not exist in isolation, but is always shaped through input from other fans

and motivated, at least partially, by a desire for further interaction with a larger cultural community” (76). This statement is not only important because it emphasizes the notion that groups of fans form collective readings of texts, but it also stresses the social aspect of fandom. As Jenkins explains in the first chapter of his text, fans are often encouraged to “get a life” and to dismiss their fannish pursuits. Jenkins’s work dismisses that notion by explaining that fan culture is neither lonely nor isolating, but rather, it is a social atmosphere within which relationships and connections are formed.

Community

The works of Radway, Bacon-Smith, and Jenkins serve as a basis for the majority of scholarship of Internet fan communities. However, when discussing the Internet, the definition of “community” is always a topic of debate. What constitutes a community, and how can it be defined outside of a physical location? As Nessim Watson (1997) explains, when discussing computer mediated communication (CMC), this question is always one open to debate. Watson seeks to understand why, simply asking, “why argue about an online forum being a community or not? Why does such a debate matter?” (102). Watson explains that “as often as Internet scholars argue that they have discovered a virtual community, it is also argued that those researchers are uncritical about the notion of community. Their detractors often accuse them of being overly excited to assign ‘community’ as a descriptor for their favorite and newly discovered online discussion group” (102-103). Watson argues that the reason for this skepticism is simply fear of new technology: “any attempt to apply

a valuable word like 'community' to a new set of phenomena should certainly be met with initial skepticism" (103). He continues by offering this explanation for the use of the word "community":

Social researchers use a community metaphor to describe something about online interaction which is similar to what we know as a community in the offline world. The primary reason why CMC researchers like Rheingold came up with the community metaphor to originally describe online interaction forums is that it *feels* right. Subjectively, when one looks into a virtual forum, it feels like what one knows as a community. (105)

Watson does acknowledge that there are flaws with the term—most notably, the lack of commitment required to be a member of an online community, and the presence of lurkers (105). However, he still advocates for the use of this term when discussing his area of research, an online fan community for a popular music group.

Online groups have definitely perpetuated the use of this term. For example, Live Journal, a website which hosts online journals and blogs, also hosts "communities." These are formatted in the same fashion as individual journals, but posting access is granted to any Live Journal member who joins the community. In the last five years, the communities have become a place where many authors post fan fiction, discuss fan culture, and trade copies of television shows and films. The guidelines for community membership varies by the type of community (for example, communities which participate in illegal file-sharing are

cautious, often only accepting members through referrals), while other communities are open to all users. Although some members of Live Journal do not participate in communities at all, many use them as a way to connect with other users who share their interests.

Within the work of Radway, for example, we are shown a physical community of women who have much in common—surroundings, similar upbringings, etc. But what of Internet communities, where participants have no mutual experiences other than a shared interest in a certain cultural text? Similarly, unlike the communities discussed by Bacon-Smith, which were tightly organized through mailing lists and conventions, Internet groups know very little regulation. While some e-mail lists and discussion boards are only open to certain members, most are not. Therefore, anyone could log in, make comments, and then never return to the group. Furthermore, communities often have many lurkers who never feel comfortable posting, but still read posts and consider themselves to be members of specific communities. Is it possible, then, to do an adequate study of Internet fan culture?

In his discussion of fan culture, Matt Hills argues that “a general theory of media fandom is not only possible but is also important; too many previous works have focused on a single TV series, singular fan cultures, or singular media (“TV fans’ versus ‘cinephiles’”) (2002, 1-2). Hills contrasts Bacon-Smith’s work with that of Jenkins—as does Jenkins himself in a later work. Because Bacon-Smith “self-consciously represents herself as ‘the ethnographer’ entering an unknown subcultural field,” Jenkins asserts that her work “deserves the label of a

traditional ‘fan-ethnography’” (68). The position of the ethnographer in the study of fan culture is always a precarious one. Hills criticizes Bacon-Smith’s work, however:

Bacon-Smith is clearly highly aware of the self-mythologizing narrative of her account, hence the overwritten ‘intrepid’ ethnographer struggling on bravely through the ‘fog’. Despite her exaggerated presentation of such a narrative, Bacon-Smith nonetheless relies on it to determine her account of the ‘evasive’ fan community. She concedes her desire to “jump up and down and scream ‘Look what I found! A conceptual space where women can come together and create—to investigate new forms for their art and their living outside the resistive boundaries men have placed on women’s public behavior! Not a place or a time, but a state of being.’” This introductory admission is presumably intended to reassure the reader: Bacon-Smith *wants* to jump up and down, but a ‘colder mind prevails’ and we are returned to the hallowed halls of academia. (69)

Hills is not only questioning Bacon-Smith’s excitement at “discovering” something new, a practice that is condescending at best, but he is also critiquing the interplay between academia and the fan community, as well as academia and *female* communities. Because both groups have been misrepresented and dismissed in academic research of the past, it is not surprising that tension would exist for an ethnographer placing herself within a community of female fans—

especially, as in the case of Bacon, since one of her goals was to understand why female fans were drawn to a show that she believed promoted patriarchal ideals.

But what of the female ethnographer who also belongs to a predominately female fan community? Would her treatment of the subjects be different? What negotiations would occur? We are able to see this methodology enacted in both Nancy Baym's *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, and Christine Scodari's *Serial Monogamy: Soap Opera, Lifespan, and the Gendered Politics of Fantasy*. Baym discusses the tension she feels through her academic life and her role as a soap opera viewer, as she begins the text by explaining, "the people I encounter in my daily life—colleagues, students, neighbors, babysitters—often find it hard to believe that I watch soaps" (2000, 35). Such reactions, Baym argues, "indicate a pervasive cultural stereotype that soap operas are vapid and so too are their fans. That soap operas merit a stereotype at all indicates how omnipresent in cultural life they have become. Even those who do not watch them know something about them (although less than they think)" (35). Baym's text offers an extensive analysis of a r.a.t.s (rec.arts.tv.soaps) focused on *All My Children*. At the beginning of her text, she positions herself as a longtime member of the group, explaining that part of her "daily routine in graduate school" was to watch the show on a regular basis and then to log on to the discussion group to read and contribute to the postings about each episode (1). Because she occupies this position, she is able to view the community in a way that an outsider would not. Baym raises questions of

community and identity in her text, focusing on the way in which identity is constructed and mediated through the group dynamic of sharing resources and information, as well as creating one's own unique identity through writing styles.

She explains that statistics show "people in r.a.t.s. do not post at all, choosing not to seek active voices, let alone identities" (144). When surveyed, lurkers offered "a number of reasons that one would opt not to post, among them the uncertainty about how to post, a sense of not knowing enough about the group to speak, the feeling that one has nothing new to contribute, and a lack of time" (144). Furthermore, Baym's research into the newsgroup showed that at one point, "10% of the posters wrote half the group's messages" (145). Clearly, it is difficult to get an idea of what a community is like when only a few posters are speaking. Although Baym's research is directed toward one specific group, I believe her statistics can be extrapolated to other discussion boards as well.

As Scodari (2004) explains, her approach to research is one of "long-term immersion" (xxv). Like Baym, she is continually involved within the community that she is writing about. While this affords her a perspective that would not be afforded to an outsider, it also lends itself to problems. Certainly, it is difficult to critique the opinions and actions of a specific community when you are, in fact, a member of the community. Furthermore, it is difficult to maintain an objective stance, because the fact that you are part of the community to begin with means that you are far from objective about the subject matter. However, each fan group is different and each comes with different codes and expressions, it seems as if it would be nearly impossible to truly understand the inner-workings of a fan

community unless you were also a member of it. This “insider” language is often reflected in fan ethnographies, some of which are confusing to anyone not familiar with the text and the community they reflect. For example, if I were not both a member of a variety of online communities and considerably familiar with the majority of the shows discussed within the texts, the work of many authors, including that of Scodari and Baym, would not have been accessible to me.

Re-defining Ethnographic Research

Most of the authors working in the academic study of fan culture consider themselves ethnographers, although this term may be disputed since ethnographic methods differ when studying online communities. In “Ethnographic Presence in a Nebulous Setting,” Jason Rutter and Gregory W.H. Smith (2005) explain:

Certainly, the online position of the ethnography makes its practice more precarious than in traditional environments. Yet it is this very difference that underlies the conventional necessity for spending time within the setting in order to explore the culture within it. In online ethnography there is often an assumption that the researcher is not going into a culture that is substantially different from their own or that the organization of the culture can be rapidly assimilated through a few brief visits or even the automatic collection of data. Online ethnography may look deceptively easy to do but there are very good reasons for insisting on the application

of traditional standards of ethnographic conduct and criteria of adequacy. (92)

Rutter and Smith comment that the world of online communities presents new challenges to ethnographers. The insider/outsider paradigm is disrupted, and even the notion of data collection becomes murky. As Jenkins, Baym, Scodari, and other scholars of fan studies agree, the position of the fan scholar/academic (or, as Jenkins now refers to himself, the “aca-fan”) is one which blurs and questions the distinctions between subject and researcher, between academic scholar and pop culture enthusiast, and between participant and lurker. As I will explore in subsequent chapters, the shifting identity of the fan scholar presents unique challenges when theorizing about TV and TV fans within the academy.

Chapter 2

From *Cagney & Lacey* to *Rizzoli & Isles*:

30 Years of Women in Crime Drama

In July 2010, cable network TNT premiered a new crime drama, *Rizzoli & Isles*, starring *Law & Order* alum Angie Harmon as “tomboy” detective Jane Rizzoli and Sasha Alexander as “fashionista” medical examiner Maura Isles. The promotional advertisements for the series, which aired repeatedly during popular crime dramas *Law & Order*, *Bones*, and *Cold Case*, as well as TNT’s previous female-led dramas like *The Closer* and *Saving Grace*, consistently reinforced the differences between the two women by emphasizing their differing approaches to traditional gender roles. Such a marketing ploy serves as only one example that, despite significant changes in the last thirty years, crime dramas are still contested spaces for female characters.

Within this chapter, I will be examining several well-known crime dramas, including NBC’s *Hunter* and *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, and CBS’s *Cold Case* to examine the changing or, in some cases, the static—representation of women in crime dramas. Specifically, I will examine the ways in which female crime-solvers are marked differently than their male counterparts—whether it be through their potential victimizations, suspicions of queerness, or their inability to form relationships. I contend that anxieties over the representation of women detailed by D’Acci and Dresner’s readings of *Cagney & Lacey* and *Remington Steele* are still prevalent today, although they are manifested in slightly different ways. Overall, I argue that, despite the growing visibility of women in the

previously male-dominated world of television crime drama, the genre still exists as a complicated space in need of gendered analysis.

In the 1980's, crime dramas changed with the introduction of *Cagney & Lacey*, a female-centered program. Unlike previous crime dramas, in which women were non-existent or were assistants to male figures, *Cagney & Lacey* presented two female leading women who operated within the male space of policework. Other TV crime dramas did not follow the lead of *Cagney & Lacey*, however. "After *Cagney & Lacey's* progressive vision," Dresner laments in *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, "opportunities for the presentation of strong female detectives on television sadly declined" (2006, 47).

In *Prime Time Law Enforcement*, author James Carlson explains how crime shows have risen in popularity over the last thirty years. He states that, despite objection to violent content, because television is a business based on ratings and advertising, these shows will continue to be on the air as long as they have an audience (1985, 29-31). Carlson argues that viewers expect their shows to follow a specific formula, despite the fact that it may offend some members of the audience:

Each program must include a crime, someone who commits it, someone who is victimized by it, and someone to bring the criminal to justice. How can criminals be portrayed without offending important segments of the viewing audience? How can crimes be portrayed without presenting an image of a threatened society?
(1985, 32)

The crime drama is paradoxical in thought; it both presents a frightening picture of some members of society, and provides comfort to the viewer when the crime is solved. Furthermore, in creating the necessary world of criminals and victims, the crime drama runs the risk of offending its audience members. For example, crime dramas must consider the message sent to their audiences when portraying victims and criminals. These concerns of subjectivity are especially relevant in terms of race and gender. A show which features white, male law enforcers at the expense of female victims and/or non-white criminals is clearly disturbing—yet this formula was quite familiar in crime dramas until the early-1990's, when the original *Law & Order* transitioned from an all-white, all male cast to add non-white and female characters. Traditionally, the space of crime drama or crime-solver has been a masculine one.

Representing Women in the 1980's: *Cagney & Lacey* and *Remington Steele*

In *Defining Women: The Case of Cagney & Lacey*, Julie D'Acci argues for the importance of the study of gender roles on television, which she considers “one of our culture's most productive technologies for generating images and meanings of masculinity and femininity” (1994, 3). D'Acci explains the anxiety which surrounded a television show focused on two female detectives. From fears about the femininity (read: heterosexuality) of the lead characters to the belief that audiences would not accept two female leads in a crime show, D'Acci's work shows that *Cagney & Lacey* sparked gendered conversations and debates simply by its existence. If D'Acci's claims about gender representation are valid, it becomes important to examine the changing roles of gender

representation on television, since they impact the way in which viewers perceive gender in their everyday lives. Crime dramas often present contradictory views of women; for example, they are often simultaneously depicted as strong, proactive crime-solvers and weak, passive victims.

As Denae Clark discusses, from the beginning, *Cagney & Lacey* served as an intentional statement for feminism:

The connection between *Cagney & Lacey* and feminism can be traced back to 1974 when Barbara Corday, one of the show's creators, made her husband, producer Barney Rozenweig, read Molly Haskell's feminist attack on the film industry, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. According to Corday, Rozenweig became enlightened when he encountered Haskell's point that women had never been portrayed as buddies in film or television, and thereafter he was committed to creating a female buddy movie. (2000, 341)

In the first episode of the series, "You Call This Plain Clothes?" we watch Cagney and Lacey negotiate their personal lives with their professional responsibilities. The parallels between *Cagney & Lacey* and the "buddy movie" are clear. Cagney and Lacey are portrayed as a cohesive unit who work together; their only discord occurs when Lacey believes Cagney is operating alone and not honoring their partnership by working on a potentially dangerous case behind Cagney's back. Similarly, Cagney's only disagreement with Lacey comes when she discovers Lacey has been discussing their work with her husband, Harvey. While Lacey

argues that she is a “wife/mother/cop,” it seems that Lacey often puts “cop” first in her priorities. Meanwhile, Harvey exists in a small, domestic role; he cooks dinner each night and is shown waiting up for Lacey to return home from a long day (or night) at work. Lacey’s true partner is Cagney; Harvey simply waits in the background to serve them dinner. This reversal of stereotypes is a refreshing change in the world of the TV crime drama, as Clark explains:

Cagney & Lacey has certainly challenged the stereotypes found in earlier police dramas such as *Police Woman*, in which a highly sexualized Angie Dickenson was put into dangerous, suggestive situations only to be rescued by her male partners. But the importance of *Cagney & Lacey* to feminism lies beyond its presentation of a new or better image of women. As a text that specifically addresses women and women’s issues, *Cagney & Lacey* potentially challenges the boundaries of patriarchal discourse at the same time as it allows viewers to actively enter into the process of its meaning construction . . . *Cagney & Lacey* empowers women and encourages women-identified constructions of meaning through a combination of its narrative form, its representational codes, and its structures of looking. (2000, 342)

The unique vision of *Cagney & Lacey* is evident in the opening credits shown during each episode of the first season. During these credits, the viewer watches as Cagney and Lacey solve an important case and receive promotions from “beat cops” to detectives. In “You Call This Plain Clothes?”—a direct reference to

the fact that Cagney and Lacey are still in uniform, just a different one—we learn that this promotion does not guarantee an upgrade in job conditions. Instead, they are still asked by their captain to work as undercover prostitutes. When they complain about working vice, they are given a transfer to homicide, only to go undercover again as prostitutes when they encounter a serial killer who is killing prostitutes. Cagney and Lacey’s workplace is one that reflects a resistance to change; their only ally within the department is Marcus Petrie, an African-American officer. The white, heterosexual male police officers are shown as racist, misogynist, and unwilling to cede any power to “minority” officers. *Cagney & Lacey* is important because it constantly points out these tensions and addresses them.

The role of the female detective as a “decoy” or performer will be discussed throughout this chapter. Although it is typically seen as negative, Clark interprets Cagney and Lacey’s undercover work as feminist: “In *Cagney & Lacey*,” she argues, “the detectives often adopt disguises in the service of their undercover work. While these disguises generally connote a power of action that extends beyond a woman’s sexualized form, the occasions of feminine masquerade provide a direct commentary on the issue of female representation” (2000, 351). Clark is quick to point out that these disguises are directly related to the performance of femininity and sexuality:

In a 1987 episode, for example, Cagney and Lacey go undercover as hookers to catch a mugger. In their role as women dressed up as women, they display an excess of femininity—mounds of

makeup and hair (wigs of an unnatural color), revealing dresses, feathers, jewelry—that creates a ridiculous image. The masquerade allows Cagney and Lacey to expose the sadism of male desire, i.e., “those ‘ogling’ eyes that turn women into pieces of meat,” as Cagney remarks. Moreover, when the detectives change into their street clothes and assume a different identity, they deconstruct this fetishized image of woman and expose male-defined femininity as a mask that can be worn or simply removed. (2000, 351)

While I argue that Cagney and Lacey’s undercover work is demeaning, I appreciate Clark’s alternative reading of the text. Certainly, the requirement for Cagney and Lacey to appear as hookers—and the need for the show to portray them as such—says far more about the male gaze than it does about women.

I examine NBC’s *Remington Steele*, a seemingly innocent romantic comedy-style detective show focusing on private detective Laura Holt, the owner and creator of her own detective agency, in order to show how this program plays with notions of gender identity and the detective. Gender inequality in the workplace, while only temporarily addressed in some programs, is interwoven into the very fabric of *Remington Steele*. In the pilot of the series, we learn that Laura faced discrimination when attempting to become a private investigator. Because no one would hire a young woman, she created the masculine “Remington Steele,” an invisible boss with a mysterious reputation. As she describes in the introduction of each episode during the first season:

Try this for a deep dark secret: The great detective Remington Steele... He doesn't exist. I invented him. Follow: I'd always loved excitement, so I studied and apprenticed, and put my name on an office. But absolutely no one knocked on my door. A female private investigator seemed so... feminine. So I invented a superior. A decidedly masculine superior. Suddenly there were cases around the block. It was working like a charm. Until the day he walked in, with his blue eyes and mysterious past. And before I knew it, he assumed Remington Steele's identity. Now I do the work, and he takes the bows. It's a dangerous way to live, but as long as people buy it, I can get the job done. We never mix business with pleasure. Well...almost never. I don't even know his real name.

While Dresner heralds Laura Holt, I argue that her character is not simply a feminist heroine. Certainly, Laura must be commended for operating as a subject in an arena where many women—including Miss Fox, her own secretary in early seasons of the series—are objects. However, Laura's power is limited; it only exists through the “decidedly masculine” character of Remington Steele. In the first episode, we see how Steele renders Laura invisible; while her name is omitted from a caption in an important news article about a case they solved together, Steele receives credit. Secondly, instead of working outside of the patriarchal structure, Laura chooses to operate and perpetuate it by creating Remington Steele to serve as her fictional superior. In doing so, Laura becomes the stereotypical “woman behind the man.” Even though *she* is aware of her

position in the detective agency, the public remains oblivious to this knowledge. Therefore, Laura is inadvertently perpetuating the notion that the occupation of private detective work should remain in the masculine realm.

The Flawed Investigator

As Dresner argues, female detectives in a variety of forms of popular culture are “flawed” in some way (2006, 7). While Dresner primarily focuses upon female TV detectives of the 1980’s, I would argue that today’s female detectives (and forensic anthropologists, and criminal profilers, and district attorneys) are still lacking in positive representation. In fact, women are still seen in three (not mutually exclusive) categories: the lonely professional; the lesbian; or the victim. The constant placement of female law-enforcers within these categories is limiting, since male characters do not face these constraints. Within this section, I examine several female characters who fit this description, including characters from *Law & Order: SVU*, *Cold Case*, *Without a Trace*, and *Bones*.

“One Tomato”: “A Single Life” and the Female Crimesolver

In the first season of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, Detective Olivia Benson is established as a single woman. She exists in opposition to her male partner, Detective Elliot Stabler, who is married and a father of four children.

While Elliot has, as his last name implies, a stable life; in contrast, Olivia does not. She is the product of a stranger rape which occurred while her mother was a college student. While Elliot works with “special victims” because he is a father, Olivia works with the squad to avenge her mother’s unsolved rape (“Payback”).

As the series progresses, Olivia’s backstory becomes more complicated. We

learn that she was engaged to an older man (“Wanderlust”) and to a student of her mother’s (“Intoxicated”), although she has never been married. Both of these relationships served as a means of escape from her troubled home life, since her mother was an alcoholic, presumably because of the trauma from her rape. Even when Olivia is given the chance to form familial ties, as she reconnects with her biological brother in later episodes (“Florida” and “Philadelphia”), then attempts to become a parent by gaining temporary custody of a drug addict’s child (“Rescue” and “Trophy”), these chances for a family are short-lived. Olivia, like many other female crime-solvers, is profoundly alone.

This state of being alone, and the accompanying state of sadness, is one that is almost expected in the women of crime drama. From Lilly Rush of *Cold Case* (also the child of an alcoholic), to Temperance Brennan of *Bones* (an orphaned child of criminals), to Samantha Spade of *Without a Trace* (a loner who starts a family by becoming pregnant from a one-night stand), women in crime dramas are consistently portrayed as awkward loners who operate outside traditional family structures. Many series address this character attribute in their detectives by interweaving it within a crime. For example, *SVU*, *Bones*, and *Without a Trace*, just to name a few, have all created episodes in which the leading female character over-identified with a victim who was unable to have a successful personal life.

