



'I've seen this on CSI': Criminal investigators' perceptions about the management of public expectations in the field

LAURA HUEY, University of Western Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Police perceptions as to the influence of *CSI* and similar forensic and/or police procedural television programs on public expectations of the investigative process in the field is the focus of the present study. Through qualitative interviews with 31 members of Canadian police forces, I explore the question of whether police investigative personnel view media representations of their work as negatively influencing public expectations, thereby creating a source of occupational role strain for police officers. What is revealed is that the majority of investigative personnel interviewed have experienced citizen queries and demands attributed to consumption of unrealistic images of police work in television programs. Where a minority of investigators report feelings of frustration due to the role strain associated with having their expert knowledge and work methods questioned, the majority of those interviewed saw such queries as opportunities for educating the public about the realities of policing.

Key words

CSI effect; police investigators; public expectations; role strain

INTRODUCTION

Much attention has recently been focused on the question of whether the '*CSI* effect' – the ascribed influence of fictionalized and/or 'reality-based' television crime programs upon audience knowledge and expectations of the criminal justice process – is a legitimate phenomenon or a media-created myth. In various media outlets, we can find scholars and other legal experts weighing in on such questions as whether *CSI* and other similar programs influence jury members' expectations of forensic science in criminal cases, alter the behavior of offenders at crime scenes or lead undergraduate students to take up criminology or forensic science courses in expectation of becoming Crime Scene Investigators.

If *CSI* and similar police procedural shows can be said to have such an enormous influence on public perceptions of forensic science and the criminal justice system more generally, it is something of a sociological mystery that little attention has been paid to the potential impact of such programs on how the public views police investigative work in the field. To date no empirical research has been published on this subject. Indeed, of published articles located on the 'CSI effect', two papers explored cultural meanings attendant on the show and those visual elements that make it a 'digital spectacle' (Gever, 2005; Cavender and Deutsch, 2007), three examined the program's potential influence on juror deliberations and argued for a null effect (Podlas, 2006; Tyler, 2006; Shelton et al., 2007), a sixth found evidence of such an effect within a limited study of 48 undergraduate viewers and non-viewers of *CSI* (Schweitzer and Saks, 2007), a seventh uncritically accepted the existence of an 'effect' in relation to juror deliberations and offered suggestions as to how lawyers might 'wrestle with the heightened standards set by fictional crime dramas' (Mann, 2006: 158), and an eighth employed actor-network theory to 'illustrate the dynamic relationship' between images of forensic science on television and real-world applications and understandings in the criminal justice system (Mopas, 2007). Another paper, by Cole and Dioso-Villa (2007), used content coding of anecdotal information contained in media reports to identify six specific forms of effects attributed to *CSI* by various criminal justice and other sources. The purported 'effects' these researchers found include: (1) the 'strong prosecutor's effect', whereby jurors wrongly acquit defendants based on a lack of forensic evidence; (2) the 'weak prosecutor's effect, which suggests that prosecutors must take preemptive steps to divert juries from relying on expectations based on viewing *CSI*-type shows; (3) 'the defendant's effect', whereby convictions are seen as more likely because of positive portrayals of forensic work in media outlets; (4) the 'producers' effect', a claim that such programs perform a public service by producing better-informed jurors; (5) the 'professor's version', which accounts for a purported surge of interest in forensic science among students, and; (6) the 'police chief's version', which suggests that such programs transmit information to criminals on how to avoid detection.

In short, the question of whether television portrayals of police investigative work might impact public expectations of the police investigative role and duties in the field remains an open empirical question worth consideration. So too is the question of whether police perceive such an effect and what influence such perceptions might have on their work life. Two sources have been identified that suggest that *CSI* and similar television crime programs might have such effects. The first of these sources is an earlier study of detective work in which the authors found that criminal investigators perceive victims as having unrealistic expectations of the investigation process, expectations that police attributed to unrealistic portrayals of their work on television shows (Stenross and Kleinman, 1989). The second source consists of published police anecdotes. For example, a police officer interviewed on Canadian television reports that 'when we go to crime scenes, we have a much more significant interest from victims of the crime who want to peer over our shoulders and offer their opinions' (CBC, 2006; see also Houck, 2006).