In “A Single Life,” a popular season one *SVU* episode, the episode begins with Olivia stopping by a neighborhood bodega on her way home from work. Her singleness is emphasized and pointed out by the grocer, who comments that she

is just buying “one tomato.” As she leaves the bodega, she happens upon a new crime scene—a woman who has just fallen to her death. As she works to solve the homicide, Olivia over-identifies with the victim, a woman who had many sexual partners but was unable to form a strong emotional bond with any of them. She, like Olivia, was flawed. In the end, Olivia discovers that the woman committed suicide, and that her emotional problems stemmed from her childhood, when she was sexually abused by her father. The tradition of Olivia as a loner continues throughout the series.

In “Moving On” a second season episode of *Without a Trace*, we see a similar parallel between a female victim and our female detective. This episode begins with Agent Samantha Spade (Poppy Montgomery) admitting to her psychologist that she can’t imagine not being a cop: “This job is all I have. It’s what I do. It’s who I am.” This statement, almost identical to one made by Olivia Benson in “Slaves,” an early episode of *SVU*, reflects the identity conflict often faced by female crime-solvers. Unlike their male counterparts, female crime-solvers often identify themselves solely with their profession, at the expense of their personal lives.

The case in “Moving On” once again focuses on a single, emotionally detached female victim. In this scenario, the victim is a neurosurgeon (Lisa Edelstein) who is excellent at her career, but who is “married to the work” and lives in a “cold, impersonal, lonely” apartment. Throughout the investigation of the case, it is revealed that the victim recently experienced a miscarriage. She placed a baby for adoption when she was a young teenager, and it is revealed

that the victim has gone missing due to a con perpetrated by a woman pretending to be her long-lost daughter. The tenuous relationship between motherhood and career in this episode foreshadows Sam's unexpected pregnancy and motherhood, which occurs through a one-night stand with a bartender.

This storyline is not unique to detectives—as previously noted, female crime-solvers in all areas fall into this category. *Bones* shows this in the season six episode, “The Doctor in the Photo.” This episode opens with Brennan (Emily Deschanel) preparing dinner for her coworkers and friends, Angela, Hodgins, Booth, and Booth's girlfriend, Hannah. Within this scene, Brennan serves as a “fifth wheel” to the two couples at the table. The domestic scene is quickly interrupted by the discovery of a new victim—the body of a doctor fitting Brennan's physical description. When the woman's identity is discovered, Brennan is surprised that no one reported her missing. It is determined that she is a doctor who is “single, no kids. Outside of people from work, there was no one to miss her.” Brennan identifies with this statement; not only is she also single and childless, all of her friends are also her co-workers. When Brennan finds voice recordings of the deceased doctor's files, she obsessively listens to them, even talking aloud with the disembodied voice of the deceased doctor. Although Brennan rarely, if ever, becomes emotionally invested in her cases, she becomes extremely invested in this one, to the point that she sees herself when looking at pictures of the victim. Furthermore, she hears her own voice when listening to the victim's recorded voice. This over-identification causes Brennan to regret her

singleness; when she realizes that the victim missed out on a romantic relationship, Brennan realizes that she does not want to meet this same fate. Although she has rejected Booth's proposal for a romantic relationship in a previous episode ("The Parts in the Sum of the Whole," which will be discussed in great detail in chapter five), this case causes her to reevaluate this rejection. When Booth rejects her in favor of Hannah, she returns to her office dejected, but with a new perspective. It is only then that she is able to see the victim as she really appears, and not as herself.

"Damn, I thought you was a lesbian":

The Specter of Lesbianism and the Female Detective

Not only are female crime-solvers loners, they are frequently inept at romantic relationships. This dynamic, combined with the masculine nature of their work, means that the accusation of lesbianism is never far away. This accusation is most famously documented in D'Acci's *Cagney & Lacey* text, in which Meg Foster was replaced after the first season because she was considered too masculine (i.e., gay) for the role, but continues today.

As a show based upon sex crimes and crimes against children, *SVU* has the potential to be the most misogynistic of the franchise. However, it appears to be the one that has been embraced by more women than the others, most likely because it has featured a female lead detective (Olivia Benson, played by Mariska Hargitay), since its inception, and multiple different lead female ADAs from the second season to the present (including Stephanie March as ADA Alexandra Cabot, Diane Neal as ADA Casey Novak, and Michaela McManus as

ADA Kim Greylek). At the beginning of each episode, the viewer is reminded that “sexually-based offenses are considered especially heinous.” The specter of lesbianism has haunted Olivia Benson since the beginning of *Law & Order: SVU*, and will be addressed both here and in subsequent chapters. Not only is Olivia notoriously inept at heterosexuality, she seems quite comfortable with women. Her onscreen pairings with several (attractive, feminine, blond) women are seen throughout the series. Olivia’s sexual orientation is subtly called into question in the pilot of the series, when a man in an open marriage proposes that his wife may be sexually interested in Olivia (“Payback”). In a now infamous interview with Conan O’Brian, Hargitay recounted an experience with a fan on the street, who, when seeing her with her fiancé (now husband), SVU co-star Peter Herman, responded with a surprised, “Damn! I thought you was a lesbian.” Hargitay went on to explain that this assumption of her lesbianism was due to the character she plays on TV.

Now I will do a close reading of three short scenes from the episode “Starved” in order to show how ambiguous the sexual orientation of Olivia Benson has become. As “Starved” begins, the detectives learn that they must find a rapist who meets his potential victims through various “speed dating” sessions. They discover that shortly after each speed dating session, the rapist contacts a woman that he finds attractive for a second date, and then later rapes her. To trap the alleged rapist, Olivia is asked to go undercover to a “speed dating” session she knows the man is planning to attend. Dean Cain, known to some viewers for his TV portrayal of Superman, plays Mike Jergens, the man

suspected of the rapes. This type of undercover work was often seen in 80's dramas like *Cagney & Lacey* and *Hunter*, where female detectives frequently went undercover as prostitutes. According to Dresner:

The identity of the female detective on television is less stable, less fixed than the identity of her male counterpart. The female detective goes undercover (a task that *Charlie's Angels* raised to a high art) much more frequently than her male counterparts, so much so that television critic Diana Meehan devotes an entire chapter of her book about female characters on prime-time television to "the decoy." She is often seen in disguise, in drag. (2007, 69)

While Dresner's discussion of undercover female officers most likely refers to the work done in early television crime dramas, it can also be applied to various other forms of performance in which female crimesolvers are asked to participate. Three short scenes at the beginning of "Starved" serve as the basis for this reading. By doing both a formal analysis and then a queer reading of these scenes, I show how the character of Olivia is now capable of performing heterosexuality believably, something that would not have been the case in earlier seasons of the series. The sequence begins with the first of two dates between Olivia (or "Rachel," her undercover name) and Mike. This scene starts with "speed dating" at a local bar, and opens with the camera panning the small bar, allowing the viewer to overhear snippets of "first date" conversation. The camera settles on Olivia, who remains seated as the man seated directly across from her leaves, and Mike enters the frame. The viewer is introduced to the

character of Mike in a low angle shot, as he is shown towering above Olivia as they introduce themselves. He quickly sits across from her, and their conversation takes place in a rapid series of close-up shot/reverse shots. The scene ends and the viewer is taken back to the SVU squad room, where Olivia is sitting at her desk. In this medium shot, Elliot is shown standing behind her while asking questions about the date. Unlike the low angle shot of the dating scene, however, the focus of this shot is Olivia; although the camera pans up to include Elliot in the frame for a brief moment, Olivia remains at the center of the shot throughout most of the scene. After an e-mail on a close-up shot of Olivia's computer screen confirms that Mike has requested a second date, the camera pans up once again to catch Elliot's reaction to the news, and then the scene ends. Immediately, the viewer is taken to the third scene in this sequence: a second date at a less crowded bar. Unlike the speed dating scene, this scene opens with Olivia and Mike both seated. Throughout most of the scene, the viewer sees only a series of close-up shot/reverse shots between the two people; the frame opens up only to include a waitress and to show the end of the date. When this occurs, both Olivia and Mike stand up at the same time; we then see a long shot of Olivia walking away while Mike is in the background paying the bill. The scene ends with a medium shot of a man at the bar who rises to follow Mike; at this point, the viewer realizes that the man—Olivia's colleague, Fin—has been there throughout the scene, only with his back turned to the conversation.

A formal analysis of these short scenes is extremely useful, because it allows us to analyze how Olivia is perceived in relation to the men around her.

Clearly, in the opening scene, the low angle shot of Mike looking down on Olivia gives him the sense of control in the situation. In the squad room, however, it appears that Olivia has regained her power; the camera focuses on her as Elliot moves around her. Throughout her second date, however, we see Olivia's loss of power again; the scene ends not with Olivia's exit, but with Fin following Mike.

Olivia is then viewed as one who needs to be protected; the viewer senses that she may be in danger, and is relieved to know that Fin exists outside the frame for her protection. From a queer perspective, these scenes also serve as an interesting commentary on the transformation of the character of Olivia. That Olivia was chosen for this undercover role is in itself is important; it shows that she has reached the point where she can now perform heterosexuality convincingly. As mentioned previously, throughout the course of the show, Olivia has been "mistaken" several times for a bisexual or a lesbian. For her to be chosen to go undercover as a heterosexual woman shows that she no longer "looks" gay. It would be difficult to imagine the butch Olivia of just a few years ago playing this part.

Furthermore, Olivia shows a confidence in heterosexual dating that has been lacking in her character throughout the course of the show. When Elliot, her partner, asks her if the ploy was successful, she responds with certainty that "he was interested. I could just feel it, you know?" Immediately, she receives an e-mail that confirms this feeling. The message to the audience is clear: Olivia Benson can successfully read heterosexual dating cues. Furthermore, she

“passed” the test: Mike believed in her heterosexuality enough to ask for a second date.

Interestingly enough, just as the viewers watch Olivia successfully date, we also see her struggle with the case. She admits that she “couldn’t get a read on him. Normally I need two minutes in the box with a guy to know he’s guilty, but. . .” Because she “couldn’t get a read on him,” viewers see that when performing as heterosexual Olivia, her judgment as “Detective Benson” is clouded. Furthermore, Olivia’s inability to read Mike immediately leaves the possibility open that perhaps he is not a rapist after all, and a relationship between the two can be pursued. Of course, as with all of Olivia’s attempts at heterosexuality, this one, too, is thwarted. Mike is proven to be the rapist, and is eventually jailed for his crimes. Along the way, the episode addresses a multitude of social issues: alcoholism, euthanasia, rape, etc. For those interested in the sexual orientation of Olivia, however, this episode serves to show how significantly the character has transformed over the course of the series.

“You’ve Never Been the Victim”:

When the (Female) Law Enforcer Becomes the Victim

As already stated, Carlson asserts that each episode of a crime drama must have “a crime, someone who commits it, someone who is victimized by it, and someone to bring the criminal to justice” (1985, 32). How is this formula disrupted when one of the members of the cast becomes the victim of a crime? What are the gendered aspects of this displacement? I will go back to a

discussion of the 1980's crime drama, *Hunter*, to examine an episode which addresses the rape of the main female character. I will then address how victimization of the female crimesolver exists in more recent programming, such as *Profiler*, *Cold Case*, and *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* in which this victimization occurs. In each of the episodes, the traditional procedural formula is broken in order for the cast of characters to address the victimization of "one of their own." Also, in each case, the crime is not contained within a single episode. Instead, the ramifications of the crime continue throughout the series.

Hunter, a show often discussed in conjunction with *Remington Steele* and *Cagney & Lacey*, can be viewed as a precursor to *Law & Order: SVU*. One of the most popular crime dramas of the 1980's, *Hunter* focuses on homicide detective Rick Hunter (former NFL player Fred Dryer) and his partner, Dee Dee McCall (Stephanie Kramer). In *The Female Investigator*, Dresner dismisses the character of Dee Dee, arguing that Dee Dee is "hardly a feminist icon" and uses her rape and her absence in the final season to establish this (2007, 106). This dismissal is very disturbing, since McCall actually serves as a feminist voice throughout the series. Perhaps McCall's rape was an inevitability, given her placement in the patriarchal space of the crime drama. As Dresner states:

The body of the female detective is a fascinating site, not only as a potential source of violence, but also as a potential recipient of violence. In *film noir*, the body of the male detective often suffers brutal beatings as part of a ritualized demonstration of power relations between men. Although the male detective may receive

beatings during the course of his investigation when his knowledge is still incomplete, he often survives to turn the tables on his former attackers and to beat them when he is closer to solving the mystery. This paradigm does not work for the body of the female detective. When female detectives are threatened, it is usually with the prospect of rape or of outright murder. (2007, 65)

Dresner's analysis shows that, while both male and female detectives are often the recipients of violence, the manner in which this violence occurs is still divided along gender lines.

In "Rape and Revenge," a two-hour episode of *Hunter*, Hunter and McCall begin the episode by investigating a rape/homicide at a South American consulate. (Although not mentioned in the text of the show, the victim resembles McCall). When interviewing various possible witnesses at a consulate, McCall questions Raoul Mariano, who instantly asks her for a date:

Raoul: It cannot be--such a beautiful woman, a police officer!
 In my country, all the policewomen are, well...
 (laughs) I am Raul Mariano.

McCall: Cultural Attaché.

Raul: And you said your name is?

McCall: Sergeant McCall.

Raoul: I have never met a woman before with the name
 Sergeant.

Raoul continues the conversation by inviting McCall for a date, but when she responds that such a move would be unprofessional, he does not relent. The interview ends on a friendly note, however, leaving Hunter and McCall to discuss their plans for the weekend. While Hunter has a date for the weekend, McCall laments that she's "just going to stay home and read." The next day, a Saturday, Raoul arranges for several bouquets of flowers to be delivered to her home. He presents the last bouquet himself, and McCall invites him in. When she still refuses to date him, he becomes violent and rapes her. This development marks the first time that McCall is placed in the position of a victim. This categorization of victim conflicts with her identity as a police officer, because she believes she should have detected that Raoul was a rapist. "I must have worked on over a hundred rape cases," she tells Hunter, as he asks her to describe the incident. "I should have known. I'm so stupid. A guy just shows up with flowers like that? I could get V.D. Or pregnant." Not only has McCall's body been violated through the rape, she must now worry about the lasting effects of the rape on her body—effects that do not occur in the "brutal beatings" between men described by Dresner. Unlike a beating, which serves as almost a badge of honor for a cop, this rape makes McCall doubt her abilities as a cop, and to question if she will be able to return to her job:

Hunter: It's perfectly normal to feel this way.

McCall: For a cop?

Hunter: Sure, for a cop.

McCall: How can I be a cop when I am afraid of everything?

Hunter: It isn't permanent. You're going to be back to the way you were in no time.

McCall: (crying) I hope you're right. I hope you're right.

The interesting development in this scenario is in Raoul's citizenship; because he is a diplomat, he has diplomatic immunity and cannot be prosecuted for his rape of McCall, nor of the previous murder. Raoul is, in effect, outside of the law which McCall and Hunter work to enforce. Because of this position, Hunter travels to Raoul's home country to take revenge against Raoul. McCall follows Hunter, hoping to reason with him:

McCall: You're a cop. You cannot act outside of the law.

Hunter: Hold on just a second here. Outside of the law? Are you kidding me? Back in the United States, this guy's committed two rapes, one murder, and one attempted murder on me. Down here, he's already raped one woman, and his wife's suicide was questionable.

McCall: Hunter...

Hunter: This guy's the one outside the law, not me.

McCall: You think I haven't thought about blowing the guy away myself? You know how many times I've wanted...Look, no one wants revenge more than I do, you know. But we took an oath when they gave us these badges. I just want this to stop now. I just want this to stop right now. Just let it go.

Hunter: You think this guy's committed his last rape or
 murder?

While McCall asks Hunter not to retaliate by murdering Raoul, he does just this. (Although this murder could technically be considered a self-defense killing, it was clearly set up by Hunter to result in Raoul's demise. Hunter kidnaps Raoul, but cannot murder him in cold blood. However, when Raoul makes a move to shoot Hunter, he has no qualms about turning around and shooting him four times.) Certainly, this episode is racially troubling, as McCall's rape is contextualized in terms of a threat by a racialized Other. When McCall and Hunter visit South America to confront Raoul and his father, it is discovered that his father holds the same beliefs about women. Thus, the cause for Raoul's treatment of women seems to be rooted in his upbringing in a patriarchal system. As Marcus explains, rape is only one part of a complex system of patriarchy that we exist within today:

Patriarchy does not exist as a monolithic entity separate from human actors and actresses, impervious to any attempts to change it, secure in its role as an immovable first cause of misogynist phenomena such as rape; rather, patriarchy acquires its consistency as an overarching descriptive concept through the aggression of microstrategies of oppression such as rape.

Masculine power and feminine powerlessness neither simply precede nor simply cause rape; rather, rape is one of culture's many modes of feminizing women. (1992, 391)

Where *Hunter* falls short, of course, is by equating Raoul's ideas about rape and women to his citizenship in a different country; this fails to serve as a commentary on the patriarchal system which still exists within the United States. Rape does occur because of patriarchal notions of power struggles, and these notions are not limited to fictitious South American countries.

In *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postmodern Culture*, author Sarah Projansky discusses the variety of rape narratives that are shown on television and film, and works to integrate them with feminist thought. Projansky argues that "Despite the potential backlash against women and feminism in any representation of rape, most 1980s and 1990s rape narratives intersect with aspects of postfeminism that seek to absorb and transform (rather than violently expel) feminism" (2001, 97). She argues that some rape narratives view rape as a way by which to make "vulnerable" characters stronger and more independent. As Marcus explains, this category is not permanent, and it exists within a larger social script:

Rape does not happen to preconstituted victims; it momentarily makes victims. That rapist does not simply have the power to rape; the social script and the extent to which that script succeeds in soliciting the target's participation help to create the rapist's power. (1992, 391)

I argue that crime dramas often use rape, or violence against female characters, to make them more sympathetic to the audience. It also serves as a disturbing way to take women out of a powerful position and to turn them into objects of

violence. While the male crime-solver always maintains his strength, the female crime-solver's strength is dependent on sources outside of herself. Within one episode, her power can be taken from her.

Typically, the episodic nature of the crime drama allows for such occurrences, even when they take place against the main characters, to be forgotten. McCall's rape is not forgotten within the trajectory of the series, however. McCall and Hunter reference her rape in subsequent episodes, and it appears to change the way in which she approaches rape cases ("The Big Fall").

Law & Order: SVU

Although dealing with victimized women on a regular basis, *SVU* rarely places the lead female characters in this space. When they are put in this position, it is considered anomalous, and is typically related to cases that the characters are working to solve. For example, in the fifth season, ADA Cabot is gunned down and presumed dead after prosecuting a rape case against a Columbian drug lord ("Loss"). She is placed in the Witness Protection program, only to return the following season to testify against her shooter ("Ghost").

Despite the fact that the relocation caused her to lose her identity, she claims that she "can't stop thinking like a prosecutor" and still identifies with her job in law enforcement. Detective Elliot Stabler—Olivia's partner and the only other person who knew that Alex's shooting was not fatal—assures her that this feeling is normal. "You've never been the victim," he states, reminding the viewer, and Alex, that in this case, she *is* the victim and not the prosecutor. Alex's space as a

victim is short-lived; she returns from Witness Protection a year later in a *Law & Order* spin-off, *Conviction*, and later returns to *SVU*.

Is it important to note that while Alex is placed in the victim role, it is not as a victim of sexual violence. Despite the subject matter of *SVU*, one of the female leads is not placed into this role until the ninth season of the series, in “Undercover.” Within this episode, Olivia determines that a series of rapes are occurring inside a women’s prison, and she goes undercover as an inmate to investigate the situation. Because it is suspected that a prison guard is the rapist, Olivia’s identity is not known to them. Olivia’s co-worker, Fin, goes undercover as a guard to look out for Olivia, and he ultimately rescues her. (The trope of the female detective who is rescued by the male co-worker is not common to *SVU*, but is very common to crime dramas as a whole.) It is important to note that during the attempted rape, she is not viewed as a detective, but rather as a criminal. When she regains her identity, she also gains power over her attacker, since she arrests him and interrogates him. During this interrogation, where he is cuffed—as she was during the attack—she uses this opportunity to emasculate him. In the end, much like Dee Dee McCall’s rape, *SVU* breaks free from its episodic traditions, as Olivia’s attempted rape is mentioned in subsequent episodes (“Smut,” etc.). This continuation is both useful and possibly damaging; while it acknowledges the trauma of rape, it also permanently marks the female crime-solver.

***Profiler*: The Gaze and the Female Protagonist**

While discussion of the representation of women in crime dramas waned throughout the 1990's, it is significant that the NBC series, *Profiler* is an exception. Within this program, Special Agent Sam Waters (Ally Walker) is brought out of hiding to serve as the head of a specific profiling team. This show marks the beginning of a new kind of representation of women in crime drama—the strong woman without a partner. These women are typically unable to form close personal or professional relationships, but are tolerated by their co-workers and superiors because they hold a specific skill in some kind of crime-solving. *Crossing Jordan*, *Cold Case*, and *The Closer* all serve as examples of this kind of drama. While *Profiler* presents a highly capable woman who is at the center of the program, it also presents a woman who is constantly a victim. Sam (like Dee Dee McCall) is a young widow, and often desexualized in this way, despite being very attractive. She is constantly stalked throughout the series by Jack of all Trades, the man who murdered her husband. In nearly every episode containing Sam, Jack also appears, typically in a voiceover at the end of the episode. This voiceover reminds the viewer that Sam is not as powerful as we would like to believe she is; despite her exceptional skills at profiling criminals, she is unable to catch Jack.

Furthermore, this show serves as a commentary on the Gaze in crime drama. As discussed in chapter one, Mulvey's work on the Gaze is both useful and troubling when discussing the representation of women in television. In fact, Dresner argues that the Gaze loses power when applied to television. However,

Profiler shows this not to be the case, since Jack serves as a textual representation of this Gaze. His voyeurism takes away any power that Sam has within her job, and often undermines her performance at work.

Rizzoli & Isles

As mentioned before, *Cagney & Lacey* did not, as the creators hoped, spark a trend of shows which specifically discuss female crime-fighters. However, while I could argue that *Rizzoli & Isles* owes more to *Bones* than to *Cagney & Lacey*, it still serves as an example that two women can headline a TV crime drama. Premiering in July 2010, *Rizzoli & Isles* both perpetuates and questions many of the aforementioned character traits of female crime-solvers.

Sadly, but perhaps not surprisingly, reviews of *Rizzoli & Isles* made it clear that women in crime dramas are still perceived differently. For example, Brian Lowry of *Variety* reviewed the program favorably, but still inserted a paragraph discussing leading actress Angie Harmon's appearance:

Harmon remains as physically striking as the day she first said "Fry 'em all" on "Law and Order," and TNT is clearly betting fans of "The Closer" will be receptive to another attractive femme cop. But in the pilot, anyway, her career-driven detective exhibits more bravado than brains, which doesn't bode terribly well for the show as a procedural. (2010, par. 4)

In all fairness, *Rizzoli & Isles* does place emphasis on the appearance of its leads. In the pilot episode, "See One. Do One. Teach One," we watch as Maura Isles appears at a crime scene wearing high heels, in contrast with Jane Rizzoli,

who shows up in jeans and a bloody t-shirt—after all, she is recovering from a bloody nose received by playing basketball with her brother. Rizzoli is self-conscious about her appearance, but when she attempts to change by wearing lipstick to a crime scene, she is only mocked by her fellow (male) officers. By placing Rizzoli and Isles into a butch/femme dichotomy, the program situates itself in the same category as male/female crime dramas such as *Bones* and *Castle*. Furthermore, by highlighting these different approaches, *Rizzoli & Isles* serves as a contrast to *Cagney & Lacey*, who lived in fear of the masculine-identified woman. Similarly, *Rizzoli & Isles* seems unconcerned with any presumptions of lesbianism of their two characters; although they are textually identified as heterosexual, they are often seen in bed together, holding hands, and bantering in the same fashion as their heterosexual counterparts on the aforementioned shows. In short, while *Cagney & Lacey* ran from suspicions of lesbianism, *Rizzoli & Isles* runs toward them.

While moving beyond the fears of perceived lesbianism, *Rizzoli & Isles* still presents one of the lead characters as a victim. Although not as omnipresent as *Profiler's* Jack of All Trades, Rizzoli has her own continuing threat. In “See One. Do One. Teach One,” we are introduced to Charles Hoyt, a serial killer who, in the past, stabbed Rizzoli and attempted to murder her. He serves as a continual threat to her, and when he escapes, her male co-worker and her brother (also a cop) jump in to protect her:

Jane Rizzoli: If I was a guy, you wouldn't be worried like this.
Frankie Rizzoli: You're not a guy.

Jane: No, I am a homicide detective, and he's not going to kill me.

Frankie: Really? He almost did the last time. Look at your hands!

Because Hoyt stabbed Jane's hands during their last (pre-series) encounter, her body is now marked with a reminder of him. She does not let this reminder, or her brother's words, allow her to accept male protection. Instead, she leaves her apartment and spends the night with Isles, where they share a bed. Although Jane does face the continual threat of violence that is similar to other female crime-solvers, she refuses to accept the male protection common in previous series.

As *Rizzoli & Isles* shows, there have been changes in the way women are represented in crime dramas. However, that representation is still troubling. I argue that female crime-solvers are still held to a different standard than their male counterparts: their sexuality is often in question, they are unable to form solid friendships and familial ties, and they still become recipients of violence more frequently. This disparity in representation shows that the masculine genre of the crime show is still unsure about how to represent women.

Chapter 3

From “Strange Women” to “Amazing Trannies”:

Crime Drama and the Queer Other

Within this chapter, I address the representation of queer bodies in contemporary crime dramas. Specifically, how are these bodies seen in relationship to the law? To forensics? How are both queer victims and perpetrators viewed within a system that polices and regulates sexuality? How do queer perpetrators use the performance of sexuality to their advantage? While the previous chapter focused on the representations of detectives, within this chapter, I shift focus to the characters who appear only briefly on several crime dramas. In particular, I examine the representations of bisexuality in *Hunter*, *Cold Case*, and *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law and Order: SVU* and *Bones*, and the representation of transgender bodies in episodes of *Bones* and *Law & Order: SVU*. This examination shows how the crime drama functions as a critical genre of television—a genre that reflects how gender and sexuality are discussed and categorized within the legal system.

As discussed in chapter one, the incorporation of queer characters into network television programming has been fraught with problems of representation, identity, and visibility. The inclusion of a queer character on a show is not necessarily positive, since such characters are often presented in a stereotypical fashion. Furthermore, in *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Alexander Doty discusses the role of queer guest characters on sitcoms, and the purposes these characters serve by impacting the main characters of the series:

More frequently sitcoms such as *The Golden Girls*, *Kate and Allie*, and *Designing Women*, point toward lesbian readings through double entendres; oblique, displaced, or jokey references to lesbianism, or with “lesbian episodes.” These “lesbian episodes” are these individual shows that feature characters clearly marked as lesbian in them, and whose project it is to raise, then to contain or deflect, the lesbian charge—or the charge of lesbianism—the series has accumulated around its regular cast. (1993, 43)

While Doty is speaking specifically about lesbian guest characters on sitcoms with predominately female casts (and thus, a suspicion of lesbianism), I broaden his argument to include the queer guest character on the crime drama. As discussed in chapter two, like the female casts of *Golden Girls* and *Kate and Allie*, women in crime dramas are also met with suspicions of lesbianism. Having queer guest characters serves as a way to, as Doty says, “contain or deflect” the notion that one of the main characters on the show may be queer. Furthermore, it allows the program to address issues of sexuality in a progressive manner without having to fully commit to representing a queer character on a regular basis.

The Nefarious Bisexual

While inroads have been made in the representation of gay and lesbian characters in television, those who fit outside this binary are often still suspect. Specifically, I address female characters who are shown in sexual relationships with both men and women. Only one of the following characters actually

categorizes herself as bisexual; this categorization leads to alienation from her lesbian community. The remaining characters do not categorize themselves at all, leaving it up to viewers—and to the crime-solvers—to do it for them.

Hunter: From San Francisco With Love

The third season episode of *Hunter*, “From San Francisco with Love,” is typically mentioned in discussions of lesbian representation in the 1980’s. When a millionaire and his son are both murdered in San Francisco, Valerie Foster, a San Franciscan officer, joins Hunter and McCall to solve the case. Hunter is immediately attracted to Valerie, and they quickly become intimate. However, when Valerie works to convince Hunter and McCall that the second death was a suicide—and when she fakes an orgasm with Hunter—he becomes suspicious and confesses this to McCall:

Hunter: You know, Valerie Foster is very strange.

McCall: She didn’t want to go steady, or what?

Hunter: I’m going to plunge right into this, OK.?

McCall: Fine, plunge.

Hunter: Now you know, Valerie and I, we...

McCall: Yes, I know.

Hunter: Don’t get me wrong. It was OK.

McCall: I don’t want to hear the details.

Hunter: But she acted very strange about...

McCall: So, get to the point.

Hunter: She was faking it. [McCall laughs.]

Hunter argues that Valerie had sex with him not because she desired him, but because she thought he “was going to be one of those after sex talkers” who would give her information about their current case. The language used in this situation is very interesting; when describing Valerie to McCall, Hunter seems at a loss for words. He can only stutter and frequently refer to Valerie as “strange.” This “strangeness” is confirmed when Hunter and McCall discover that Valerie is having an affair with the young widow, and that they have conspired together to kill both men (Casey’s husband and stepson) and to receive their inheritance. In a discussion of the lesbian villain in crime drama, Stephen Tropiano addresses this episode:

After sleeping with Valerie, Hunter becomes suspicious—she seems too preoccupied with the case and suspects she faked her orgasm during sex (the possibility that Hunter may have been the cause is never considered). Once again, Hunter’s instincts are right on the money. He and McCall discover that Valerie plotted both murders with her lesbian lover, Casey (Philece Sampler) the millionaire’s young wife. Now that her husband and stepson are dead, Casey stands to inherit \$80 million. Hunter and McCall foster friction between the lesbian couple, which culminates in a little face slapping before Casey turns Valerie over to the police. Once again, lesbianism is reduced to something cheap and tawdry—the dirty little secret which needs to be uncovered in order to catch the killer. (2002, 71)

Tropiano includes both women in a discussion of the negative representation of lesbians. However, one could argue that the women are more complex than that. They are both shown using men to get what they want—in this case, 80 million dollars. However, while clearly in a sexual relationship, the women do not appear to be dedicated to one another; as Tropiano points out, they quickly turn on each other when pushed by Hunter and McCall. In the end, I argue that their representation is not one of lesbianism, but of women who use bisexuality for nefarious ends.

Law & Order: Criminal Intent: Anti-Thesis

The notion of bisexuality continues to be one of suspicion in crime drama. *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* plays on this notion as well, since it introduces sociopathic serial killer Nicole Wallace (Olivia D’Abo) as a bisexual visiting professor who is engaged in a relationship with both a male graduate student and a female professor (“Anti-Thesis”). In both relationships, Nicole uses sexuality as a means to an end; she is not romantically interested in either person, but uses each one to assist her in her larger goal—maintaining a false identity and remaining in the United States. The popular TV wiki, TV Tropes, even mentions Nicole as an example of the trope of the “depraved bisexual”:

Depraved Bisexual: Nicole Wallace. To be fair to the show, her bisexuality isn't actually portrayed as a negative, and they make it clear she's just plain messed up, period. Also, it appears her only confirmed lesbian relationship may have been simply a means to an end rather than due to any actual desire. (TV Tropes)

Nicole was actually engaged in *two* lesbian relationships over the course of her multi-season arc; although she is married to a man in her second episode, she is involved with a woman in her first and third appearances. Sometimes operating under a false identity (“Elizabeth Hitchens”), Nicole serves as a walking reminder of the construction and fragility of identity. Much to the dismay of her nemesis, lead Major Crimes Detective Goren (Vincent D’Onofrio) she consistently evades criminal prosecution for her crimes by taking on new romantic partners and lifestyles. Goren determines that Nicole’s behavior stems from childhood sexual abuse, thus pathologizing non-normative sexual behavior. Not only is she a con-artist, Goren believes, she also murdered her child. Thus, in her third appearance, Goren argues that her new (young) girlfriend serves as both a lover and as a substitute for Nicole’s dead daughter. Either way, he reasons, Nicole will kill her. (She does.) Nicole appears throughout Goren’s reign on *Criminal Intent* several times, eluding him during each episode. Perhaps because she lacks a fixed identity, she is unable to be profiled in the traditional sense. As I will discuss in a moment, those whose sexuality does not fit into established categories pose a continuing problem to the law, because they cannot be regulated.

Cold Case: Best Friends

The popular second season episode “Best Friends” is often celebrated by lesbian viewers for showing a positive lesbian relationship between two women during the Prohibition Era. As previously mentioned, *Cold Case* focuses upon a sole female investigator, Lilly Rush (Kathryn Morris), who leads a team of cold

case detectives. In their oldest murder case to this point, the story begins when the detectives discover a bullet-ridden car from the 1930s. As they quickly learn, the car belonged to a bootlegger and his sister, Rose. When we first see Rose, she is sitting passively in her brother's car, waiting for him to deliver moonshine to Doc Winn's, a jazz club. An innocent looking blonde, Rose is captivated by who she sees at Doc Winn's—Billie, a young African American woman who wears a tie and a man's hat. During their first conversation, Rose addresses Billie's gender performance while they drink and listen to Billie Holliday perform in the background:

Rose: How come your mother lets you dress like a boy?

Billie: I do what I please, first off. And I don't dress like a boy. I dress like a fox.

Billie is clearly comfortable in her own appearance and dress, something that is attractive to shy Rose. During their investigation, the police learn that Billie was "arrested for causing a public disturbance for wearing men's pants," and that she frequented Doc Winn's. Pointing to a picture of Billie and Rose at the club together, Doc Winn's granddaughter acknowledges that their relationship has remained a popular story: "The story is, Rose was the first white girl to ever come into Doc Winn's. Lured in by the music. Doc said it was a testament to the blues being universal." Although Billie was known to be in a sexual relationship with Georgie, another African-American girl who frequented Doc Winn's, it certainly would not have occurred to anyone that Rose was there because she was

interested in Billie, not the music. Still, during a series of flashbacks, we watch as Rose, now a widowed grandmother, recounts her time with Billie:

Billie: You come back to the club, I'll buy you a real drink using my poem earnings.

Rose: I thought you didn't want me there.

Billie: All right, listen. I go with this girl, Little Georgie, and she's batty.

Rose: You go with a girl?

Billie: They're a headache, but that's my taste.

Rose: I have a beau. Ted. A boy.

Billie: Your boy get jealous?

Rose: (smiles) Sure. He's a hot head.

Billie: Little Georgie's got a pistol in her purse and I seen her use it.

Rose: You're saying she'd use it on me?

Billie: I broke it off with her. Told her I got a right to new friends if I wanna.

Rose: Will you teach me how to smoke? Will you teach me how to dance?

Billie: Yeah, all right.

From the beginning, Billie is positioned as outside of regulation and the law; she does not conform to the contemporary standards of gender. Rose appears thrilled with Billie's rebellion—both her rebellion against gender norms, and her

life of smoking and dancing. When her fiancé, Ted, attempts to “rescue” Rose at Doc Winn’s, he is surprised to see her dancing with Billie:

Ted: Rose, what kind of place is this? You’ve got to be out of your mind.

Rose: My brother’s a bootlegger, Ted. Been bound to happen.

Ted: You gettin’ lippy just then? [...] She’s a queer, Rose. She brought you down here to get you sauced and take advantage.

While Billie is outside the law, Rose also positions herself there, both through her connections to her brother’s actions and her feelings for Rose. Certainly, she reasons, if she was going to continue to spend time with her law-breaking brother, she was bound to lose her innocence. Although Ted and Georgie, both jilted lovers, were suspects in the murder, the detectives discover that Billie died when she and Rose drove off a bridge together. Because Rose’s brother shot at them as they drove away in his car, he presumed they were both dead. In reality, Rose survived, but Billie did not. “I was gonna go home to Philly, but I met a Wall Street man, and he became my husband,” an elderly Rose confides to Lilly. “I wondered if it was wrong—the feelings I had for her,” Rose confesses. Lilly quickly responds that “it was just the wrong time” for their relationship to occur.

This episode is disturbing on a number of levels. First of all, when Billie and Rose are being chased, Rose makes the decision to enter into a suicide pact with Billie before Billie has the chance to agree. When she does agree, it does

not matter; Rose has survived, Billie has not. Although Rose lived with this guilt throughout her life, it still must be pointed out that she had a full life with a husband in New York, while Billie, the non-normative, non-white, character perished in her youth. Thus, Rose reinforces another notion about bisexuals—the notion that bisexuality between two women is simply a phase, particularly for femme bisexual women. While Billie was clearly rooted in her gender and sexual identity, Rose was simply exploring, and her exploration led to Billie’s death.

Secondly, this episode of *Cold Case*, along with many others which deal with race, gender, and sexual orientation, perpetuates an idealized notion about time. The overall narrative within these episodes supports the notion that, as Lilly says to Rose, “it was just the wrong time.” The notion of *living in the wrong time* seems correct at first, but it has a disturbing undertone. By saying that those entering gay relationships, or interracial relationships, or—as in the case of Billie and Rose, gay interracial relationships—were simply *ahead of their time* is to imply that now these relationships would be fully accepted by society. In reality, this is not yet the case. By implying this, *Cold Case* does an injustice to those who live non-heteronormative existences today and are still persecuted for them.

Law & Order: SVU: “P.C.”

As mentioned in chapter two, *SVU*’s Detective Olivia Benson has been plagued with suspicions of lesbianism throughout the series’ run. Although hinted at numerous times, this suspicion is not directly addressed until the eleventh season episode, “P.C.” Guest-starring comedienne and reality show star Kathy Griffin as lesbian activist Babs Duffy, this episode brings to light a unique

representation of bisexuality. When a lesbian is murdered, Babs immediately appears at SVU to demand that action will be taken against the murderer.

Another officer describes Babs as a polarizing force who only appears when something happens against a lesbian, but not another queer person: “I wouldn’t mind her so much if she also fought for gay men, bisexuals, and transgenders,” he states. “But for Babs, it’s all about lesbians, 24/7.”

The character of Babs, much like that of other queer guest characters discussed in this chapter, serves the function of forcing the main characters of the show to question their own beliefs about gender and sexuality. When the deceased lesbian’s partner is arrested for her murder, Babs offers Stabler a feminist argument about why the partner is innocent:

Babs: You cannot believe she killed her. She’s a woman.

Elliot: Who gets off on slugging people.

Babs: Women resort to violence only when provoked by male oppression.

Elliot: Your P.C. crap is killing me.

Babs: Hey, you just don’t want to hear anything that threatens the power structure perpetuating male control.

Elliot: What I care about is probable cause—there’s your P.C.

Certainly, this argument is fallacious; an activist like Babs should be aware that domestic violence exists in lesbian relationships as well. However, Babs’ strident behavior forces Elliot to articulate his own thoughts about gender and sexuality.

Meanwhile, Olivia attempts to play “good cop” while interrogating Sharon, the murder suspect, about her relationship:

Sharon: I live in a different world than you. Straights never understand people like me.

Olivia: Sharon, I want to help you.

Sharon: You want to put me in jail because of who I am. [...] I get angry about things and I hit people. People I love. But Alyssa knew that. She got me into therapy. She was helping me be a better person.

Because Sharon does not conform to normative gender roles—she is masculine, and thus, associated with violence—she believes she will be wrongly persecuted by the law.

What is interesting about the scene between Sharon and Olivia is that Sharon reads Olivia as a heterosexual, one who would not understand her. On the other hand, Babs reads Olivia as a lesbian. When it is determined that Sharon is innocent and that the killer of lesbians is still at large, the police discover that Babs is in need of protection.

While under police protection, Babs attempts to kiss Olivia, and she is rejected:

Babs: Is it me?

Olivia: No, no, it’s me. Babs, I’m flattered. I’m just also straight.

Babs: Oh. Come on, I mean, the job, and the gun, and the attitude. You’re like Ellen, Joan Crawford, and Calamity Jane all rolled into one. If you can balance a checkbook, I’ll throw in Susie Orman. Look, believe me, I know it can be difficult it

can be—the conflicted feelings—but the heart wants what the heart wants.

Unlike Sharon Harris, who has read Olivia as straight, Babs reads her as a lesbian. This mistake—a common trope, as discussed in chapter one—uses queer guest characters to bring to light a discussion viewers of the show have been debating for years, and one that is a recurring theme of this dissertation: is Olivia gay or straight? Does it matter? Is her sexual orientation always in the eye of the viewer? Regardless, Babs' flirtation unnerves Olivia so much that she immediately asks Elliot his reaction to her sexual orientation:

Olivia: Hey, El, can I ask you something?

Elliot: Yeah.

Olivia: Do you ever get a gay vibe from me?

Elliot: Would it matter if I did?

Olivia: You're not answering the question.

Elliot: Well, it's not like you've had a lot of luck with guys.

Olivia: It's called being married to the job.

This encounter with Babs brings to light Olivia's own feelings about her sexual orientation—or, at least, the way others perceive her sexuality. As discussed in chapter two, Olivia, like many female crime-solvers, is portrayed as “married to the job” and unable to have successful personal relationships. Babs brings to light the threat of lesbianism in the single female crime-solver which has existed since the days of Christine Cagney. However, Babs is not without her own issues; it is soon discovered that Babs, who is presented at the beginning of the episode as a strident lesbian, is

engaged in a sexual relationship with a man. When interrogated about this, she denies it at first, but quickly “admits” it to Olivia and Elliot:

Babs: Detective Benson, I don't know if you recall last night, but I'm gay.

Olivia: Well, for a man-hating lesbian, you seem awfully cuddly with Larry Luft.

Elliot: Yeah, we dumped Larry's cell phone. Three hundred and eighty texts between you two in the month alone.

Olivia: OK, Babs, now it's time to really be strong.

Babs: Alright, look. Do you think I expected this to happen? I still totally love women. I met Larry at a rally six months ago, and now I have feelings for him too.

Olivia: The heart wants what the heart wants.

Babs: I know, I get it. I feel like a complete traitor. Torn between who I've always been and who I'm becoming.

Elliot: So, this ultra-militant stance was just a cover so no one would find out about the reverse closet you're in?

Babs: No. It was never a cover. I'll never stop fighting for lesbians. [...] My girls can't find out about this. They would see it as the ultimate betrayal.

Olivia: Babs, you're bisexual, that's the truth.

Thus, Babs, not Olivia, is revealed as the closeted character who needs to be outed. This brings to light a number of important issues about the fragility and stability of current identity categories. As Judith Butler comments in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” the coming out process is always troubling, since identification with one category often negates the other. As she states, “If I claim to be a lesbian, I ‘come out’ only to produce a new and different closet” (1993, 309). Babs Duffy is forced to come out of her “reverse closet” when her bisexuality is discovered—conveniently tearing away suspicion of queerness from Olivia and placing it back onto the guest star. The portrayal of Babs’ rejection from the lesbian community upon disclosing her bisexuality is not without merit; as Marjorie Garber discusses in *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, the bisexual is often an object of suspicion within the gay and lesbian community:

Some gays and lesbians also stereotype bisexuals as self-indulgent, undecided, “fence-sitters” who dally with the affections of same-sex partners, breaking their hearts when they move on to heterosexual relationships. (1995, 21)

These stereotypes of the unstable bisexual are certainly seen in all of the bisexual characters discussed within this chapter; unlike the earnest, well-meaning hetero and homosexual characters, the bisexual does not fit within a binary, and is therefore seen as shifty, uncategorized, and untrustworthy, both by straight and gay characters alike.

While Babs is coming to terms with her bisexuality, Olivia utilizes the assumptions about her own sexual orientation to her advantage, as she interrogates the true lesbian murderer, a heterosexual man who owns a print shop in a lesbian neighborhood:

Olivia: Hi boys. Mind if I play?