Police perceptions of the influence of *CSI* and similar police procedural television programs on public expectations of the investigative process is the focus of the present study. Through qualitative interviews with 31 members of Canadian police forces, I explore the question of whether police investigative personnel view media representations of their work as negatively influencing public expectations, thereby creating a source of occupational role strain. To be clear: this paper is not about audience receptivity to media effects or media constructions of the law as a form of social control, which other scholars have already researched in relation to *CSI* (Schweitzer and Saks, 2007) and more amply with respect to other television programs and media forms (Gunter, 1987; Sparks, 1992; Oliver and Armstrong, 1995; Haghihi and Sorensen, 1996; Doyle, 2003; Innes, 2003; Mawby, 2003; Innes, 2004). What is instead presented here are the findings of a study of police perceptions as to whether the previously described effect exists, and interviewees' beliefs as to whether such an effect has any influence on their own work. What is revealed here is that the majority of investigative personnel interviewed have experienced citizen queries and demands that they attribute to consumption of unrealistic images of investigative work found within television programs. Where a minority of investigators report feelings of frustration due to the role strain associated with having their expert knowledge and work methods subjected to increased public scrutiny, the majority of those interviewed saw such queries as opportunities for educating the public about the realities of policing.

ROLES: THE POLICE INVESTIGATOR AS 'CRIME EXPERT'

'People tell me how to do my job all the time!' – Forensic Identification Officer

Social identities function as behavioral templates, providing actors with means of understanding and orienting their actions in accordance with the particular identity they assume (Goffman, 1959, 1963). These identities are developed within social structures. As with other occupationally rooted identities, the criminal investigator's sense of social identity is bound up in the institutionally mandated duties and functions they perform. In relation to policing, it has been argued that much of police work involves routine information gathering or 'knowledge work' (Manning, 1977; 2003; Ericson and Haggerty, 1997).

Knowledge work is particularly key to understanding the role of the police investigator, whose primary function is 'to produce a definitive account of who did what to whom and why', channeling information acquired through investigative efforts into 'a series of interpretations, classifications and inferences about [an] event' (Innes, 2002: 670, 681). In order to do so, the police investigator must have a detailed understanding of such diverse and complex informational fields as 'incident reports, crime scene investigator reports, witness statements, suspect statements, tip lines, crime scene photographs and drawings, fingerprints, DNA, physical evidence (ballistics, tool marks, blood spatters),

informants and property tracking' (Gottschalk and Holgersson, 2006: 184). It is worth noting that this small list does not account for the legal complexities of the job, such as the need to develop mastery of rules of admissibility and the ability to draft legal documents pertaining to searches, wiretaps and so on. A further element of 'knowledge work' worth considering relates to the purported mystique of detective work. As Henry (2004: 202) suggests in his study of policing as 'death work', public fascination with the detective is frequently seen to rest on this individual's unique access to: 'special knowledge... about matters of life and death and the secrets of human nature'. The body of knowledge possessed by the criminal investigator is so highly prized within the police occupational culture that Ratcliffe (forthcoming) conceptualizes this knowledge as a 'status object' within police organizations. Indeed, as he notes in relation to the development of the detective in Britain,

by 1963 every force in England and Wales had a detective bureau and since that time policing has tended to idolise detectives and rewarded them for their knowledge of the criminal environment, and of offenders in particular. In a culture where knowledge is power (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997: 317), the power that has traditionally been respected, treasured and retained by individual officers has been knowledge that can solve individual cases. As a result, the detective function – a function which emphasises the case-specific and investigative facet of law enforcement – has become a prized position within policing. Along with its elevated status, the position has a number of perks for detectives, such as an associated reward structure and significant public recognition (Ratcliffe, forthcoming).

In addition to serving as normative templates for the individual actor, social identities also function to guide audience expectations. As Goffman explains, 'we lean on these anticipations that we have, transforming them ... into righteously presented demands' (1963/1986: 2). In Ericson's (1983) study of detective work, published before the advent of reality television and the routine use of 'field advisors' to render fictional programs more 'realistic', he notes that investigators routinely drew upon this specialized knowledge of crime in interactions with victims. Victims' lack of similar access to knowledge of policing, coupled with the expectation that the detective as *the* 'crime expert' would perform their roles and responsibilities in accordance with their expert status, routinely translated into detectives being able to frame interactions in ways that led to desired outcomes (Ericson, 1983). Lack of citizen knowledge of their work similarly affords police investigators the ability to retain control over their social identity.