Elliot: Detective Benson, I don't think you should be in here.

Olivia: Well, I don't care what you think.

Elliot: Detective, I think it's too personal for you to be in here.

Olivia: Remember me?

Ronnie: You were on stage today.

Olivia: Oh no. That must make me one of *them*. You must be sick to your stomach having someone like me so close to you. If I was straight it wouldn't freak you out. Of course, if I was straight, I wouldn't be anywhere near you. 'Cause that's your problem, isn't it, Ronnie? Huh? Don't get a lot of girly action.

Ronnie: That's none of your business.

Olivia: Oh, come on. You're not very attractive. You've got a crap job, stuck in that hot shop all day printing out signs and invitations for other people's fun. And where you are, that's lesbian parties. Lesbian weddings. Lesbian blowouts every single weekend at

Kitty Corner. It's like everyone in your little world is out there having a great time, getting laid, except you.

Ronnie: You need to shut up now.

Olivia: Is that how it started? Did you make a move on one of them and she blew you off? It's bad enough that straight girls look right through you. But now your 'hood is filled with lesbians.

Olivia's appearance beside Babs at a gay rally, plus her performance as "one of them" in the interrogation, leads the murderer to admit his guilt. Thus, Olivia uses Babs' suspicion of her lesbianism to her advantage to uphold the law and to do her job effectively. For viewers who may still debate her sexual orientation—viewers who will be discussed at length in the next chapter—Olivia's sexual orientation is left open. When she leaves the squadroom after receiving a conviction, Elliot responds to her, "Hell of a performance. I think." Elliot, along with the viewer, is left wondering if Olivia's encounter with lesbian-turned-bisexual Babs Duffy simply enabled Olivia to "perform" as "one of them," or if it made her realize that she is, in fact, "one of them." Elliot's comment brings to light the notion of performance which is crucial to this argument, As Judith Butler famously argues in *Gender Trouble*,

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constructed in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. (1990b, 140)

The characters in “P.C.”, from the masculine Sharon, to the more feminine Babs, to Olivia, who switches between feminine and masculine, illustrate the fragility of identity categories. For Olivia to perform as a lesbian, she only needs to change her gender performance and the assumption of her sexual orientation will follow. Babs acts as an impetus for the other characters to realize how fragile these categories are, and how easily gender (and sexual orientation) can be performed. Babs also transitions from lesbian to bisexual throughout the course of the episode, further emphasizing an instability of identity. Thus, while Babs is a far more developed character than the other bisexuals I have discussed—and the only one who actually identifies as bisexual—she still exists to serve the greater plotline of the show.

“Amazing Trannies”: Representation of the Trans Victim

Sadly, because of the subject matter of the crime drama, the queer guest star is typically a victim of the crime, and when that crime is murder, he/she is unable to speak. As we will see, this loss of language then forces those within the medical and legal systems to speak for the victim, often categorizing him/her incorrectly. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1990), Michel Foucault discusses the relationship between the law, language, and medicine. Specifically, he addresses the way in which non-normative sexualities are regulated by these entities:

First there was medicine, via the “nervous disorders”: next psychiatry, when it set out to discover the etiology of mental illnesses, focusing its gaze first on “excess,” then onanism, then

frustration, then “frauds against procreation,” but especially when it annexed the whole of the sexual perversions as its own province; criminal justice, too, which had long been concerned with sexuality, particularly, in the form of “heinous” crimes and crimes against nature [...] These sites radiated discourses aimed at sex, identifying people’s awareness of it as a constant danger, and this in turn created a further incentive to talk about it. (30)

Foucault’s argument is at the heart of this chapter. The criminal justice system seeks to police and regulate behavior, and one of the most regulated of these behaviors is sex. When victims and suspects in crime dramas do not fit into established categories, they immediately become a problem for the criminal justice system. This problem is especially clear when examining the representation of the transgender character.

In “Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question,” Susan Stryker argues that “transgender practices and identities are a form of gender trouble, in that they call attention to contradictions in how we think about gender, sex, and sexuality” (2008, 83). Using this framework, I will be examining the “gender trouble” which occurs when transgender bodies are represented in two specific episodes of *Bones* and *Law & Order: SVU*. In doing so, I argue that the television crime drama can be used as a space to examine the confines which science and the law place on the boundaries of gender identity.

As previously mentioned, the Fox crime procedural, *Bones*, centers on Temperance Brennan, a forensic anthropologist who uses bones to identify crime

victims. In “The Bare Bones of Sex,” Anne Fausto-Sterling speaks to the connection between bones and identity, arguing that bones “can indicate class, race, and sex (or is it gender—wait and see)” (2005, 1491). While the gender of victims on the series is typically clear cut, this is not the case in the fourth season episode, “The He in the She.” Within this episode, the forensic team debates the identity of two victims found in the ocean. While both victims are cut in half, one appears to be a woman, the other a man. Through forensic testing, the scientists discover that the victims are one and the same:

Mr Nigel-Murray: He's in the water...drowning, maybe, or-or he was pushed from a boat. When he reaches for the boat, his fingers are smashed. He drowns, and then is cut in half later in some maritime mishap.

Cam: He?

Mr. Nigel-Murray: Triangular pubis. No evidence of a ventral arc. The pelvic bone speaks—it says, "I be male."

Cam: The pelvic bone can say whatever it wants to say--this part here says female.

Mr. Nigel-Murray: What part's that?

Cam: It's called a vagina. [...] Well, I can do a DNA comparison to find out if these two sets of human remains come from the same victim.

Mr. Nigel-Murray: The measurements of the vertebrae match perfectly. I-I'm nearly positive that it's all one victim.

Cam: Who is...

Mr. Nigel-Murray: Male.

Cam: And female. We have one victim with two sexes.

It is discovered that the victim, a male-to-female transsexual, gave up a position as a prominent conservative televangelist to move to a remote island and minister to those often rejected by religious bodies. It is determined that she was murdered by the estranged jealous wife of one of the parishioners, and her small church is taken over by her son. This narrative shows not only a transition in gender, but one in place and in religion—a “redemption through transformation.”

While the characters of *Bones* attempt to define gender through science, those of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* attempt to do it through the law. As discussed in chapter two, *SVU* focuses on solving and prosecuting “sexually based offenses, which are especially heinous.” The fourth season episode, “Fallacy,” begins with a rather typical story for *SVU*: a possible rape victim, Cheryl Avery, murders her attacker (her boyfriend’s brother) in self-defense. Unbeknownst to Cheryl’s boyfriend, Cheryl is a pre-operative transgender woman. When the detectives discover (through the scientific means of DNA, of course) that the female victim is medically male, the case changes and the victim/perpetrator’s “gender is put on trial.” Prosecutors speculate that Cheryl

killed her attacker not because he was attempting to rape her, but because he would reveal her “secret.” As the mystery unfolds and Cheryl’s “secret” is uncovered, her boyfriend commits suicide. Despite her insistence that she is female, she is categorized as a male in the legal system. Although she is offered a plea-bargain in the manslaughter case against her attacker, when she accepts it, she is placed in a male prison. She rejects the plea offer and fights to go to trial, since she has a chance of being acquitted. Because, as ADA Alex Cabot explains to Olivia, “New York state determines a person’s gender based on their genitals, not their feelings. [...] There’s nothing I can do.”

In the end, Cheryl goes to trial and is convicted of murder. She is placed in a male prison, only to be raped by a fellow inmate. While Olivia and Alex attempted to advocate for her, they were unable to do so. “Fallacy” illustrates the tragedy which occurs when sexual identity does not fit into the binary constructions which have been created by the law.

While taking different approaches to the issue, both episodes show how the bodies are mediated through science and through the law. Furthermore, they bring into conversation questions about gender identity and power—questions that are often neglected within the framework of episodic television. In both cases, their bodies are interpreted by the criminal justice system. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler addresses the power of the law over gender identity:

In Althusser’s notion of interpellation, it is the police who initiate the call or address by which a subject becomes socially constituted [...]
The call is formative, if not performative, precisely because it

initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject.

Althusser conjectures this “hailing” or “interpellation” as a unilateral act, as the power and force of the law to compel fear at the same time that it offers recognition at an expense. (1993, 121)

According to Butler’s reading of Althusserian interpellation, queer bodies are subject to definition and categorization by the law. This reading becomes especially important when analyzing the way in which both characters are identified, not through their own agency, but through the words and actions of others—in this case, those in power. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, Foucault specifically speaks to the relationship between power, language and the law:

Power is essentially what dictates law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden. Secondly, power prescribes an “order” for sex that operates at the same time as a form intelligibly: sex is finally to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law. And finally, power acts by laying down the rule: power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse it creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law. It speaks, and that is the rule. The pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator; and its mode of action with regard to sex is of a juridico-discursive character. (1990, 83)

Clearly, language is tied to the law, and definition is part of that. In “The He in the She,” when Brennan and Booth discuss the case, Booth stutters and cannot find the proper pronoun to use when discussing the victim. Because Brennan and Booth are—in different ways—attuned to human behavior, they assume that the victim was killed because a potential boyfriend (whose voice is heard over the answering machine), discovered her “secret.” From both a social and an anthropological perspective, both Brennan and Booth agree that such a secret would threaten the masculinity of a heterosexual man:

Brennan: Anthropologically speaking, a male's status in a society is closely connected with what he perceives to be his outward maleness.

Booth: Look, there's no way the guy on that answering machine knew that he...she... he... knew that she... he...was transgender.

Brennan: How do you know?

Booth: Well, because I know an "ain't too proud to beg" phone call when I hear one, all right? He had no idea that she wasn't a real woman.

There are striking similarities within both episodes: both shows present transgender people as victims, not agents. Furthermore, their identity must be continually explained by those in power—forensic scientists, psychologists, and the legal system. In both instances, science is used to determine the gender of the victim. Forensic science is interpreted by psychology, however, as both sets

of detectives meet with psychologists to discuss their puzzling victim. There are striking differences as well: while Cheryl Avery is given the chance to voice her gender identity, Patricia Ludmuller, on the other hand, is not given a voice at all; in fact, the only time we hear her speak is in a video of her in her “former life” as a male televangelist. Thus, Patricia is seen as a puzzle that needs to be put together—both literally, since her body is broken in half, and figuratively—by forensic investigators.

Psychology and Forensic Science

Forensic science is used to determine the gender of both victims; as we see with Cheryl Avery, the detectives first learn that she is “a man” because of DNA left behind in blood from the crime scene. Furthermore, during Cheryl’s trial, evidence is presented which details differences in “male” and “female” brains. This discussion is disturbing on a number of levels—not only does it present a reductionist and simplistic view of gender identity—one that is devoid of any cultural connotations—but it also medicalizes the transgender person. By presenting Cheryl as someone with a chemical imbalance in her brain, she becomes someone in need of repair by the medical community. Furthermore, Cheryl must meet with Dr. Huang, the resident SVU psychologist, in order to be assessed for her trial. In this session, she must explain herself—but her feelings are of no consequence; although she identifies herself as female, she is still categorized by the legal system as male.

Testing from the Jeffersonian lab on *Bones* also determines gender, since it allows the scientists to conclude that the body is “one victim, two sexes.” Again,

this incongruity must immediately be explained to the detectives (and thus, the audience) through a resident forensic psychologist. (And perhaps this interpretation is even more frustrating on *Bones*, since Dr. Sweets is not able to meet with the victim. He, like the investigators, can only guess about her feelings about her own gender identity). Both the victims are translated and explained by psychologists who feel the desire to interpret their behavior to others. Immediately, this interpretation places the victim into the state of abnormality.

The Law

Unlike the transgender victim in *Bones*, who is found dead and can only speak through her body, *SVU* features a living, compelling trans woman who can speak about her treatment within the gendered legal system. In the case of Cheryl Avery, the determination of gender through the law—and the difference between the definition of gender in the law and gender through science—is a debate. When plea-bargaining down to a lesser charge, Cheryl agrees to a shorter jail sentence. However, because she was “self-medicating with a friend’s birth control pills” instead of going through the proper channels to seek sexual reassignment surgery, there is no doctor to testify on her behalf. Furthermore, despite her identification as a woman and her feminine appearance, because she has not received reassignment surgery, she is still legally classified as a man and housed as such. This case mirrors real-life treatment of transgender people in the criminal justice system; because they disrupt the gendered binary of the prison system, they face isolation and violence when placed within it. As Foucault explains, the court system exists in part to control and regulate sexual behavior,

and those who are perceived as outside of this system of control, or who do not fit into it, are suspect:

As to the courts, they could condemn homosexuality as well as infidelity, marriage without personal consent, or bestiality. What was taken into account in the civil and religious jurisdictions alike was a general unlawfulness. Doubtless acts “contrary to nature” were stamped as especially abominable, but they were perceived simply as an extreme form of acts “against the law”; they were infringements of decrees which were just as sacred as those of marriage, and which had been established for governing the order of things and the plan of beings. Prohibitions bearing on sex were essentially of a juridical nature. The “nature” on which they were based was still a kind of law. For a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime’s offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union. (1990, 38)

Foucault’s explanation of the relationship between the law and sexuality is important here, because this discussion is crucial when analyzing the incorporation of queer characters in crime dramas. These characters “confound” the law and those who work to uphold it. Thus, viewers typically see law enforcers struggle with queer characters—especially, those who are criminals—in a unique way. Like the characters in Doty’s discussion, transgender characters serve as a way for the viewer to understand the main character’s feelings about

gender and sexuality, and also to reinforce roles of gender and sexuality.

Stephen Nathan, executive producer of *Bones* also addresses this issue in

Bones: The Forensic Files:

these issue-oriented plot points are very important to the series. Brennan's a forensic anthropologist; she views the world as a scientist in very logical, rational terms. She sees things in anthropological terms. What we see as odd and bizarre, she sees in some sort of historical and sociological context that allows the audience to remove certain preconceptions that we might hold over very charged issues, like "The He in the She" [...]. It also allows Booth, who seems like kind of an Everyman, to confront these situations as well. (qtd. in Ruditis 2009, 76-77)

Within "The He in the She," as with other *Bones* episodes, Dr. Brennan operates as the detached, scientific observer, while her partner, FBI Special Agent Seeley Booth, operates as an emotional force. This dichotomy refutes typical gendered notions about emotion and reason.

SVU, on the other hand, operates under strict gender codes. Detective Elliot Stabler, a hypermasculine and conservative man, appears threatened by Cheryl's gender identity. His partner, Olivia Benson, on the other hand, appears sympathetic to her case. Even Assistant District Attorney Alex Cabot, who is typically emotionally detached from cases, forms a bond with Cheryl—despite the fact that she must prosecute her. In this case, the discussions surrounding Cheryl's gender serve to reinforce the gender boundaries among the main

characters; Elliot rejects the representation of non-normative gender which disrupts and threatens his definition of gender roles, while Alex and Olivia bond over Cheryl's mistreatment in the justice system.

An Aside: The Racialized Other(s) of *Bones*

Although this project specifically focuses on the representations of white women's sexuality, it is important to note two instances of queerness in *Bones* applying to characters who are neither suspects nor victims, but affiliated with the law. As mentioned in the introduction, the biracial character Angela Montenegro is a permanent member of the cast and Brennan's closest friend. While often characterized as the most "normal" member of the "Squints"—Booth's nickname for the Jeffersonian Institution staff who work with Brennan—Angela serves as an enigmatic figure in a number of ways. Characterized as both a flighty artist and a serious computer program designer, as a homebody and as a international traveler, as a monogamous romantic and one who is very sexually promiscuous, Angela's inability to be determined is troubling, particularly when the other characters within the series are very narrowly defined. Along with, or perhaps because of, this strange characterization, Angela is one of the few openly bisexual characters on network television. While it has only been established that she has had one significant relationship with a woman—her college roommate, Roxie, with whom she reunites in season four of the series—Angela's bisexuality is troubling because it adds to the notion that the bisexual is an unstable, unpredictable being. Furthermore, Angela's admitted sexual promiscuity adds to the notion that bisexuals are, in fact, promiscuous.

In “The Girl in the Mask,” a fourth season *Bones* episode, the Jeffersonian team assists Booth’s friend from Japan in solving the murder of his sister. In order to help understand the case, Dr. Tanaka, a famous forensic anthropologist from Japan, is brought in to work with them. Brennan appears to be the only team member who is impressed with Dr. Tanaka; the rest of the team spend the episode trying to guess Dr. Tanaka’s gender:

Angela: I Googled Tanaka. 300 hits, all Japanese. None of them with a personal pronoun.

Hodgins: Should we just ask her?

Angela: Him.

Sweets: You people can identify human remains based on a tiny little finger bone, but you can’t judge the sex of a person standing right in front of you? Does nobody else see the irony in this?

Hodgins: Of course. But as a scientist, I also see the challenge.

Sweets: Well, Dr. Tanaka identifies with a subset of an urban Japanese aesthetic known as Kei. It glorifies androgyny.

Hodgins: Well, mission accomplished there, Dr. Tanaka.

Angela: I think you’re probably right. We should just ask him.

Hodgins: Her.

Sweets: Tanaka won't answer. That's the whole point. Gender is unimportant. We should be mature enough to accept Dr. Tanaka just the way Dr. Tanaka is.

Much like in "The He in the She," when Dr. Nigel-Murray and Cam disagree over the sex of their victim, the team is torn about Dr. Tanaka's gender. Because Dr. Tanaka is a guest member of their team, however, and not a victim or a suspect, they are not able to run the scientific tests on her that they would run on either the victim or a suspect, because it is not relevant to the case at hand. Instead, they must simply treat Dr. Tanaka as another mystery to solve, using cultural markers to determine Dr. Tanaka's gender—markers which are disrupted because Dr. Tanaka is from a different cultural background. After they work together to solve the case, the members of the Jeffersonian team—with the exclusion of Brennan and Booth, who seem to accept Dr. Tanaka without question—are dismayed to discover that no one has solved the mystery of Dr. Tanaka's gender:

Hodgins: So...no one asked Tanaka?

Sweets: It doesn't matter, remember?

Hodgins: Yeah, yeah. No, I know.

Sweets: Very good.

Angela: Oh, this is ridiculous.

As the team watches, Angela approaches Tanaka and offers a tight, awkward farewell hug. She then reports back to the group: "It moved. He's a guy." Despite their pleas for "maturity," the team is so confounded by Tanaka's gender

ambiguity that their method of determining Tanaka's gender is anything but mature. Only Angela—whom Tanaka refers to earlier in the episode as the “partly Chinese woman”—is able to determine Tanaka's “true” gender. Because Angela, like Dr. Tanaka, is marked as exotically queer, she is able to use her liminal position to discover something that the rest of her colleagues cannot.

While one could argue that these guest characters serve a purpose and lead to visibility, one could also argue that this is not enough. They are still seen as tragic figures, not allowed to speak for themselves and categorized by others. Functioning only as conversation starters who will soon be forgotten by the other characters, these characters bring out the main characters' ideas of gender and sexuality, but do not force them to deal with these conflicts on a regular basis. The Special Victims Unit and the team at the Jeffersonian, along with the viewers, only need to wait for the next crime to have a new victim to interpret.

Chapter 4

“The Lesbians Will Rejoice Tonight”:

The Cyberculture of *Law & Order: SVU* and *Conviction*

Building upon my previous discussion of representations of queerness in crime drama, I now transition from queer weekly suspects and victims into a queer reading of crime-solvers. As both D’Acci and Dresner discuss, the specter of lesbianism is common within readings of the female detective. Within this chapter, I combine queer reading with fan analysis by discussing the fan community surrounding *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*’s Olivia Benson and ADA Alexandra Cabot. Since I have already discussed the role of Olivia Benson’s queerness, I shift my focus in this chapter to examine the role of Alexandra Cabot within the framework of both *Law & Order: SVU*, and her failed *SVU* spin-off, *Conviction*. These fan readings are representative of the power of community, queer reading, and fan culture.

In this chapter, I revisit notions about television audiences and communities presented in chapter one, and combine those with ideas about the representation of women and queer bodies presented in chapters two and three. Unlike those chapters, which served as both a historical and a feminist textual analysis of television, I will now combine this methodology with a reading of fan response to these characters. By doing so, I explore the growing convergence of technologies which occurs in the existence of Internet television fan communities. This analysis is firmly rooted in ethnography, in the study of fandom, and the study of women’s communities.

I begin this chapter by discussing the relationship between the two characters as seen on *SVU*. I then move to a discussion of online forums, specifically focusing on the popular TV Web site, Television Without Pity. Finally, I examine fan fiction written within this fan community about the two women, and trace both discussions and pieces of fan fiction throughout the course of the first twelve seasons of *SVU*.

As previously addressed, *SVU* premiered on NBC in 1999 as the first spin-off of the crime drama *Law & Order*. Looking primarily at the detectives of a New York City sex crimes unit, the show operates as a procedural drama; for the most part, each episode is focused upon solving a crime, not on delving into the personal lives of its characters. Throughout the course of the series, viewers learn little about the character of Olivia Benson: she was a child of a stranger rape, her father remains unknown until season eight of the show. Her mother, an alcoholic professor, is killed in the second season of the show. With no other familial ties to speak of, Olivia—unlike her partner, Elliot Stabler, who consistently worries about the impact his career has had upon his marriage and family life—is seen as a loner. As discussed in chapter two, because of her lack of family ties, Olivia's primary identity is seen, not in relation to a marriage or a family, but to her work. Olivia never mentions long-term relationships with men; throughout the course of the show, references to Olivia's unsuccessful heterosexual dating life have been mentioned only a handful of times. Because of the masculine nature of her job, along with subtle hints about her possible bisexuality early in the series, many queer fans claimed Olivia Benson as a

subtextual lesbian. This lesbian fan base surrounding the character grew as the show progressed, as Olivia—growing “butcher” by the season—was often shown opposite the very feminine Assistant District Attorney, Alexandra Cabot. Many viewers began to speculate that the two women were secretly involved. One of the most extensive essays on this subject is “The Case of the Butch and The Blonde,” by LiveJournal user Cabenson. Throughout this essay, Cabenson traces the relationship between Olivia and Alex through the fifth season of the show, concluding that

There is an undeniable connection between the two women that is not seen in any other *SVU* ship, except for possibly Fin and Munch. The strong, sensitive detective compliments the intelligent and snarky lawyer. Even the briefest interaction between the two characters can be seen as HoYay! simply because of the chemistry they share. As I said at the beginning of this essay, if it looks like HoYay! and plays like HoYay!, then in my mind, it IS HoYay! (par. 9)

This on-screen pairing has created a large community of fans who still communicate and discuss the potential relationship between the women on a daily basis, despite the fact that March has not been a full cast member since 2003, when her character entered the Witness Protection Program. On *SVU*, little information about Alex’s personal life was given to the viewers. In an episode from the third season of the show, “Execution,” Alex visits a colleague in New Jersey who was presumably her boyfriend in law school, but their conversation is

strictly confined to a discussion of a case. In the fourth season episode, “Angels,” Elliot and Olivia interrupt her on a date with Trevor Langan, a defense attorney, but the extent of their relationship is never discussed. In the sixth season episode, “Ghost,” Alex states that she was involved with a man while living in Wisconsin under an assumed identity. Again, the details of the relationship are never given. These are the only references to her romantic life in over three years on *SVU*. Meanwhile, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Olivia’s sexual orientation is not addressed within the text of the show until the middle of the eleventh season, when she is “mistaken” for a lesbian by a lesbian activist.

Clearly, the perception of Olivia Benson has changed throughout the course of the show; it is left up to the viewers to decide what wider implications these changes will affect. As Sally Forth states in her popular site, “Olivia Benson Rave,”

“Starved,” showed us femme Olivia on another date, albeit with a suspect, followed by the hyped but cryptic “look” by Stabler when Olivia boasted about her womanly skill in “knowing” when a guy is interested. . . . Personally, I think FemmeBenson is just the TPTB pimping to get ratings up. If you read the next section you’ll see they have been successful. Apparently the majority of viewers can only relate to familiar, traditional, stereotypical characters. Now our little “inside joke” has become a joke on us. And that’s NOT a good

thing.

Forth's comments are ominous, since they raise important questions about lesbian invisibility on television. In October of 2005, the *New York Post* reported the findings of a survey conducted on the television viewing habits of gay men and lesbians. Lesbians, the study revealed, watch "Law & Order: SVU," 'Golden Girls' reruns on Lifetime and Spike TV's 'Real TV' in far greater numbers than the general population" (par. 2). Certainly, this information speaks to the larger questions raised by Forth's essay regarding lesbian audiences—should lesbians be content to cling to a character who serves as a lesbian only for those "in the know"? Does this "inside joke" help or hurt lesbian communities, and lesbian representation in general? Most importantly, why do some viewers still attempt to read Olivia Benson as a lesbian at a time when there are more positive representations of lesbians in television now than ever before? Although these questions have no easy answers, I begin by arguing that the mere discussion of Olivia's sexual orientation creates strong communities that would not exist if her sexuality was obvious, and it is the loss of communities that lesbian fans fear the most.

The online *SVU* fan community spans a variety of online sites, from various communities on *Live Journal* and Yahoo! Groups, to the *SVU* message boards at *Television Without Pity*, appearing to have the same dedicated core members at each site. This popularity may occur because shows such as *Law & Order* are typically plot—not character—driven; the viewers often know little about the personal lives of the characters on the show. Furthermore, despite the

fact that the characters have both (on very few occasions), been romantically linked with male characters, because they are in careers in which they are likely to be closeted, it is possible for them to be engaged in a relationship secretly. Such a scenario would be most plausible for Alex Cabot, since she states that working with SVU will help her political career (“Wrong is Right”), worries about her image in the media (“Baby Killer”), and even expresses a desire to one day be elected governor of New York (“Runaway”). Finally, the character of Serena Southerlyn on the original *Law & Order* series supports the notion that Alex could have been closeted: Serena, also a young ADA, was outed in her recent final episode of the show, responding to her termination by asking, “Is this because I’m a lesbian?” Although some fans were left lamenting that the wrong blond ADA was outed, Serena’s statement shows that, in the *Law & Order* universe, a character’s sexual orientation can be hidden from the viewers of the show.

In order to completely understand the perception of Olivia’s sexuality, one must understand that this perception is intimately linked to Internet fan culture. As Julie Levin Russo describes in her 2004 essay, “My Girlfriend Olivia,” her immediate reaction when viewing *SVU* for the first time was to search for lesbian fan fiction between Alex and Olivia; she quickly discovered that they were “well on the road to becoming a power couple of girl-on-girl fan fiction.” Because she discovered that she was not alone in her queering of Olivia, that there was an entire community of people who “read” her in this way, Russo states that “Olivia ripened into a powerful object of desire located in the resonant interface between nightly dates with her television image and the alternative canon of fan

productions and discussions.” Consequently, Russo explains that her reading of *SVU* “demonstrates and depends on the ways that interpretations of (and libidinous investments in) *SVU* the show are intertextually entangled with Internet fandom and with the activities of daily life.” For Russo, as with many fans, it is impossible to separate the onscreen version of Olivia with the Olivia who has flourished in lesbian fan culture.

Russo’s views on Olivia are highly influenced by her interactions with a community of fans; however, the notion of studying the different ways in which interpretive communities analyze texts is certainly not a new one. In “Writing *Reading the Romance*,” a new introduction to her classic text on fans of romance novels, Janice Radway discusses her incorporation of Stanley Fish’s notion of the interpretive community into her own work as a way to understand the way multiple readings of romance novels were produced. While she understands there are often endless readings to a specific text, she explains that,

. . . whatever the theoretical possibility of an infinite number of readings, in fact, there are patterns or regularities to what viewers and readers bring to texts in large part because they acquire specific cultural competencies as a consequence of their particular social location. Similar readings are produced, I argue, because similarly located readers learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes that they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter. (1991, 8)

Because the Internet has created an entirely new idea of geographical spaces, I will be examining fans who have developed their own communities, complete with “strategies and interpretive codes” for reading *SVU*.

The Online Forum: Television Without Pity

TWoP is arguably the most popular television discussion site online. Operating under the motto, “spare the snark, spoil the networks,” the site houses a variety of different discussion boards in which fans can post their reactions to various TV shows. While the site does host a library of “recaps,” or long descriptions of individual episodes of various shows, I find the TWoP discussion boards to be the most interesting. Shows are placed into different categories on the boards based on genre and popularity; those with larger fanbases have discussion groups with multiple threads. Conversely, smaller shows are given single threads and housed under topics such as “Dramas,” “Competitive Reality,” “Candid Reality,” etc. If a discussion thread is extremely popular, it will often be expanded to allow for more conversation threads. Conversely, if a show is not well-received by the TWoP audience, the size of its discussion board is typically scaled down. This approach shows that TWoP is a fan-based site willing to change format based on participation. It is important to note that a lengthy discussion thread does not necessarily mean that the show is well-liked; it simply means that TWoP posters enjoy discussing it.

As Jonathan Gray discusses in “Antifandom and the Moral Text: Television Without Pity and Textual Dislike,”

TWoP is also renowned for its sarcastic and at times brutal honesty, encouraging play with and criticism of television. Thus, although significant sections of the site resemble a fan site, with space for character worship, spoilers and speculation, fanfic, and general debriefing of episodes and their issues, TWoP simultaneously creates ample room for networking textual disappointment, dislike, disapproval, distaste, and disgust. (2005, 846)

Gray's assessment of TWoP adequately describes the board's *Law and Order: SVU* thread, one of the most popular on the site. In fact, regular posters on the board are so prolific that they have even published a glossary of terms frequently used in their discussion. This lexicon, which includes phrases like, "Glasses of Power and Justice," "Business Card of Death," "March Madness," and most recently, "Oliska," serves as shorthand for fans when discussing the episodes. Although the viewers at TWoP are clearly fans of the show—most posters never miss an episode—their terms show that they both "worship" and critique the characters. The character of Alex Cabot is nearly universally worshipped; fans discuss everything from her closing arguments to her eyewear. They are also invested in Stephanie March's other roles; to be a fan of Alex is simply to have a "Cabot Habit"; to be a fan of both the character and the actress, is to have full-blown "March Madness." Board response about Mariska Hargitay and the character of Olivia is more critical; fans appear annoyed by Mariska's growing identification with her character ("Oliska"), since many believe that she is to

blame for the feminization of Olivia. Although the posters appear to have faith in Olivia's abilities as a detective, they mock the procedural aspects of the show as well. (For example, they note that whenever Olivia hands a character her business card, this character soon dies). Furthermore, when viewing the TWoP boards, one senses distrust in the powers that be (TPTB) of *SVU*; the writers of the show are often referred to as "Pot Weasels." This sense of distrust often centers around the fear that the producers of the show wish to heterosexualize Olivia, thus rendering lesbian interpretations—and consequently, their community—invalid.

Gray's notion that TWoP perpetuates "anti-fandom" is an interesting one, most likely developed out of this TWoP description offered on their FAQ page: "Our mandate is, more or less, to give people a place to revel in their guilty televisual pleasures. In most cases, we have a complex love/hate relationship with the show, and this site is a way for us to work through those feelings. If we plain hated a show, we wouldn't pay it any attention at all. The notion that one can have a "love/hate relationship" with a TV show or fandom is interesting, since it implies a move beyond simple fan adoration into the realm of the critique.

In her thesis, *Fans Without Pity: Television, Online Communities, and Popular Criticism*, Jessica Stilwell argues for a new interpretation of community that would include fan sites such as *Television Without Pity*. The first step to this inclusion, Stilwell reasons, is a shift in cultural thought about the nature of television. Stilwell states that while she wishes to view television watching as active, others do not agree:

The field of media studies traditionally argues that television viewership is a passive activity. My observation of participants in online fandoms indicates this is not the case, at least not for all viewers. Participants in TWoP are actively engaged with television programming, challenging and questioning everything, and conducting an extensive dialogue with television producers. They analyze and respond not only to the shows, but to interviews with the writers, producers, and actors on the television show(s) around which their fandom is centered; they write letters to production offices, email official websites, and lobby advertisers who support “their” program. (2003, 6)

Clearly, posting at TWoP shows that some viewers are actively engaged in television viewing. One does not have to post to be active, however; I consider the visiting of the boards on a regular basis to be active as well. While I rarely post on these boards, I visit them daily. Although Stilwell argues that one cannot fully understand the dynamics of TWoP unless one is both a poster and a reader; I tend to disagree. Having watched the community for several years, I feel a part of it despite the fact that I rarely respond to the posts. Perhaps this feeling of inclusion exists because I know some of the regular posters through other online sites as well, or perhaps it is simply because I feel connected to them because they typically “read” shows in the same way that I do. And perhaps this debate about inclusion is the most difficult aspect one faces when writing about an online community: it is never clear exactly how many people consider themselves to be

part of it. Online groups such as TWoP have changed the way some viewers react to specific television shows, but does this make them a community?

Despite geographic disparity and virtual anonymity, the posters at the TWoP site, however, do seem to have many attributes in common. As a whole, the site is clearly directed toward those who speak English and speak it well—grammatically incorrect posts are not acceptable on the boards. This restriction alone limits posts both geographically and demographically, since many younger Internet users tend to use informal “net-speak” that is not tolerated on TWoP’s boards. Furthermore, the maintainers of the site demand that the posters maintain a respectful attitude during discussions. The “About Manners and Respect” section describes the site as follows:

Imagine yourself at a friend of a friend's party. You mingle with other guests, strike up some conversations, and generally get along with everyone else even if they might not share the same opinions as you do on everything. You don't go ripping on people for having a different view of something, jumping up and down on the couch and calling them stupid. You'd be shown the door. So it is at TWoP.

By comparing the site to a physical party, the maintainers wish to promote a virtual atmosphere that seems “real.” However, it is important that it is described as a “friend of a friend’s party.” Furthermore, in a rule reminiscent of *Fight Club*, the first rule of TWoP is that one cannot “talk about the boards on the boards.”

The reason we ask that posters not discuss the boards on the boards is that this is a site about television, and the discussion

should remain about television -- or about something of substance. Once the discussion stops being about something, and starts being about the site and each other, it's very easy for the site to slide into irrelevance. If you want to tell another poster how funny or great s/he is, or how much you'd like to see him/her hook up with another poster, or whatever, you may certainly email him/her to say so.

These rules set up an atmosphere at TWoP that is different than other, less moderated communities. While posters do begin friendships with one another, it is obvious that the main topic of each conversation (or "thread") should be television.

Although it is clear that TWoP itself, despite its large number of lurkers and posters, operates as a community, I also argue that it is made up of a variety of different communities, each with their own unique terms and points of reference. Some posters may be active in a variety of these small communities, while others remain in only one. While I am familiar with a variety of "locations" on TWoP, I consider myself to be most familiar with the *Law & Order: SVU* section of the site. *SVU* was recapped in its first season, but was quickly sent to PH, or "Permanent Hiatus." At the time, the "Shows" board described *SVU* in this manner: "It was just like *Law & Order*, except that no one cared." After it was placed in PH, the show was given a small thread underneath the larger "Drama" section of the discussion board, where it began to flourish. Posters often worried that their posts would become erased or that the thread would be shut down because of the high number of posts. The *Law & Order* programs were then

given a larger section of the discussion board which enabled more posting options for viewers, such as the option to have individual threads for each character and each episode. The old thread was archived, much to the relief of frequent posters within the community.

A distinction must be made between fans of the show and regular viewers of the show. While a regular viewer of the show may only watch an episode once or twice (after all, the show is a crime drama; certainly some would argue that, much like a mystery novel, the episode loses appeal if you know the ending), a fan will watch the same episode countless times. Friends and family of *SVU* fans, particularly, often don't understand how one can spend countless hours watching a show about violent crimes. I argue that fans watch not to see the crimes, but to watch their favorite characters. This notion is contrary to the very philosophy of the show; from the beginning, the *Law & Order* shows have prided themselves on being "procedural" dramas with little character development. (Ironically, I argue that throughout the course of the series, the only *SVU* character who significantly changes is Alex Cabot, who, as I discuss later in this chapter, was the focus of a short-lived *SVU* spin-off, *Conviction*, which creator Dick Wolf deemed a "charactercedural." While set in the *Law & Order* universe, Wolf claims that *Conviction* differs from the rest of the *Law & Order* "brand" because it places an equal emphasis on the personal and the professional lives of its main characters).

One may even argue that the notion of shallow viewing could be an example of "trivialization" discussed in "Strategies of Coding in Women's

Cultures.” Authors Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser argue that women often trivialize their conversation or actions in order to speak about subversive thoughts and ideas:

Trivialization involves the employment of a form, mode, or genre that the dominant culture considers unimportant, innocuous, or irrelevant. When a particular form is conventionally not threatening the message it carries, even if it might be threatening in another context, is overlooked. Consider women’s self-deprecating use of the culture’s trivial names for their expressive genres: “Oh, we’re just gossiping”; “That was only ‘woman-talk’.” Such phrases can be strategies to avert attention from topics of conversation that are in fact crucially important to the speakers. (1993, 19)

While it is impossible to tell the gender of the participants in an Internet discussion group, it appears to me that the majority of the posters are female. And while *SVU* coded language does not disrupt notions about gender, it certainly does challenge established notions about sexual orientation. TWoP *SVU* posters have coined a variety of terms in order to discuss sexual orientation on TV:

HoYay: Homoeroticism, Yay! A celebration of all subtextual (and textual) homosexual lusting.

HetYay: The heterosexual version of HoYay!

One Drink: Sex. Watch for all the invites!

These three definitions are interesting because they show how the TWP community uses a variety of phrases to decode and search for subtexts within the plot of the show. While HoYay and HetYay are terms used throughout the TWP boards (and now throughout the Internet at large), it is important to note them simply because to go beyond the text to offer a “celebration of all subtextual homosexual lusting” is quite an act of resistance. The discovery of HoYay relies on a subtextual reading of a script, often with codes already established. For example, in the fifth season *SVU* episode, “Escape,” Olivia’s ex-boyfriend returns to town and they work together on a case. At the end of the episode, he asks Olivia to spend a few days with him in hopes of rekindling their romance, and she refuses. He follows up with an invitation for “just one drink,” which is clearly understood to refer to sex. (Olivia refuses, of course). If viewers take “one drink” to mean “sex” throughout the series, then one can look back and read the show in a new way, filled with instances of both HetYay and HoYay that may not have existed otherwise.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Alex/Olivia fan culture, however, is that it is able to exist—even flourish—independent of the show. This phenomenon is certainly not unique to *SVU* fandom; as fan scholar Mary Kirby-Diaz notes, one of the most interesting aspects of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan culture is the fact that it has continued to grow despite the cancellation of the series (2009, 37). Similarly, the majority of fan fiction written about the couple has occurred *after* Stephanie March’s October 2003 exit from the series and Alex Cabot’s faked death and entrance into the Federal Witness Protection Program.

While only 7 posts were made in the (now defunct) Yahoo! AlexOlivia Group in September of 2003, 94 were made in October of 2003. The number increased each month; in January 2005 alone, 1104 posts were made. There are now over 1000 members of the group, so many, in fact, that disagreements among group members prompted some to begin another group with the same purpose: in mid-February 2005, the Yahoo! OliviaAlex Group was founded. That the membership and postings in the AlexOlivia group have risen steadily since Stephanie March's final episode ("Loss") show how the viewers have refused to let a character go; in fact, they feel the need to create numerous scenarios for her return. As I will discuss later in the chapter, Stephanie March has returned to the role of Alex Cabot several times; when *Conviction* was not renewed by the network, she returned to *SVU* a few years later in seasons 10 and 11. For the most part, these returns have not lived up to fan expectations. While currently released from the Witness Protection and on leave to work with international crimes against woman ("Witness"), it is unclear when or if she will return again. In the meantime, fan fiction continues to be written about her and her subtextual relationship with Olivia Benson.

This act of reading a text based upon the views from a small community is reminiscent of Radway's *Reading the Romance*. In the updated introduction to her text, she explains that she understands that there are often endless readings to a specific text, and the community creates "interpretive codes that they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter" (1991, 8). Clearly, the TWoP *SVU* fans have constructed for themselves a variety of codes with which to interpret the text,

some of which result in interpretations very different from those intended by the producers. By doing so, they have created a new text outside of the show, one that they, not the producers of *SVU*, are in charge of. When viewers learned that Alex would be released from Witness Protection for good (as opposed to for one episode only, as was the case with the 2006 classic, "Ghost,") the TWoP *SVU* boards were flooded with speculations about the character. Many simply reveled in the fact that, despite her two year absence, the character of Alex Cabot had remained in a prominent place on the boards, while Casey, her replacement, was rarely discussed. In the "*Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* in the Media" thread, many posters agreed on their affection for Alex Cabot:

- medicminx:** Back to the Shallow? Alex: Now and forever-
hot and kick-ass!
- SugarJolt:** I *just love* the fact that although Alex has been stashed away for the past 2 seasons, her thread consistently remains on the front page here at TWOP!
- sweetsasami:** Yeah, and Casey's thread almost never makes it to the front page. *snickers*

Despite their fears about the possible heterosexual textual representation of Alex, TWoP viewers clearly feel vindicated in their adoration of Alex Cabot. By resisting her replacement and continuing to discuss her as though she were still on the show, viewers once again created their own version of the text of *SVU*,

one in which Alex Cabot was continually discussed and ready to return home at any point.

Overall, the study of community has become essential to the study of folklore. While definitions of community used to be more tangible, the technology of the Internet has made it essential for scholars to reconceptualize how they see communities. Some television audience communities, like the ones I have discussed, share common ideas, jokes, and even codes of resistance. When closely analyzing how tightly connected Internet communities can become, one cannot help but include them into the larger framework of ethnographic study.

SVU Fan Communities and Fiction

Alex and Olivia are not only characters who appear in many discussions of online forums; they are characters who are queered in fan fiction which appears on numerous sites online. From this perspective, there are two areas that I am interested in: first, the way in which online communities interact with each other and build online relationships based upon their writings about fictional characters, and secondly, the way in which these communities and fictions address, subvert, or negate the category of lesbian within their work. Because slash fiction writers are writing pieces in which they essentially change the sexual orientation of already created (and, typically, established as heterosexual) characters, the acceptance or rejection of lesbian identity is often a major theme within such pieces. Furthermore, such pieces of fiction do not exist in a vacuum; they are often representative of the thought of a larger fan base. I am interested in understanding why specific characters are appropriated by fans, and what such

appropriation says about larger questions of lesbian identity and representation on television.

Pre-Loss

Before discussing the fiction that was written post-“Loss,” it is important to note that some authors did focus upon the Alex/Olivia pairing while March was on the series on a regular basis, from season two to the beginning of season five. The two pieces that I find most compelling, “Objects in the Mirror” and “The Emma Cabot Series” both address issues of sexual orientation.

CGB’s “Objects in the Mirror” emphasizes Alex’s internal conflict about her relationship with Olivia. The fic is based upon “Guilt,” a third season Alex-centered episode focused upon her gradual emotional breakdown surrounding a child molestation case. Told from Alex’s perspective, “Objects” assumes that Olivia and Alex are engaged in a sexual relationship, but, because of Alex’s internalized homophobia, she does not allow Olivia to make the relationship public. Early in the fic, after first sleeping with Olivia, Alex is shown wondering if her sexuality is visible:

After the first time she wondered whether people could tell. She had gay friends who would play "lesbian/ straight?" over coffee as if there were secret signs, visible only to women in the know. And maybe there was something in that. She wondered if she exhibited such signs, whether she stared too long at the waitress's cleavage or whether she looked too interested in the girl on the cover of Maxim at the newsstand. [. . .] She lists the wrongs the way she

lists her faults when she's looking in the mirror: she doesn't have sex with co-workers, she doesn't have sex with women, she doesn't have sex. Not lately.