Conceptualizing policing, and in particular 'detective work' as 'knowledge work,' thus accords with a central element of the police investigator's self-image: as an authoritative 'expert' in the field of crime¹ (Clark, 1965; Skolnick, 1966; Ericson, 1983) and human behavior (Henry, 2004). It is this aspect of the social identity of police investigative personnel that is challenged when victims and other citizens profess 'knowledge' of police work acquired through television viewing.

By 1989, the investigator's claim to specialized knowledge of crime, and thus a fundamental component of their self-image, was clearly under challenge. In a study of detective work, Stenross and Kleinman (1989) found police investigators complaining that

victims would attempt to usurp their role by offering unsolicited advice on how to solve cases and making demands concerning the deployment of resources. The source of these demands is traced to victims' expectations of the investigator's social identity influenced by exposure to the perceived 'expert knowledge' offered by television representations of investigative work (Stenross and Kleinman, 1989: 445). More recently, in a study of the influence of television portrayals of frontline police officers on public expectations, Perlmutter (2000) notes that 'street cops perceive that the mass-mediated cop is in a sense a rival – one that has far greater influence on how we the citizenry define and appreciate police work' (p. ix). This rivalry, as I suggest in my concluding remarks, has two potentially significant social effects. The first potential effect can occur at the individual level, with individual actors suffering occupational role strain as a result of increasing demands. A further consideration is the issue of public confidence in the police institution as a whole, particularly when victims or the public at large fail to see what they believe to be an appropriate level of police response.

To explicate the tensions and frustrations that police investigators can experience when they find themselves confronted with multiple, often-conflicting demands while on the job, I draw on the symbolic interactionist concept of 'role strain.' Role strain, conceptualized by William Goode (1960) is drawn from 'role theory' and refers to the difficulties individual actors feel when attempting to fulfill multiple obligations within one role. As Goode explains, 'the individual's problem is how to make his whole role system manageable, that is, how to allocate his energies and skills so as to reduce role strain to some bearable proportions ... so that various institutional activities are accomplished' (p. 485).

In relation to work in the field, the police investigator is expected to perform a range of tasks related to the furtherance of a given investigation. These tasks must be completed in ways that adhere not only to the operational requirements of their particular organization, but also comply with the legal-normative rules of the criminal justice system and potentially with extra-institutional demands made by insurance companies, social service agencies and other institutions that may have a vested interest in the outcome of a given investigation (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997). Within this task work, we can also locate a further set of positive obligations – to victims, victim families, witnesses, suspects, and the general community – that are embedded within the institutional mandate of serving the public. Interactions with members of these groups are always tinged with awareness on both parts of these positive obligations and what they mean.

Thus far I have been focusing on the police investigator's side of the police-citizen interaction, but it is equally important to consider, if only briefly, the nature of the citizen's expectations in these interactions and those forces that shape public expectations. Most citizens' direct knowledge of policing comes through contact that is brief and often limited to the negative experience of receiving a ticket by a patrol officer (Skolnick, 1966). Rather than direct experiential knowledge, the bulk of public knowledge of policing is derived from media sources: newspapers, fictional and 'reality' television crime programs and movie images (Ericson et al., 1989; Mawby, 1999; Jackall, 2000). Given the ubiquitous nature of television, a fair amount of scholarly attention

has been deservedly focused on the question of whether and how different television formats influence audience perceptions of policing (i.e. Doyle, 1998; Oliver and Armstrong, 1998; Perlmutter, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2005;).

Scholarly opinion on police perceptions of media images of policing has tended to converge on one central point: the police institution and its members view such images as having an effect on public perceptions and thus are particularly sensitive to portrayals of their work (Ericson et al., 1989; Reiner, 1992; Perlmutter, 2000). Reiner (1992) makes this point most succinctly:

Police reactions to their media representation suggest a kind of Catch-22 paranoia. Stories about police deviance are understandably regarded with concern ... somewhat less predictably, officers are also worried about positive representations of policing, which would lead the public to expect too much of the police in terms of crime-fighting wizardry or superhuman patience, tact and integrity (p. 267).

It is police concern with the second of these forms of representation that is explored here. To the extent that *CSI* and similar other police procedural programs remain popular among North American viewers, and that the *CSI* franchise in particular has generated media-fuelled controversy over whether its glamorous images of high-tech police investigative work translate into unrealistic expectations of the police investigation process, I use *CSI*, as well as the raft of police procedural programs available on cable networks, as vehicles to explore with police investigative personnel their beliefs, thoughts and experiences as to what they perceive as the influence of such television programs in shaping aspects of their interactions with victims, witnesses and other members of the general public. Further, I explore the extent to which interactions seen as being influenced by the consumption of fictionalized images of policing on television serve as a source of occupational role strain for investigators.

METHOD OF INQUIRY

This paper is informed by data drawn from interviews conducted with 31 Canadian police investigators. In order to increase the sample size and the diversity of the interviewee pool, the Chief Constable's office of municipal and/or regional police units from two Canadian provinces – British Columbia and Ontario – were contacted and permission was sought to conduct interviews with police investigative personnel. Seven municipal and/or regional police units representing two major Canadian cities and several medium-sized communities agreed to participate.

Once approval was granted, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who fall into one of two groups: police investigators and Forensic Identification officers. Interviews typically ranged from 1–2 hours, with an average interview length of 1.5 hours. Members of both occupational groups were asked questions related to two of the core concerns of this study: (1) to what extent do television portrayals of police investigative work cohere with actual police roles and functions; and (2) do police

TABLE 1

<i>Interviewee category</i>	<i>n</i>
Police Investigators:	
Major Crimes Investigator	7
Homicide Investigator	9
Sex Crimes Investigator	3
Property Crimes Investigator	1
Forensic Identification Officers	11
Total	31

officers perceive television programs, in particular *CSI*, as influencing public expectations in the field in relation to their investigative role and work duties? (See table 1.)

Although both occupational groups were asked the same sets of questions, and have been grouped here under the more generic category of 'criminal investigator', their work functions are very different. The police detective is the officer responsible for overseeing the management of an investigation as a whole (including the interrogation of suspects, interviewing witnesses and making arrests). Members of Forensic Identification (Ident) units are specifically tasked with processing evidence at crime scenes, and their function is more closely analogous to that of the 'CSI', or Crime Scene Investigator (a term more common in American police jurisdictions). As portrayals of police work found on *CSI* and other such police procedural programs often blur these otherwise distinct police roles, both sets of police workers were interviewed in order to flesh out similarities and differences between the 'real' job, as perceived by those who perform it, and the mediated images presented to the public. Further, including both groups allowed me to more fully capture a range of interactions that police investigative personnel have with the public. For example, unlike their fictional *CSI* counterparts, Ident personnel interviewed for this study attend 'lesser crimes' – break and enters and robberies – where they report frequently encountering victims who openly manifest curiosity about Ident techniques used and/or attempt to proffer advice with respect to potential sites for fingerprinting. In contrast, crime scenes involving homicides – the major staple of television crime dramas – are processed behind barriers that operate to inhibit non-police contact with working investigators.

I also note that four different types of police detectives were interviewed for this study: members of major crimes, homicide, sex crimes and property crimes units. Personnel from each of these groups were included because they have very different sets of interactions with victims, victims' families and witnesses (due to the nature of the crimes involved). However, despite the fact that the nature and impact of the crimes they investigate may differ – for example, one interviewee in a major crime section specializes in robbery, whereas other participants work exclusively on homicides – most of the individuals interviewed had previous experience in other units and drew on this experience in formulating responses to questions posed. Thus, a homicide investigator

spoke at length about his perceptions of the 'CSI effect' in relation to previous experience as a sex crimes investigator, and the head of a Major Crime unit related stories from his time working on a major homicide file. Similarly, several of the Ident personnel interviewed have previous experience in detective units, and spoke about this experience as it related to different topics covered during interviews.

To analyze the data collected, interview transcripts were printed, read and then manually coded according to major themes identified. To ensure reliability, as well as to identify emergent sub-themes, transcripts were re-read and manually re-coded two further times.

In relation to the selection of Canadian investigators, I note that although a large number of forensic and police procedural programs are produced and consumed in the USA, these programs are also purchased by networks abroad and watched by a multitude of viewers in other countries. This is the situation with respect to Canada. Further, as many cable subscribers also pick up broadcast signals from US television stations, it would be fair to say that the Canadian market is saturated with US programming. Thus, one would expect to find that Canadian police investigators would have similar perceptions about potential effects of US crime programs as their col-leagues to the south.