This characterization of Alex Cabot is quite believable; as stated previously, her political future and appearance is of primary importance. However, "Guilt" is recognized by most fans as an episode that transforms the character of Alex; she is seen risking her career to make a case against a child molester. Because the episode already focuses upon the internal conflict that she feels over the case, the author simply builds on this conflict and adds another layer—that of Alex's conflict over her sexuality. This conflict is shown later in the piece, when Olivia approaches Alex in the SVU squad room to discuss the case:

"We should be more careful," she says, watching the squad room for signs of interest. "We shouldn't... not where everyone can see us."

"See what, Alex? You think someone's going to hold up a 'gay' flag every time you hang out with your girl friend in public?"

"I'm not gay!" She says it loud enough to be heard. This time they both look around to see who notices. No one does. Alex folds her arms across her body. "And you're not my girlfriend."

That Alex rejects the identity category of "gay" while continuing to be sexually involved with Olivia is one of the most intriguing aspects of the story. Such a notion brings to the forefront questions of identity—what does it mean to be gay or straight, and what are the implications of claiming these categories? Can Alex

be straight and remain in her relationship with Olivia, or must she identify as a lesbian?

Another of the first, and most popular, Alex/Olivia fics, Nicole Berman and Celia Stanton's "The Emma Cabot Series," creates the fully developed character of Emma Cabot—younger sister of Alex—and integrates her within the already existing SVU storyline. While the story changes the way in which Alex and Olivia are introduced, the narrative quickly begins to follow the show's canon. (Later chapters, in fact, are changed in response to "Loss"). In an early chapter, Olivia and Alex kiss, and then Olivia discusses Alex's sexual orientation with Emma:

"Is she..." Olivia trailed off, climbing into the driver's seat. The word had never tricked her before, why should it now? "Is she gay?"

Emma shook her head. "I don't think she sees herself that way.

Most other people would call her bisexual, I guess. She's had both boyfriends and girlfriends."

Nodding slowly, Olivia started to grin as they started off in the general direction of NYU. "I guess you'd say I'm gay," she admitted softly, "although I've yet to...well, whatever."

Emma nodded understandingly. "I think you fall for who you fall for, end of story. And personally, I think you and Al would be amazing together. I would love to hear your dinner conversation sometime.

But no pressure," she added hurriedly, winking.

Laughing, Olivia shook her head. "No pressure."

The story takes the notion of identity away from desire at this point, since Olivia

and Alex have already kissed and begun a relationship before questioning their identity categories. Furthermore, Olivia identifies as “gay” although she has never been sexually involved with a woman; Alex, however, who has, does not claim such a category. This dialogue operates in contrast to “Objects in the Mirror,” in which Alex participates in a sexual relationship with Olivia while actively rejecting the category of lesbian. In their acceptance of a 16th Precinct Award for their work, the authors state that their reason for writing The Emma Cabot series was to:

answer the question of why Alexandra Cabot stayed an SVU prosecutor for as long as she did. We knew from the get-go that she was career driven and initially saw the job as a stepping stone to bigger things. But those first few cases showed us that she wasn't just an ice princess; those looks in her eyes showed us her heart broke every time a victim took the stand. And we wondered why. Thus, Emma Katherine Cabot Hudson was born. [...] The Alex/Olivia thing happened naturally. We were both big HoYay fans from the beginning of Alex's tenure on the show (how can you not be?), but given the circumstances at play, we had to make sure we didn't force it. Luckily, those two characters are such compliments to each other, and are naturally drawn to one another. They just fit.

Unlike later fics, which were created in direct reaction to the emotional scenes of “Loss,” “The Emma Cabot Series” shows that a lesbian subtext could be seen during March's tenure on the series as well.

“Loss” and “Post-Loss” Fiction

As mentioned previously, while Alex/Olivia femslash always existed, after Stephanie March's departure from the show in "Loss," it grew dramatically. In order to understand why, one must first attempt to understand "Loss," March's complex departure episode. Throughout the episode, Alex becomes involved in a dangerous case involving a Columbian drug cartel. Although DEA agents urge her to drop the case—which involves the rape and murder of an undercover female DEA agent—she refuses. Threats are made on her life and the life of her mother, and a DEA agent is killed. In the last few moments of the episode, when the detectives believe the threat has subsided, they are shown at a bar sharing drinks. (This in itself is significant; it establishes that the character of Alex has moved from an antagonistic role to a part of the squad). Upon leaving the bar with Elliot and Olivia, Alex is gunned down in front of them. As Elliot chases the gunman, Olivia rushes to Alex's side, places her hand on her bleeding shoulder, and pleads, "No no, no, no. . .stay with me, sweetie. Stay with me." The detectives are then shown two days later, sitting quietly in the squad room and looking at newspapers which proclaim Alex's death. That evening, however, Olivia and Elliot are asked to drive to a remote location, where they are reunited with a presumed dead Alex. The moment in which Alex is reunited with the detectives is clearly emotional for all three, however, the scene focuses primarily upon the emotions of the two women. After it is established that Alex's death was faked so that she could enter the witness protection program, Olivia responds with a tearful, "How long?" Alex, too emotional to speak, shrugs in response.

Olivia, in turn, stares at Alex for a few moments, but does not speak. Alex, in turn, nods her head. The viewer, then, sees Alex nod in response to Olivia's unspoken communication. With that, Alex is ushered into an SUV and taken away, leaving a tearful Olivia and Elliot behind.

When speaking about her story "Out of the Game," winner of the 16th Precinct Award for Favorite Post-Loss fic, author D.S. states that it,

was written out of necessity. I had never seen *SVU* until the fateful night that *Loss* aired, and as I was glued to the ending I thought, "Oh, man, there's something between those two women!" I started watching reruns on USA, with the sexy arguments, the lack of personal space, the hand brush, the unbuttoned blouses, and all that hotness. I hadn't written any fan fic for years, but I decided I *had* to get those two together again.

Not only does the final scene of "Loss" provide fic writers with an impetus to reunite Alex and Olivia, it also provides new information about the character of Alex which plays a pivotal role in Post-"Loss" fiction. Most notably, in "Loss," viewers learn that Alex has a mother in East Amherst, New York. With no mention of a father, authors extrapolate that Alex's father is deceased or that her parents are divorced. The character of Mrs. Cabot (whose first name is never given) is a frequent player in Alex/Olivia femslash—always appearing with a different first name, of course. It is up to the fic writers to create these characters based on the little information they have been given.

When it was reported that March would return for one episode a year and

half later, in February of 2005, it is significant to note that an article from *Las Vegas Weekly* discussed “March's sizable and vociferous lesbian fan base” while using several terms unique only to fans on TWoP. The author concludes:

Barring any tragic cooking accidents March will make an honest man of Flay, forcing sufferers of so-called "March Madness" to console themselves with Kleenex and March's one-shot return to SVU in Tuesday night's "Ghost." No doubt the TiVo will be primed to capture further hints of subtextual sapphism between March's Cabot and Mariska Hargitay's Det. Olivia Benson, the slyest romance on network television.

This article marks the first mention I've found of the term “March Madness” (to refer to Stephanie March fandom, that is), outside of Internet fan communities. Furthermore, it does something equally rare: it mentions *March's* lesbian fan base, not Hargitay's. Because of Olivia Benson's often stereotypically butch appearance and behavior, it is frequently assumed that it is *she* who has the lesbian fan base, not March. (Femme invisibility, clearly, plays a role with the character of Alexandra Cabot; because she does not “look” like a lesbian, she is typically viewed as heterosexual). This article establishes the fact that Alex is a woman whom lesbians find attractive; she does not exist simply in relation to the more “authentic” lesbian Olivia Benson. Furthermore, this is one of few mentions of the subtextual relationship between Alex and Olivia that exists in the media. To refer to the couple as “the slyest romance on network television” gives validation to those who participate in Alex/Olivia fandom at all levels.

Alex Cabot and the Politics of Gender and Sexuality in *Conviction*

Cyberfandom

In December 2005, NBC announced that Stephanie March would be returning to the network to play the character of Alexandra Cabot once again in *Conviction*, a new show created by Dick Wolf, the creator of the “Law & Order” franchise. The show proposed to bring Alex Cabot out of the witness protection program and promote her character to the chief of a bureau of young, inexperienced Manhattan assistant district attorneys. Unlike the other “Law & Order” shows, which focus primarily on specific cases and leave little room for character development, creator Dick Wolf coined the term “charactercedural” to refer to “Conviction,” stressing that equal time would be placed on the cases and on the personal lives of the characters. As previously mentioned, despite the fact that March left *SVU* in October of 2003, her character remained extremely popular and maintained a loyal Internet fanbase throughout her absence. One would assume that these fans would follow Alex to her new show, but this was not the case. In fact, some of the most loyal people in the fan communities refused to accept the show as “canon,” and many others refused to watch it at all. Within this section, I examine why this specific fan community refused to accept the return of a character they continue to discuss on a daily basis, and how this refusal is linked with both the politics of sexual orientation and of gender.

Despite the fact that Alex was portrayed as heterosexual on *SVU*, many viewers read the character as a lesbian, and formed communities based on the

notion that she was involved in a secret lesbian relationship with Detective Olivia Benson, the other lead female character on the show. When March chose to leave the show in 2003 and her character was presumed dead—with only Olivia and her partner, Elliot, aware that she was actually alive—and was shuttled into the Witness Protection Program, fans did not abandon the pairing. In fact, just the opposite occurred—discussion groups on sites such as Live Journal and Yahoo! Groups dedicated to the pair grew steadily in number, and fans continued to write fan fiction about the two characters. A large part of the fan fiction surrounding the couple focused on various scenarios in which Alex could return from Witness Protection, always coming back to be reunited with Olivia. Obviously, *Conviction* disrupted this scenario by placing the character of Alex in the same city but on a different show, and away from Olivia. Furthermore, because the show's aim was to discuss the personal—and therefore, romantic—lives of its characters, it was made clear in early interviews that viewers would finally receive a glimpse into Alex's romantic life, something we were denied on *SVU*.

While the disruption is, in part, related to Alex's heterosexual relationships within the new show, I believe this show is viewed as a threat to the end of these Internet communities, most of which are primarily communities of women. However, I argue that the problem is deeper than perceived sexual orientation of a character. Instead, I believe *Conviction* was rejected by many fans because, by telling the personal stories of its characters, it violates the unspoken agreement that has existed between the *Law & Order* shows and fan fiction

writers for so long—that the show provides the unemotional legal drama, and the audience creates their own versions of the characters’ personal lives. These two forms of writing can clearly be seen in gendered terms: the legal, procedural side as masculine and the personal, romantic stories of the characters can be placed within the realm of the feminine. Additionally, I believe that these communities reject the character of Alex Cabot because they would prefer for her to have more traditionally feminine traits, and these traits can be given to her in fan fiction. Sadly, after three years of fan fiction about the character, perhaps many fans decided they liked their version of Alex Cabot better than the one provided by the actual show.

Although the pilot episode of *Conviction* was first released on iTunes on February 22nd, 2006, the series premiered on television on March 3rd, 2006. It was originally assumed by fans that the character of Alex would be resurrected on *SVU* and then transferred to *Conviction*, but this never transpired—partly because the *SVU* shooting schedule was rearranged to work around Mariska Hargitay’s current pregnancy. For this same reason, it seemed unlikely that Hargitay would appear on *Conviction* during the spring season. On the morning of March 3rd, March appeared on NBC’s “Today” show to discuss the new show. In the interview, she explained that the show would be more focused upon relationships than *SVU*, and that her character would be involved with two different men—a co-star and a guest star. Immediately, fans began to post about the interview. Tina posted in the Olivia/Alex Yahoo! Group:

guys, saw it and thought I'd warn ya'll ahead of time! first off, for those whom missed it, they talked to Stephanie. we met the new folk's too. why the warning?!? Because the interviewer told us that Alex is in a "hot-n-heavy relationship" on the show but didn't let us know with whom. since I fully suspect it won't be the lovely, Olivia Benson, I have no need to watch after tonight.

Quickly another poster responded: "I saw that this morning too and I will not be watching tonight either. I don't need to be slapped in the face twice." These posters were not alone; despite an initial flurry of excitement over March's return, many who actively participate in these online communities rejected the show as soon as it was revealed that no crossovers were planned with the cast from *SVU*, and that Alex would be shown having multiple heterosexual relationships on the show.

Those who continued to watch the show were very vocal in their dislike for it. Part of the frustration faced by *Conviction* viewers was the difficulty of piecing together exactly what happened to the character of Alex from February 2005—when she was placed back into witness protection on *SVU*—and the beginning of the new series. Despite insistence from the show's creators and March that Alex's past year would be explained, it never was. Because March was a late addition to the cast, her role in the first few episodes of the series is brief. Alex's relationships are not addressed until the fifth episode of the show, "Savasana." The episode begins by re-introducing Robert, a wealthy businessman with whom she is involved, to Jim, the Deputy District Attorney of her bureau. There is

obvious tension between the two men, since it is clear that, despite his earlier romantic involvements with Jessica, another ADA in the bureau, Jim is also interested in Alex. Although it was hinted in earlier episodes that Jim and Alex may have been involved in the past, it is confirmed in this episode, as Alex and Jim discuss their past in his office:

Alex: You are such a bureaucrat.

Jim: Is that why we broke up?

Alex: We never dated.

Jim: Oh that's right, I'm sorry, I forgot. We were just sleeping together.

Alex: Something like that, yeah.

Jim: It was fun though, right?

Alex: Sure was.

The scene ends with Alex explaining that she broke off her relationship with Jim because she met Robert, who “seemed like the perfect guy.” It was established at the beginning of the episode that Jim and Robert met briefly at the department Christmas party, which means that Jim and Alex were involved before this. (It is revealed in a later episode that Jim and Alex have known each other for seven years, placing him in Alex’s life before her job at SVU. Certainly this is an interesting tactic, since it forces viewers to see the character of Jim not as a new addition to Alex’s life, but as someone who has been in a relationship with her for a long time—even longer than Olivia). Viewers are dealt another surprise later in

“Savasana,” as Alex confesses to Jim that Robert—who viewers have barely met—is interested in marrying her:

Alex: I have to get home.

Jim: Is everything okay?

Alex: Yeah, Robert wants to have a talk.

Jim: Sounds like fun.

Alex: It should be easy, you know. Falling in love, committing, getting married.

Jim: You're talking about the rest of your life. There's nothing easy about that.

Alex: I just always thought I'd have this feeling in my gut telling me this is it, this is the one - but I don't.

Jim: Yeah, that sweet little romantic voice shuts off after a while. Like right around the tenth murder trial.

Alex: Are you telling me I should marry Robert?

Jim: I.. am not good at these conversations, Al. With all due respect, I'd just rather not get involved.

Despite Jim's insistence that he would prefer to stay out of Alex's personal life, he does just the opposite. In the following scene, Jim and Alex follow up a heated argument about quarterly reports by having sex on a desk in a conference room near their offices. The next morning, however, Alex becomes engaged to Robert and tells Jim their brief affair was a mistake. After over three years of barely a mention of Alex's love life on *SVU*, watching her have sex with a co-worker only

to become engaged to a different man the next morning shattered many viewers' perceptions about Alex's behavior in her personal life. Viewers were dismayed to see Alex behave in such a manner, deeming it completely out of character. One could argue, however, that, because of the strict procedural constraints of *SVU*, viewers were simply never able to see this side of Alex Cabot until now.

In her "rantish" post, a poster identified as "Angie in NM" encouraged viewers to take matters into their own hands by creating their own scenarios for the characters through fan fiction:

Go and watch the *A/O* re-runs obsessively to put the ick out of your mind. Choose your favorite Olivia haircut and outfits to create a picture of her before you start writing. That's who she is and can be for you despite anything TPTB do to destroy the characters for you. Same with Alex. *Conviction* must be some horrible dream, and you can just wake yourself up out of it.

On *SVU*, both women were established as being bad at heterosexual relationships; they were shown having clearly undesirable ex-boyfriends and interrupting dates to spend more hours at the office. Although Olivia was shown once—literally—falling out of bed with a male co-worker following a bout of "no-strings attached" sex, this behavior was in the first season of the show, before Alex appeared. After Stephanie March was added to the cast, men existed only on the periphery of both Alex and Olivia's lives. This is certainly not the case in *Conviction*, as Alex is discussed throughout this chapter. In any event, it becomes significantly more difficult for fan fiction writers to write characters who

are in convincing lesbian relationships when their subjects are so overtly heterosexual, and when the men are so visible.

I argue that it is this difficulty, and not the sexual orientation of Alex, that caused fans to reject *Conviction*. Specifically, I contend that the discomfort many fans feel with the representation of Alex Cabot on *Conviction* is not due to her heterosexual behavior, but due to a displacement that many fan fiction writers feel now that Alex's romantic life has become textual to the show—as opposed to subtextual—and her romantic life, once seen as the domain of creative fan fiction writers, has now been turned over to the producers of the show. Certainly, the character of Alex Cabot provides a unique perspective into the analysis of fan fiction, since she first existed on a television show that did not discuss the private lives of its characters, and moved to a show that does. Furthermore, I argue that the character of Alex Cabot created in this fan fiction is much different than the one presented on both television shows, since fan fiction writers have given her traditionally feminine qualities that she does not exhibit on the show.

In the fandom I am discussing, nearly all of the fan fiction writing is created by women. As Catherine Lutz explains in “The Gender of Theory,” women's writing is not seen as authoritative and is easily dismissed by the predominantly male academy (1995, 250-251). The same holds true for much fan fiction or stories about women's lives that are created on TV. For example, referring to a show as a “soap opera,” I argue, is a derogatory term that simply means it is becoming too feminine and is placed within the realm of emotion and not reason. In my opinion, this type of writing only becomes valued when it proves to be

commercially successful. Because “Grey’s Anatomy,” a “primetime soap,” is doing well in the ratings, NBC was willing to invest in this kind of storytelling.

While some authors contend that fan fiction can be used as a way for female characters to transgress gender boundaries, much of the fiction in this community serves to place Alex within a more traditional feminine role. This trend started early, in “The Emma Cabot Series,” one of the first and most popular fics of the fandom. Over three hundred pages long (and still unfinished), this story is a classic Mary Sue fiction. It introduces the character of Emma Cabot, Alex’s younger sister, as a reason why Alex took a job with the Special Victims Unit. This fiction works to put Alex in a specific light—one that is more traditionally feminine than actually seen on the show. This is clearly out of character; in her first episode, Alex openly admits that she wants to work for SVU because “living victims” will vote, therefore it will help her political career. Other authors cast Alex in the role of a nurturing mother, despite the fact that she was always portrayed as one who was uncomfortable around children, and unlike Olivia, has never expressed a desire to become a parent. While Alex-as-mother fics are very well-received among most members of the community, they typically present a very out of character version of Alex as well. It is disconcerting that so many female authors find themselves uncomfortable writing for an unapologetically ambitious woman.

In conclusion, debates about Alex Cabot’s femininity and sexual orientation, while still situated primarily in the hands of her cyberfans, were also acknowledged in “Downhill,” the eighth episode of “Conviction.” After David

Nazarian, a famous temperamental playwright, is ordered to plead guilty to a case, he demands to see the “big bad boss of the joint,” and confronts Alex in the middle of the office:

Nazarian: Blond bitches like you have always had it in for me.

So, what is it, honey? You hate men?

Alex: I’m in the middle of a trial, otherwise I would stick around and chat. [turns and walks away]

Nazarian: Yeah, the lesbians will rejoice tonight [Alex turns around, smirks, and then walks away]. You’ve nailed Nazarian’s testicles to your front door. You know, one of these days someone’s going to give you a good strong smack in the mouth to remind you what you are, and I hope it’s me. You’re gonna love it!

This conversation is interesting on a number of levels, first because it focuses upon the notion that women in positions of power are “bitches” and seek to emasculate men. In “The Gendered Workplace,” Michael Kimmel discusses the notion that women in power are often held to a higher standard, and then seen as unfeminine if they break through the “glass ceiling” that holds many women in jobs they are overqualified for (2004, 263). Kimmel’s notions about gender and the workplace can be applied to the character of Alex as well, since everyone, both the viewers and characters within the show, seems unwilling to accept a young woman in a position of political power. This scene is also significant

because it finally acknowledges the possibility that Alex can be read as a lesbian outside of the butch/femme construct she existed within on *SVU*.

Clearly, some fans were happier about the exchange than others, as some lamented that it took years for someone to call Alex a lesbian, and it had to be a misogynistic lunatic. Janice1950, a poster who had previously discussed her dislike for the series, offered a positive comment on the episode at the *Conviction* board at *Television Without Pity*:

I really liked this ep. It was vastly superior, IMO, to the previous eps. I got to see some of the "Old Alex" do her amazing stuff in the courtroom. Smirk, snark, glasses of power and justice, intelligence, beauty, fashion sense....and later she gets called a lesbian!! What more could I ask for!!

Not everyone was convinced, however; in a debate about the exchange in the Live Journal Alex_Liv_Lovers community, poster me_llamo_lolita replies in a thread simply entitled "!!!!!!":

The lesbian accusation lit up my life, but the rest of the episode was just NOT Alex. The old Alex would never trade a rapist's freedom for an immaterial witness, especially RIGHT under the nose of another colleague. She's a super-straight, alpha-bitch on this show and we all know that's not our Alex. Olivia needs to come and sweep her off her feet again! (Well...when she gets off her maternity leave...)

Andrus dark concurs with: "I hate this new Alex Cabot. I don't care if she is gorgeous, sexy and all. She is a bitch. I want the old one back." I argue that the Alex Cabot the posters long for is not one who has ever existed onscreen, but rather one who has been created by the fans. During her early seasons on *SVU*, Alex Cabot was called a "bitch" by several characters, and her personality was very similar to her portrayal on *Conviction*. While it is certainly powerful for fans to take ownership of a character in this manner, it becomes a problem when fans let stereotypical ideas about gender cloud their judgment. Perhaps instead of simply dismissing "the new Alex Cabot" as an "alpha-bitch," fans should examine what it means for women to express such views about the female characters they so closely identify with.