In relation to questions about specific programs, during interviews respondents were queried specifically about *CSI*, as well as other popular crime programs. While several of the officers interviewed stated that victims/witnesses had cited *CSI* specifically, in other instances we are relying on the police officer's attribution of the source of a particular remark to *CSI*. As the original source of a particular witness/victim comment is not traceable and/or there is always a possibility that a police officer may have mistakenly conflated *CSI* with other shows, I am not focusing exclusively here on *CSI*, but rather on *CSI* and the range of police procedural programs currently available. I realize that some readers may see major distinctions between the framing of various elements in different program types; however, while it is the case that *CSI* over-emphasizes forensic technology, it also contains investigative elements common to other programs (such as witness/suspect interviews). Conversely, programs that are typically categorized as 'police procedural' (such as *Law & Order*) may contain any number of forensic elements (from autopsies to lab work).

A final note on method: whereas previous studies have sought to discern a 'CSI effect' through various methods, the present study is significantly more modest in scope. As a wealth of literature in the field of media studies has suggested, attempting to deduce a 'media effect' is a frequently problematic undertaking because of issues related to sampling, methods employed and so on. To avoid these problems, I am focusing on the narrower question of whether police officers interviewed *perceive* an effect from *CSI* and other police procedural programs in relation to their interactions with victims and witnesses and, if so, *how they respond to it*. While it is the case that narrowing the scope of the study entails offering little directly to the 'CSI effect' debate, it does permit a means by which the views of police officers are represented in a form other than anecdotal evidence contained in media reports.

DO INVESTIGATORS PERCEIVE *CSI* AND OTHER SUCH SHOWS AS HAVING AN EFFECT ON INTERACTIONS IN THE FIELD?

'People will come and expect me to do the magic that they see on TV' – Forensic Identification Officer

In each of the interviews conducted, respondents were asked a variant of the question: 'have you ever experienced a situation with a victim, victim's family member or witness where they were questioning something you were doing or not doing and you had the feeling that their question was influenced by viewing *CSI* or another fictional television crime program?' Of the 31 police investigators interviewed, 28 interviewees stated that they had had such experiences, which they attributed to the influence of police procedural programs on television. Only three interviewees responded in the negative. Of the latter, one respondent noted, 'I do know of others [police investigators] who have run into the whole *CSI* 101 questioning.'

Thus, the majority of officers interviewed spoke to what they perceived to be an effect of television crime programs: civilians believing they have sufficient knowledge of police procedures to query investigators' work methods, and/or suggesting potential avenues of investigation. For example, a Sex Crimes Investigator stated, 'You'd be surprised how many people say, '*CSI* can do this and *CSI* can do that. So why aren't you doing this?' A Forensic Identification officer similarly noted, 'people will tell me often "*CSI* is my favorite show" ... occasionally as I work they will even say, "Well aren't you going to...?" because that [technique] figured prominently in some episode they saw.' A Homicide Investigator related experiences in which civilians said to him, 'I've seen this on *CSI* and you might want to...' A Sex Crimes Investigator noted receiving comments from victims and witnesses, such as, 'I saw on *CSI* that you can get fingerprints from a pen.' One frustrated Major Crimes Investigator spoke about his experiences of finding civilians interviewing witnesses in relation to crimes he was investigating, behavior that he attributes to the effects of viewing police procedural programs on television and believing that they have sufficient knowledge to conduct their own interviews:

People start to interview the witnesses themselves, and then saying, 'well, you didn't ask this question.' And it's like 'well I can't lead the person. I need to ask them open-ended questions ... that has become a real big problem where people don't leave us to do the investigation and they are starting to do investigations on their own. Asking 'well you haven't talked to this person yet' and its like 'well I haven't gotten to that person yet!'

Those same interviewees who reported experiencing this version of the '*CSI* effect' also specifically addressed what they perceived to be unrealistic expectations of their abilities fostered by television portrayals of investigative work. For example, a Major Crimes Investigator attributed to *CSI* a set of expectations that he finds difficult to manage: 'people wondering why you can't do more, or why you haven't found somebody yet.' A Forensic Ident officer stated,

I've noticed that since the show [CSI], not to spend too much time talking about the show, these are the perceptions that people have: I should be walking to the edge of the room, peering in, seeing one hair to the exclusion of all the others that are on the carpet, realize its significance and have events play out like a video because you can watch the events based on that one hair, and I should have the hair taken away and discover the author of the crime. And I do have to explain to people, because if I don't get down on my hands and knees and search for the burglar's hair, then I'm not doing my job!