Female lawyers are often undefined figures in television, as Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan explain in "Lilah Morgan: Whedon's Legal Femme Fatale" (2010). In their discussion of Lilah Morgan, a lawyer from the drama, *Angel*, they argue that the female lawyer occupies an interesting space in television. As they point out, "the legal profession remained largely closed to women until the twentieth century, so the female lawyer's character has developed chiefly in the visual medium of film and most especially on television. (2010, 53). The authors explain that Lilah is frequently described as a "bitch" throughout the run of the series. As previously noted, Alex Cabot faced the same description throughout her tenure at *SVU*, when she was frequently referred to as a bitch, typically by suspects who were upset with her prosecutorial tactics ("Asunder," "Vulnerable," "Loss"). Like Lilah, whom Sutherland and Swan state

“wears the mantel’ [of bitch] with pride, knowing that it reflects upon her strength” (58), Alex Cabot is never offended when she is referred to as a “bitch.” In fact, she typically smiles or smirks at this name, as though she is proud of her behavior. Operating in direct contrast to Olivia’s sympathetic, motherly nature, Alex Cabot, particularly in the early seasons of *SVU*, serves as a different kind of woman in law enforcement. What is confusing about audience response to Alex is that, although her reputation as a “bitch” was clear on *SVU*, she is rarely described in this manner in fan fiction, and fans revolted against this portrayal of her on *Conviction*—where, perhaps her “bitchiness” was even more pronounced, since she was in a position of power. This disparity between textual representation and fan perception is very useful when analyzing how fans—particularly female fans—read female characters. Is Alex’s behavior simply a product of a masculine version of a female lawyer—something which can be erased when re-written by female fans?

Alex Cabot: Return to *SVU*

When Stephanie March returned to the series in mid-season ten, it was as if *Conviction* had never happened. When she and Olivia were reunited, there was no explanation of her absence. There was also no explanation or reference to *Conviction*, and Alex’s fiancé was never mentioned again. This non-explanation is certainly typical within the procedural crime drama, as the crime-solvers are nearly interchangeable with one other, and the viewer’s emphasis is always on the crime, not on the law enforcers. In interviews surrounding her return to *SVU*, even March seemed unsure how long Alex had been in the

Witness Protection program, since descriptions of “Lead,” her return episode, dismissed *Conviction* completely. In interviews, Stephanie March does not mention her time on *Conviction*, she simply acts as though it never occurred. This omission is certainly curious, because *Conviction* is readily available in numerous outlets, such as Hulu.com and on DVD.

However, fans seem to have forgotten *Conviction*, and, for the moment, appeared to accept March back to the show. She appeared in seasons ten and eleven, where she was added to the credits once again. Her relationship with Olivia continued to be discussed among fans. March left the series again at the end of season eleven (“Witness”) to accept an appointment in Africa to work with hate crime victims there. This willingness to accept such a position shows a growth in the character of Alex; she began as a politician who was not concerned with victims’ feelings, but she ended that role by leaving her job to do humanitarian work. Certainly, the Alex Cabot of seasons ten and eleven was a kinder, less “bitchy” character; perhaps this softening was due to her time as a victim. As discussed in chapter two, Alex’s time in Witness Protection placed her in the category of victim, a space she was not comfortable with. March’s departure, once again, was left open-ended. As a result, fans on TWoP and in several Alex/Olivia Yahoo! Discussion groups still regularly discuss her possible return, hoping that she will be seen once again before the close of the series.

In conclusion, this chapter looks at a specific fan community’s fascination with two characters from a long-running crime drama. What is extremely interesting about this community is their resistance to accepting versions of a

specific character who are given to them. Instead, they encourage one another to create and write about their own versions of the characters of Alex and Olivia. By taking a close look at this community, we are able to see how fans guard their characters, and they show immediate resistance to a character's action which has disrupted their own view of her. This discussion raises interesting questions about textual ownership, women's writing, and fan fiction, which will be addressed in chapter five.

Chapter 5

“Nothing Happens Unless First a Dream”:

Female Fandom, Narrative Play, and the Alternate Universes of *Bones*

"We should certainly avoid celebrating a process that commodifies fan cultural production and sells it back to us with a considerable markup."

– Henry Jenkins (“The Future of Fandom” 362)

In the tradition of *Remington Steele* and *Moonlighting*, the current Fox series *Bones* aims to be more than just a crime procedural, striving for a mix between drama and romantic comedy. At the center of *Bones* is the relationship between forensic anthropologist Temperance “Bones” Brennan (Emily Deschanel) and her partner, FBI Agent Seeley Booth (David Boreanaz). In this chapter, I will discuss the way *Bones* creator Hart Hanson manipulates conventional storytelling methods to explore a romantic relationship between the two lead characters without disrupting the larger narrative of the program. I argue that Hanson borrows narrative techniques that fan fiction writers have been using for decades—techniques which allow fans to create their own stories without disrupting the narrative flow of the primary text. In doing so, I propose that Hanson co-opts the writing of female fans—writing which is often trivialized and dismissed—for his own purpose.

Bones serves as an interesting contrast to many crime dramas which have been discussed throughout this dissertation. Although Brennan does fall into the pattern of the lonely, socially awkward female crime-solver discussed in chapter two, she is also independent and self-sufficient. *Bones* has never placed Brennan in the position of a victim of sexual violence, unlike many of her female

counterparts. While she has been a victim of kidnapping, her partner, Booth, has also been a kidnap victim. When Booth has been kidnapped, he has been rescued by Brennan, and vice versa. Indeed, *Bones* not only refuses to perpetuate the stereotypes of the female crime-solver mentioned in other shows, it also actively refutes them. While the character of Brennan is associated with science and logic, Booth is associated with emotion and religion. This difference is a clear rejection of the association of emotion with the feminine and logic with the masculine. By actively disrupting this binary, *Bones* operates within a feminist framework.

Not only does *Bones* actively disrupt gender constructs, it also disrupts linear thought. This play with non-linear time first becomes evident in the fourth season finale, "The End in the Beginning," or "EitB." This episode portrays an alternate reality in which Brennan and Booth, who are not romantically paired on the show, are shown as a happily married couple. Furthermore, "EitB" places both full and recurring characters in an alternative universe, creating a dream-like reality for them to operate within. Hanson followed up the romantic tension created in "EitB" in the fifth season episode, "The Parts in the Sum of the Whole," in which the audience was presented with a different type of alternate universe: an episode which, through flashbacks, told of Brennan and Booth's first meeting. In both scenarios, Hanson did what he cannot do within the narrative structure of the show: place the two lead characters in a romantic relationship.

Hanson's attempts to play with narrative structure and time are remarkably similar to the techniques of writers of fan fiction, who often place romantic

pairings in situations which do not occur within the actual series. Through his narrative play, Hanson has found a way to give fans what (he believes) they want, while continuing to present a weekly show which builds on his characters' unresolved sexual tension. Furthermore, Hanson complicates the already tense relationship between producer and fan, since he appears to be using the tools of both. Finally, Hanson is working against the linear aspect of television and disrupting narrative flow. In doing so, he perpetuates the notion that television is fragmented, multi-voiced, and feminine—a notion argued by Joyrich (1996) and others.

Internet Communities and TV Fandom

One of the most popular cultural productions of fan communities is fan fiction. Loosely defined by fan scholar Sheenagh Pugh as “fiction based on a situation and characters created by someone else” (2005, 9), fan fiction serves as a way for fans to work through their own expectations and desires for their favorite fictional characters. Although early fan fiction was distributed through mailing lists and fanzines, the Internet has allowed for endless fan communities to develop, communicate with one another with ease, and to share their work. Fan scholars often reference Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* as a starting point for this research. In this foundational text, Radway examines the reactions that various women have to romance novels, and attempts to learn why women continue to become involved in works that can be seen as misogynistic. More importantly, she argues that the romance novels can be read as texts with multiple meanings:

[. . .] whatever the theoretical possibility of an infinite number of readings, in fact, there are patterns or regularities to what viewers and readers bring to texts in large part because they acquire specific cultural competencies as a consequence of their particular social location. Similar readings are produced... because similarly located readers learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes that they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter. (1991,8)

Therefore, the meaning of the text does not come from the original author, but from the group interpreting it. This principle is also found in Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Bacon-Smith 1992), as she takes an ethnographic approach to women who have formed *Star Trek* fan clubs to discuss their multiple interpretations of the series. Unlike the women profiled in Bacon-Smith's writing, the Internet now allows fans to trade fan fiction, fan videos, etc., more quickly, not having to wait until a convention or until their fan fiction arrives through a mailed newsletter. Furthermore, open Internet communities allow viewers to dabble in fan culture without needing to take the time or expense of traveling to a fan convention or meeting.

In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Jenkins 1992), fan scholar Henry Jenkins combines many of the ethnographic approaches used within the work of Radway and Bacon-Smith and applies them to a fan community of which he is a member. Jenkins—who is, among other

things, a *Star Trek* fan—traces the history of fan culture from an insider perspective. His work echoes that of Radway as he discusses the impact that groups have upon the reading of texts: “Fan reception cannot and does not exist in isolation, but is always shaped through input from other fans and motivated, at least partially, by a desire for further interaction with a larger cultural community” (Jenkins 1992, 76). This statement is important not only because it highlights the notion that groups of fans form collective readings of texts, but it emphasizes the social aspect of fandom. As Jenkins explains in the first chapter of his text, fans are often encouraged to “get a life” and to dismiss their fannish pursuits (1992, 9-49). Jenkins’s work dismisses that notion by explaining that fan culture is neither lonely nor isolating, but rather, it is a social atmosphere in which relationships and connections are formed.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Internet fan communities into the study of popular culture is not always an easy one, as Nancy K. Baym discusses in *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*. In her text, she comments on her personal experiences as a soap opera fan and graduate student posting in a soap opera online discussion group primarily dedicated to the discussion of *All My Children*. While she claims that her work is ethnographic and follows in the tradition of Radway’s work, she also states that ethnographic definitions of community are not always applicable when discussing groups of Internet users, since ethnographers have often placed too many limitations on their definitions of community (2000, 18-19). Perhaps by studying the interaction of posters on various online communities, a new methodology will eventually appear, one

which understands that folk groups and communities are not always bound by language or location.

Baym's notion that Internet communities challenge concepts of temporality is also an interesting one. Certainly, TV fans, for example, can chat with one another during or immediately following the broadcast of an episode, creating both a sense of immediacy and intimacy among the community members. Internet discussion boards, however, may also be viewed by newcomers to the fandom months, even years, after their original postings. Thus, many discussion boards serve as a place for timely discussion and as an archive of fans' thoughts and reactions to a particular episode or storyline. Baym appears to believe that Internet communities have changed the way in which audiences are viewed, and perhaps this will lead to a difference in the way these communities are studied: "In short, even if one wanted to find a nicely bounded, self-defined audience community of interrelated members, it has not been easy. The Internet has changed that, in part by making audience communities more visible and in part by enabling their proliferation" (2000, 19).

Although much scholarship exists in the realm of television fan communities and fan production, little has been produced discussing fan relationship to crime dramas. This lack of scholarship is surprising, given their popularity and longevity. In *Prime Time Law Enforcement*, author James Carlson explains that crime shows have risen in popularity over the last twenty-five years. Carlson argues that viewers expect their shows to follow a specific formula: "Each program must include a crime, someone who commits it, someone who is

victimized by it, and someone to bring the criminal to justice” (1985, 32). This predictably is certainly one of the reasons why the procedural crime drama is so popular; the viewer receives satisfaction when justice is brought to the criminal. Crime dramas rarely play with narrative time; they—in the tradition of the crime novel, to which many current TV crime dramas, including *Bones*, owe a great debt—follow a strict formula which allows for little deviation. This tight format also allows each episode to stand alone, thereby making crime dramas popular in syndication, since they do not have to be watched in sequence or with prior knowledge of the program. This lack of serialization, however, works against the development of the main characters. Fans of these shows, therefore, often take it upon themselves to fill in the gaps, creating “personal” lives for their favorite characters through fan fiction. Fan communities for such programs are often very difficult to analyze, however. Episodic, rather than serial, crime dramas tend to lead to a broad audience, from viewers who only watch on a periodic basis to those who immerse themselves within the fan culture surrounding a specific show. Whereas a cult program, for example, may have a very targeted audience—and, consequently, an easily identifiable and centralized fan community – the audience of the episodic crime drama is far more difficult to determine.

Alternate Universe I: The End in the Beginning

In March 2009, Emily Deschanel and David Boreanaz appeared on the cover of *TV Guide* with the headline “He’s Just that Into Her.” In the article, which operates under the premise that *Bones* and *Booth* will “seal the deal in May,” the

actors are questioned about how “Booth and Brennan are moving from the lab to the bedroom” (Keeps 2009, 29). Interestingly, Deschanel mentions that her favorite TV couples are Liz Lemon and Jack Donaghy from sitcom *30 Rock* and Olivia Benson and Elliot Stabler from *Law & Order: SVU*. Although both pairings maintain significant fan followings, neither are romantically paired within the text of their respective shows. Along with this article, the actors appeared on a variety of different talk shows and media outlets during the season, always proclaiming the same “party line”—that the season would end with the characters in bed together.

As previously mentioned, *Bones* focuses on the partnership of FBI Special Agent Seeley Booth and forensic anthropologist Temperance Brennan. Partially based on the life of author Kathy Reichs—forensic anthropologist and creator of the *Temperance Brennan* crime novels—*Bones* takes on many characteristics prevalent in crime dramas. Each episode stands alone, and character development is often secondary to crime-solving. As with most crime dramas, the lead characters are supported by a larger cast of characters: Dr. Camille Saroyan (Tamara Taylor), forensic pathologist and head of the Forensic Division of the Jeffersonian; Angela Montenegro (Michaela Conlin), Brennan’s closest friend and an artist who uses her talent to reconstruct the faces of crime victims; Dr. Jack Hodgins (T. J. Thyne), an entomologist who specializes in “bugs and slime”; Zack Addy (Eric Millegan), Brennan’s doctoral student and assistant, who, in later seasons, is replaced by a revolving door of various interns; and Dr. Lance Sweets (John Francis Daley), a psychologist added to the cast in later seasons,

both to serve as a criminal profiler and to study the relationship between Brennan and Booth for his own research on workplace dynamics. Although the characters are more developed than some on procedural crime dramas, such as those within the *CSI* and *Law & Order* franchises, in most episodes, the personal lives of the characters are secondary to the “crime of the week.” At times, however, *Bones* does delve into the personal lives of its characters. In the episodes leading up to “EitB,” Booth experienced several hallucinations. In the episode directly preceding “EitB,” Booth entered the hospital to have brain surgery, since it was revealed that he had been suffering from a brain tumor. It was with this anticipation that “EitB” was greeted by fans.

From the first scene, “EitB” is clearly not a typical episode of *Bones*. It begins (and ends) with a voiceover narration by Hodgins. His introductory voiceover, heard as Brennan is shown climbing into Booth’s bed, alerts the viewer that this episode will be unique:

People say you only live once, but people are as wrong about that as they are about everything. In the darkest moments before dawn, a woman returns to her bed. What life is she leading? Is it the same life the woman was living half an hour ago? A day ago? A year ago? Who is this man? Do they lead separate lives, or is a single life shared?

Hodgins’ commentary questions the boundaries of time, hinting at the possibility of alternate universes. Furthermore, his words give the viewer permission (not

that permission is needed, of course), to view this episode outside of the narrative space and time of the series.

Indeed, the universe presented in “EitB,” is quite unique. The characters exist in an alternate reality where, instead of working in the forensic laboratory at the fictitious Jeffersonian Institute, they work at a nightclub called “The Lab.” The fourth season interns, along with the main characters and some frequent guest characters, play a unique role in this universe. The characters within “EitB” are all intriguing; for the most part, they are either similar to the real characters or (in another referential sense), direct opposites of them. Uptight intern Clark, for example, is a flamboyant rap artist; globe-trotting artist Angela struggles with visual aids and geography. On the other hand, Zack, as in “real life,” is revealed to be “the kind of guy who would go away for a crime he didn’t commit” (a fact unbeknownst to anyone outside of Sweets, and, of course, the audience), and Sweets is a bartender, which he concludes is “practically a psychologist.” Hodgins, our narrator, is a “best-selling pulp crap crime novelist.” Booth and Brennan’s relationship stays the same—although they are not “crime-solvers,” they still attempt to solve a murder committed in their nightclub. While doing so, they operate in the same fashion familiar to viewers; Booth operates from a place of emotion, while Brennan operates from a place of logic. The only change to this partnership—which is always a refreshing reversal of gender stereotypes—is their marriage. “EitB” allows the viewers to see how Booth and Brennan would exist simply as a couple.

At the end, the episode is revealed to be a combination of Booth's comatose dream and Brennan's most recent novel, which she is writing and reading aloud to Booth while sitting at his hospital bedside. In the last moment of "EitB," Booth awakens only to ask Brennan quizzically, "Who are you?" This ending, like the rest of the episode, led to a great deal of discussion and outrage amongst fans. Furthermore, it spawned a great deal of fan fiction from authors who were unsure what Booth's final comment really meant. When season six began, would he have amnesia? If so, how would this affect the show?

In order to understand the way in which "EitB" borrows from cult fandom, one must first understand the impetus behind the creation of fan fiction. In "So, What's the Story? Story-Oriented Fans and Series-Oriented Fans: A Complex of Behaviors," Internet and TV fan scholar Mary Kirby-Diaz addresses fan fiction:

Fans write fan fiction to 'correct' what they perceive as poor script writing and incorrect characterization, to deepen a relationship they'd like to see—or see subtextually, on the shows they are engaged in, and to amuse/entertain themselves and other fans.... Consequently, fans who would like to see particular relationships occur—or who want to read more about a particular relationship, will search for, read, and sometimes write fan fiction. Fan fiction—which is available on the Internet, for free—thus reinforces 'ship loyalty.' (2009, 69)

Fan fiction serves as a way for fans to create romantic narratives for their favorite TV couples—regardless of whether the characters are actually a couple within

the text of the TV show. It also serves as a way to play with time, and to reimagine new or different realities for one's favorite fictional characters. Pugh concurs, describing alternate universe fiction (AU), as one of the various types of fan fiction, along with "sequels, prequels, crossovers, and missing scenes" (2005, 47), which plays with narrative time and structure. While some of these genres simply add to an existing canon, the AU fic complicates time in a different way:

AU's, in some fandoms, are known as 'what ifs.' They are deliberate departures from canon; what if this, and not that, had happened. [...] The name 'AU' comes from the idea, familiar in futuristic fiction, that there might be any number of parallel universes in which the same people live out different destinies.

(2005, 61)

Pugh further acknowledges that "the idea that one man might have different potential fates... is a lot older than science fiction," but is a common literary trope (2005, 61). These descriptions of alternate universe fiction mirror Hodgins' voiceover at the beginning of "EitB," as he reminds the viewers that characters can lead multiple lives and have multiple realities. Like authors of alternate reality fan fiction (or fan videos), in "EitB," Hanson takes his own characters and places them in another created universe, while continually referring back to the original text. By doing so, he both stretches the boundaries of the procedural crime drama, and also achieves his goal of placing the two lead characters in a romantic relationship. Furthermore, he acknowledges to fans that he is aware of their writing techniques. *Bones* fan fiction abounds on the Internet, and Hanson is

acutely aware of the *Bones*' fan base, engaging with them at conventions and on Twitter. In fact, Hanson is so known for his engagement with fans through his Twitter account that he was profiled in a *Los Angeles Times* article about celebrities who Twitter, described as "an active Twitterer known for his gently ironic on-set updates and affectionate exchanges with the show's hard-core fans" (Collins 2009, par. 2).

After the airing of "EitB," Hanson spoke to *TV Guide* again, claiming that he did not technically lie when stating Bones and Booth would consummate their relationship: "It wasn't an out-an-out lie...It [the alternate reality] was a strange combination of two people's experiences—a book Brennan wrote and then deleted and a dream in Booth's head" (Keck 2009, 21). Despite this explanation, both Hanson and *TV Guide* writer, William Keck, admitted to receiving many "nasty emails" (Keck 2009, 21) about the episode after its airing. Hanson believed "EitB" served a purpose within the larger context of the series, however, and remains undeterred by negative fan response. He maintained that "EitB" marked a significant development in Booth and Brennan's relationship, as "they can no longer pretend that there is not something in them that is screaming out for that alternate reality" (21). However, he claimed that although fans claim to want Booth and Brennan together, this might not be the case: "Fans desperately want it, but if they get what they want, they could be very, very disappointed" (21). Hanson's comments were not well-received by fans, who still maintained that Hanson did not deliver on his promise to place Booth and Brennan together in the season finale.

Hanson's dismissive, paternalistic attitude toward fans continued at the *Bones* panel during the 2009 Comic Con. Clearly nervous and prepared to, once again, defend "EitB," Hanson proclaimed:

I always saw the season finale... as a love letter to our loyal fans... The season finale was full of inside jokes and layers and echoes from our four seasons and with the extra added blitz to see what it might look like if Booth and Brennan were a married couple. Also, I think with a lot of the other characters, we kind of showed what they're like inside... In retrospect, I hope the season finale will become more and more likable to our loyal fans, although I think our loyal fans got it. The people who tune in every once in a while didn't like it as much, and boy did I hear from them.

Hanson's distinction between "loyal fans" and casual viewers is troubling. Certainly, casual viewers would not, as he states, send him messages through Twitter. The notion that "EitB" was, in fact, not as well-received by fans seems to be one that he cannot accept. Although the proliferation of discussion boards within the *Bones* fandom make it nearly impossible to gauge fan response, an examination of 206 Bones, a popular Live Journal fan community, shows that many fans were not pleased. Immediately following the episode, one poster expressed her frustration to community members by directly addressing Hanson:

Dear Hart Hanson, That was, without a doubt, one of the worst season finales. That was the big cliffhanger? "Who are you?" I know you don't care, because, really, why should you? But

honestly, the fans have spoken. THAT WAS HORRIBLE. NO LOVE. Me.

The post was quickly followed up with a brief rebuttal by another poster, who simply stated, “Well, I’m a fan and I liked it, just so you know...” This exchange, like many within the community, is useful. Both posters identify themselves as fans of the show, the first taking it upon herself to speak for “the fans.” (When the first fan’s opinion was challenged, however, she immediately followed up by stating that she was “ranting”). Furthermore, this brief exchange is useful in that it shows an awareness of production, and also resists it. The poster directly challenges Hanson, operating on a level which shows she is aware of his role within the series.

While Hanson’s assumption is that true fans did not “get” the episode, this seems to be untrue; instead, they felt misled by his earlier statements that the season finale would end with the characters together. Fans of the show would surely appreciate an episode filled with clever inside references and a unique perspective. However, the downfall of this episode is not in its disruption of the traditional crime narrative format, but the misleading publicity surrounding the outcome of the episode.

Alternate Universe II: The Parts in the Sum of the Whole

In “The Parts of the Sum of the Whole,” the 100th episode of the series, Hanson tries to repair some of the damage done to the fan base through “EitB.” “Parts” serves as a follow-up episode to “EitB”—even more so than the similarly titled “The Beginning in the End,”—since it is filled with references to “EitB.” Like

“EitB,” “Parts” plays with narrative time and structure, borrows from fan writing, and serves as a vehicle to place the two lead characters in a romantic relationship. Instead of the alternate universe of *The Lab*, however, “Parts” takes place as a re-created flashback—the story of Booth and Brennan’s first meeting. Because the characters already knew one another in the pilot episode, “Parts” serves as a way to construct their meeting, as well as to offer more background story on the other members of the Jeffersonian team. Sweets, as a late addition to the cast, functions as a representative of the audience, as Brennan and Booth recount their meeting and first case to him. Sweets has finished a book about Brennan and Booth, and (like the fan writers and viewers themselves) made his assumptions about their relationship without knowing the dynamics of their first case. He begins the episode by explaining his conclusion to Booth and Brennan: “the two of you are in love, and the sublimating energies of that connection are responsible for the energy, rigor, and vigor that you bring to your homicide investigations” (“Parts”). Within their flashback, Booth and Brennan openly address their attraction to each other, discuss the possibility of starting a romantic relationship, and share a kiss. With these actions, their characters bring to light the discussions which typically do not exist within the parameters of a crime drama, but instead, exist as a subtext which is developed by fans. Through this play with narrative time, fans are given a window into Booth and Brennan’s past relationship that they did not have before; a glimpse which supports the theory that they have always been attracted to one another.

Although, like “EitB,” “Parts” includes a murder mystery, it is secondary to the development of the characters. This is rare, because character development typically is secondary within crime dramas. As noted earlier, this lack of development opens a space for fans to create their own backstories for their characters, but these stories can often be contradicted within the canon of the series. This chance for contradiction is high after an episode like “Parts” – one that attempts to fill in narrative gaps of the series. Numerous fans have already written fan fiction which recounts the characters’ pre-series interaction; such stories could be negated by the canonization of “Parts.” After all, not only does “Parts” provide more development of the Booth/Brennan relationship, it also expands on Angela’s introduction to the Jeffersonian, Angela and Brennan’s early friendship, and the formation of the crime-solving unit itself.

“Parts” differs from “EitB” in one important way, however. Instead of the unsatisfactory ending of “EitB,” the break in narrative time in “Parts” is actually used to move the larger narrative forward. At the end of the show, Sweets (again, operating as a surrogate viewer/fan), urges Booth and Brennan to act upon their feelings for each other. Poised in front of a structure displaying the Carl Sandberg quotation, “Nothing Happens Unless First a Dream,” Booth urges Brennan to reconsider their relationship. (This quotation, a direct reference to “EitB,” serves as yet another inside reference for fans.) Although Brennan rejects Booth’s proposal of a romantic relationship, the characters share a kiss. More importantly, they have acknowledged what was previously only subtext: a romantic connection.

Because it was marketed to viewers differently than “EitB,” “Parts” was met with positive fan reception. However, I argue that it poses interesting questions for fans and fan-writers. While the history of the characters once belonged to fans, it is now, like the present, in the hands of production. While it could be argued that Hanson *borrowed heavily* from fan techniques for “EitB,” it did not disrupt fan writing in the way that “Parts” must. By proposing a new history for the characters, “Parts” negates fan fiction which attempts to create a history for the characters before the pilot episode of the series, thus relegating it to the realm of “alternate reality.” How should fans react to the re-writing of the history of a television program? What happens when fan writing contradicts the narrative text?

It is crucial to examine this interplay between producer and fan within the larger context of desire. Pugh comments that, “A fan fiction writer of [her] acquaintance once remarked, on an unarchived mailing list, that people wrote fanfic because they wanted either “more of” their source material or “more from” it (2005, 19). This need for “more of” certainly resonates with authors in crime drama fandom; as I have discussed, they often provide character development that goes unnoticed within the context of the series. Unlike the *SVU* fan community, who produce both heterosexual fan fiction for Olivia and Elliot, and Olivia and Alex femslash—discussed at length in the previous chapter—this is not the case with the *Bones* fandom. Indeed, the most popular *Bones* fan fiction communities on Live Journal, as well as an examination of Fan Fiction.net, the most popular archival site fanfic, both show that *Bones* fan fiction is comprised

predominantly of romantic heterosexual stories about the pairing of Booth and Bones. There are important questions about heterosexual privilege here. The authors of Alex/Olivia fanfic are aware that their fiction will never be materialized onscreen; they are authoring a pairing which has no chance of becoming part of the *SVU* canon. Just as the early fanfic Kirk/Spock writers discussed in Bacon-Smith's text, *SVU* fans write with no expectation of seeing their work onscreen. *Bones* fans—specifically, Booth/Bones fans—write with a different expectation. They are not authoring a pairing which has no chance of existing on screen; on the contrary, they have every reason to believe their pairing will one day materialize. Therefore, their motivations for writing are not the same as those who write against the invisibility of queer characters—as discussed in chapter one—but because they feel that the crime drama genre limits the stories which can be told.

Pugh connects this desire not to queer invisibility, however, but to the desire that women have to write about relationships. When discussing women's fanfic about characters in science fiction and crime dramas, Pugh argues that women missed the emotion and the character development which was lacking in these shows:

But by and large, what the women liked were the characters (at least the male ones, for back in the 70s female characters in such series tended to be awfully vapid) and the relationships between them. What they wanted was the development of that; what they

got from most scriptwriters was space battles, car chases, and other assorted frenetic “action”. (2005, 20)

Pugh’s comments speak to the desires of female fans of male-centered programs, such as crime dramas and science fiction shows. She argues that, “Some fans, often female, wanted the action to slow down enough to give the characters and relationships time to evolve; they wanted more overt emotion and personal interaction than the scriptwriters were giving them” (20). Pugh’s statements speak directly to the reaction *Bones* fans had to these two episodes—episodes which broke away from the traditional format and offered them character development. While some fans certainly did enjoy this diversion, certainly, others felt that the personal lives of the characters were better off in the hands of the fan fiction writers; after all, it was the fan fiction writers who had been dealing with their emotions and personal relationships for years.

Undoubtedly, much fan writing exists for fans to create their own romantic scenarios for their favorite onscreen pairings. Perhaps these questions belong to a larger framework of discussions about textual ownership and technology. Certainly, “The End in the Beginning” and “The Parts of the Sum of the Whole” both play with concepts of time and narrative. This play raises questions about the limits of fan fiction and audience participation. Furthermore, it disrupts traditional ideas of authorship, text, and narrative. Most importantly, this narrative play allows *Bones* to move beyond the framework of the traditional procedural crime drama and into the realm of cult television status.

Conclusion: The Future of the Televiewing Experience

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, one of the difficulties of writing about both current television programs and about Internet communities is temporality, since both are always changing. As I conclude this dissertation, many of the shows I discussed within it are still in production, and many others will be in syndication for years, perhaps decades, to come. Furthermore, since I began my initial investigations into the convergence of television and the Internet in 2005, I have noticed a steady growth of participation in Internet fan communities. This growth continues to lead to more scholarship which addresses the role of the Internet on the future of the televiewing experience. Along with the integration of new media within television, I have also addressed the representation of women and of queer bodies in crime drama. I argue that this representation has slowly become more positive, but that there is still progress to be made.

In "TV.com: Participatory Viewing on the Web," June Deery concludes that "There is little doubt that a closer link between television and the computer is coming. What also seems certain is that the convergence of our era's two most significant media will require a more complex understanding of what is meant by 'the viewer' and 'the television text'" (2003, 179). This sentiment is echoed in Sharon Marie Ross's *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (2008). Within her text, Ross looks at the growing participatory nature of television viewing and the way in which television viewing is now linked to participation in Internet communities. While such communities used to be created by fans and correlated

with audiences which existed surrounding the “cult TV show” (18), Ross argues that this dynamic has changed, because networks are now creating their own spaces for audience involvement:

Tele-participation has become an increasingly critical element in industrial strategies to capture the ever splintering audience, as well as a crucial element in viewers’ expectations for television. The Internet, meeting television and meeting the viewer, is a most important part of this historical reconfiguration of television in the broadest sense. (18)

Ross’s observations are critical; while the integration of Internet participation and the televiewing experience was once left in the realm of the fan—and thus, occurring in fan created spaces—it now also occurs in the hands of television production. Indeed, television viewers expect that networks will integrate their favorite TV shows with online content, whether it be episodes streaming on a network Web site, discussion boards housed by the network, or original content produced simply for an online audience—for example, several shows, such as *The Office* and *30 Rock*, have created “Webisodes” simply for online viewers. This shift in the creation of online materials is, I believe, not lost on fans. One need only to examine the changes to Television Without Pity (TWoP), a fan created discussion board discussed at great length in this work to see this shift. In the course of writing this dissertation, TWoP was purchased by Bravo TV, a cable channel owned by NBC/Universal; this purchase emphasizes the importance television corporations now give to Internet discussion outlets—

outlets that they would have dismissed a decade ago. The co-option of fandom by production is addressed in chapter five, and is an issue that I believe will continue to be crucial in the study of the relationship between television fandom and new media technologies.

Because of this changing media, many of the arguments that the television scholars discussed in chapter one will lose power. For example, as mentioned, early TV scholars often focused on programming and “televisional flow,” a term used to discuss network programming as a whole, instead of as a single TV show. With the prevalence of instant viewing through network Web sites, through Hulu and other streaming services, and through online file-sharing of episodes between members of fan communities, this argument for the importance of the television schedule seems outdated at best. Furthermore, the availability of TV shows on DVD—and, consequently, through media like Netflix, which is associated with films—adds to the credibility of TV, although this credibility is contingent on an argument discussed within the “quality television” debates of the 1980’s discussed in chapter one. Today, this discussion manifests itself in a slightly different, but still insidious way; no doubt, we have all heard someone state, “I don’t watch TV, but I’ve watched every episode of *The Wire* (or *The Sopranos*, or *Arrested Development*, or *Lost*...) on Netflix.” This equation of television with film both privileges and demeans it, harkening back to Robert Thompson’s claims that some television shows in the 1980’s, such as *Hill Street Blues* and *St. Elsewhere*, were “quality” television—thus, implying all other television is not.

Along with the increasing relationship between media that I've discussed, the representation of women and of queer bodies is also continually changing. As I point out in chapter two, there are significant differences in the way in which *Cagney and Lacey* was perceived by earlier audiences and the way in which, thirty years later, shows like *Rizzoli and Isles* are received. It is significant to note that the newer crime dramas which have focused upon lead female characters, such as *In Plain Sight*, *The Closer*, *The Protector*, and *Rizzoli & Isles*, are all produced by basic cable networks. This move to basic cable can be viewed in a variety of ways. First of all, it is certainly positive that some networks have taken chances on female-driven crime shows, because they know that that the audience is there to view them. However, it can also be seen as a form of the "pink ghetto"—a move to remove female-centered programming from the major networks, and to place it on more specialized cable channels. This movement leads to decreased access to these shows, as well as to lower pay for those involved in the production of the show. Consequently, this movement could be seen as inevitable, or it could be seen as yet another way in which network TV still privileges the male-led crime drama.

It is important to note here that, in a discussion of gendered television, much of the scholarship surrounding the representation of women on television, as well as female audiences, focuses on the soap opera. As I conclude this project, the soap opera is currently discussed within the media as a dying art. Upon the April, 2011 announcement that the long-running ABC soap operas *All*

My Children and *One Life to Live* would soon be cancelled, the *Chicago Tribune* addressed this subject:

Once a dominant source of escapism for tens of millions of women, the soap opera genre is losing ground to scores of cable TV networks, the Internet and social media. The latest victims: "All My Children" and "One Life to Live," which are being canceled by ABC and replaced with lower-cost lifestyle shows. (James 2011, par. 1-2)

Although it may seem strange to end a dissertation based on television crime dramas with a discussion of the soap opera, this change in television programming speaks to several of the themes which I have discussed in this work. Throughout this dissertation, I have focused on several aspects of the televiewing experience: the representation of gender and sexuality within television, the audience response to those representations, and the producer reaction to audience reaction (or, in the case of *Cagney & Lacey*, perceived audience reaction). All of these aspects unite not only in the discussion of televised crime drama, but also in the space of the soap opera.

The above statement about the cancellation of *All My Children* and *One Life to Live* not only addresses the gendered audience of these shows—and thus, speaks to the changing roles of women in America—but it also addresses the role of new media, cable television, and the televiewing experience. *Time* also addresses this changing form of media, and connects it to a larger desire within our culture:

The reversal for the soap, a genre that has been reliable for so long, seems to be due partly to the popularity of reality TV, and, beyond that, our tabloid culture. Soap operas, after all, are about immersion in the details and drama of a set of people's lives. But they're no longer alone in that. The *Real Housewives* shows, for instance, indirectly compete for the same mind space, offering a similar kind of serial storytelling, personal intrigue, and schadenfreude—as do offscreen narratives of the likes of Kate Gosselin and the Kardashians. For too many viewers, soaps are not just an alternative, which is why one of the TV's oldest formats is running out of lives to live. (Poniewozik 2011, 26)

The discussion missing in conversations about the death of the soap opera is one about the importance of women's writing and the scripted, long-term narrative of female characters. Soap operas, far more than any other television genre, are typically written about women for women. To assert that female audiences are equally intrigued by tabloid gossip and reality programming is discounting the value of female writers and producers. Furthermore, it discounts the notion of the women's community who associated with the soap opera; because of their long-term status, generations of women have passed on soap opera viewing habits to their daughters. This type of long-term audience cannot exist for non-scripted reality television.

Furthermore, one must remember that the loss of the soap opera is, to a great extent, a loss of potential scholarship about the female audience. Books

such as Baym's *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community*, discussed in chapter one, were foundational to an understanding of the way in which television viewers interacted with fellow fans online. The combination of audience studies with feminist scholarship is indebted to many soap opera scholars, since soap operas have always been geared toward and written with the female viewer in mind. The contemporary American soap opera is a uniquely female venue, and one that can help us understand the role of women in television, as audience members, viewers, and producers.

This potential loss of a genre of television also speaks to the crime drama. Perhaps it is too optimistic to assume, as I do throughout this dissertation that the crime drama will continue on, both in new shows and throughout syndication, for decades to come. Certainly, if viewers (and, therefore, advertisers), can begin neglecting the soap opera, they could also tire of the crime drama format. As stated in the fifth chapter, fans often miss the character development and romantic storylines which are not fulfilled in crime drama, and seek to create these stories for themselves. Already, it appears that the crime drama is changing; for example, the original *Law & Order* is no longer in production, and recent seasons of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*—the highest rated of the franchise—have relied more on the development of their lead characters in order to retain a faithful audience. Perhaps this shift in focus is emblematic of a larger change to come. If the soap opera truly is dead (or dying), will there be a rise in character-based crime dramas, as an attempt to fulfill this void? Will more fans participate in writing fan fiction as a way to develop characters? These questions

will continue to circulate as long as the fate of the American soap opera is in jeopardy.

Questions of narrative, writing, and voice are central to this dissertation. Perhaps because I have a background in English Literature—specifically, the study of contemporary female authors—this dissertation is concerned with the privileging of one form of writing above another, as well as the co-option of “female” writing techniques that fan fiction authors use. These questions go along with the notion of the female community, but also are at the heart of textual analysis; for fan fiction writers, the canonized text varies in importance, as does the role of authorial intent. As I have shown in chapters four and five, fans are often upset with the direction “their” TV characters take, and they have no qualms about changing this direction within their fan writings. While some fans do take authorial intent seriously—and often establish fandom around certain television writers, such as Joss Whedon and Aaron Sorkin—many dismiss it in favor of their own interpretations of the text. This dismissal of the author and drive for multiple perspectives arises out a postmodern context; a context in which the “death of the author” remains a guiding principle.

One of the challenges presented in this dissertation was simply logistical; while some of the series discussed here have long since ended, the two which are the most prevalent in this work, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and *Bones*, are still in production. This poses some interesting problems when analyzing the series; it is impossible to discuss these shows as a whole because they have not yet ended. Certainly, when both series end, some of my arguments

will need to be revisited. I have attempted to include both older and more recent episodes of these series in my dissertation, particularly in the discussion of *SVU*, because the characters discussed within this text—Olivia Benson and Alex Cabot—changed a great deal since the early seasons of the series. Regardless, one of the challenges of popular culture scholarship as a whole is to make contemporary arguments while simultaneously producing a piece of academic work that will not be dismissed as outdated shortly after publication.

The role of the fan scholar—what Henry Jenkins terms the “aca-fan”—is always both a challenge and a pleasure. Throughout this dissertation, I have written about texts which mean a great deal to me as a fan and which I believe speak to larger issues about gender and sexuality on television. This analysis is complicated by subjectivity; as a fan, I am certainly biased in my choice of texts and of characters I’ve chosen to discuss in great detail. However, I also argue that my category as a fan has been more beneficial than invasive; as a fan, I am not only familiar with the television shows discussed because I have viewed them multiple times, but I am familiar with the larger conversations fans have surrounding these shows. Thus, I am in a position to analyze these texts in a way that would be impossible for an “outsider.” While discussions about positionality of the researcher have occurred in traditional ethnographic research for decades, they still occur within fan studies. While fan scholars are almost overwhelmingly fans of the texts they study, they often sheepishly identify themselves as such, both within their academic and their fan communities. Furthermore, as Jenkins states in “The Future of Fandom,” new technologies are allowing easier access

to participatory behavior, forcing fan scholars to question—again—what it means to be a fan:

And yet, at the end of the day, as fandom becomes such an elastic category, one starts to wonder—who isn't a fan? What doesn't constitute fan culture? Where does grassroots culture end and commercial culture begin? Where does niche media start to blend over into the mainstream? [...] Maybe, as subculture studies folks (Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004) are arguing, there is no longer a centralized or dominant culture against which subcultures define themselves. Maybe there is no typical media consumer against which the cultural otherness of the fan can be located. Perhaps we are all fans or perhaps none of us is. (2009, 363)

While fan studies typically aligned itself with ethnography, since fan groups were read as small communities resistant to the dominant culture, Jenkins argues that with new technology, this alignment may change. So then, I argue, would the way in which fans are studied and categorized within an academic framework.

Another challenge to this dissertation was the simple categorization of the genre of "crime drama." While I have narrowly defined this genre throughout the text, leaning heavily toward the procedural crime drama, it is important to note that the crime drama format can exist in a variety of ways. Most notably, it has recently been combined with the science-fiction format in shows such as *Fringe*, which combines traditional crime drama elements with science fiction aspects. (One could argue that *X-Files* serves as a precursor to this movement; it could

also be noted that *Angel*, which is discussed briefly in chapter five, falls into this category). Furthermore, the medical drama *House*, whose lead character is an intentional successor to Sherlock Holmes, serves as an example of the combination of the crime procedural and the medical drama. In all of these cases, the format of the traditional crime procedural has been successfully combined with another genre. This combination of genres allows for a larger audience, as well as a greater potential for success in syndication; *House*, *Angel*, and *The X-Files* all exist alongside *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *Monk*, and *The Closer* as syndicated episodic dramas. While the majority of these shows are re-broadcast on basic cable networks such as TNT and USA, it is important to note that serialized dramas, such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *Desperate Housewives* are syndicated on the Lifetime Network—the first and largest channel for women. Thus, even within the realm of television basic cable, television viewing is gendered.

Finally, it is necessary to address a change in which audience communities are created and formed. As previously stated throughout this dissertation, television audiences are no longer gathered around the television for “must-see-TV.” Instead, viewers are “pulling” content to themselves whenever it is convenient for them. As Amanda Lotz discusses in *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (2007), viewers now exist in a “post-network” era where the DVR, torrent-sharing, and other new technologies change the rituals of television viewership (241-244). This change in watching television shows, especially when viewing on one’s own computer, literally takes the TV out of the television

experience, and transforms it into something different. I argue that this experience alternately isolates the viewer and simultaneously makes him or her more connected to an audience, as many TV streaming sites are integrated with discussion boards and forums. While the viewer may be watching the show alone, he or she can also immediately connect with others who are also engaged with it. This new kind of viewing community, one not tied to television scheduling—or even to the television—is becoming a critical piece of the future television studies.

Overall, this dissertation makes a contribution to the areas of fan studies, women's studies, and queer studies. While some texts look solely at fan communities or at the representation of women and/or queer visibility in television, I argue that these contained perspectives are not enough in the changing field of television studies. By combining these three areas to first trace the representation of female and queer bodies on crime dramas, and then adding fan voices to the discussion of these representations, I have shown how television is an active, changing, and engaging medium. As recent events have demonstrated, the crime drama is not immune to these shifts in programming changes, and will most likely need to continue evolving in the future. I have shown that, perhaps now more than ever, it is a medium in need of critical academic attention.

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