A Homicide Investigator summed the views of several other respondents in offering the following thoughts on public expectations, which he attributed to *CSI* and similar other programs:

[The public] think everything we're gonna get it within half an hour. More enlightened people think you should be able to get it within a day. Or you should be able to get search warrants. Just draft up a one page paper and you've got your search warrant, right? They don't realize that things take a while ... The CSI thing is sort of a lack of understanding. If I were to generalize it as a whole, that's what we're faced with.

Unrealistic public expectations in relation to the investigative value of particular pieces of evidence – expectations perceived by investigators as engendered by television crime programs – was also a recurring theme in interviews. A Major Crimes Investigator stated that programs such as *CSI* place too much emphasis on the investigative value of 'clues'. Using the example of a boot print on a floor, he explained, 'Well, yeah, okay, we'll take a picture of it and get the imprint, but chances are we're not going to do anything with that boot print unless we have a suspect. But people, because of the *CSI* show, they think, "Oh, perfect! It's solved!"'

Interview respondents who perceived victims and witnesses as having unrealistic expectations fuelled by television crime programs expressed concerns over the potential for public dissatisfaction when such expectations are confronted by the realities of modern police work and its limitations. As a Homicide Investigator explained, 'I think [*CSI*] provides false hope to a lot of people and makes them believe that "oh my gosh, if it's on *CSI* than this is what must be happening. Technology is this up to date that this must be used worldwide." And that's just not the case.' Another Homicide Investigator noted that whereas *CSI* portrays investigators as having the ability to almost instantaneously access DNA results, lab results usually take between three to six months to process. Thus, he said of some of the victim families with whom he has had contact, 'it makes them pretty pissed off that you aren't as good.' Similarly, a Major Crimes Investigator commented,

I can see that people would get frustrated ... I think the public does get frustrated if they don't see what they believe to be an appropriate police response and a thorough investigation, which I think is influenced directly by the media and the television shows that you've spoken of.

During interviews, police investigators were also asked as to the frequency with which they had received comments from victims/witnesses that they felt were

attributable to consumption of *CSI* and similar other fictionalized forensic or police procedural programs. The majority of police officers interviewed stated that such 'second guessing' was not a routine occurrence – indeed, one respondent noted that he had even encountered a witness who had said 'I know it's not like *CSI*' – and used words such as 'occasionally' and 'the odd time' to describe the frequency with which they encountered such comments. However, others – most notably Ident personnel – employed words like 'often', 'not uncommon' and 'all the time' to describe the frequency of such interactions. The latter is likely explainable by the fact that Ident personnel tend to process more crime scenes than investigators (particularly Homicide) and are at such scenes for longer periods of time, thus facilitating the possibility of increased interactions with victims/witnesses.

MANAGING ROLE EXPECTATIONS

'I need to make [victims and witnesses] feel that their feedback and input is appreciated. Not just say "you don't know anything. Bug off."' – Major Crimes Investigator

Although media images of the detective frequently cast police investigators as cerebral, analytical types who cogitate over evidence (Reiner, 1992) or as wisecracking, action-oriented 'hard-chargers' (Herbert, 2001) knocking down doors and 'busting perps' (Scharrer, 2001), policing scholars have long recognized that successful police investigators rely primarily on their inter-personal skills (Jackall, 2000; Henry, 2004). They are, as Henry (2004) notes, 'first and foremost good communicators and good listeners' (p. 213). Indeed, a recurring theme in interviews with police personnel was the need of the criminal investigator to successfully 'manage people' in order to further an investigation. Included in the list of those who must be 'managed' are suspects, victims, witnesses and sometimes other police or criminal justice personnel. Interviewees revealed that in many instances, their 'people management' activities take the form of managing public expectations related to their role as police investigator. For example, a Major Crimes Investigator advises that 'it's always been me explaining to [victims] that this is how the investigations work and unfold, and these are the parameters that exist surrounding the things that we do.' The major rationale offered for 'people management' as task work is that respondents see it as part of their public service duties. Still others noted that engaging with victims and witnesses allows investigators to secure much-needed cooperation that might yield information critical to an investigation (see also Ericson et al., 1989). However, yet another reason for engaging with citizen expectations emerged in interviews. In the words of a Major Crimes Investigator, 'if you shut [victims and witnesses] out, of course they're going to complain ... they'll make a scene right there at the scene. People don't like to be shut down.'

Writing in 1967 of the rise of the professional movement within policing, Neiderhoffer suggests that the most important element of demonstrating professionalism within a police force is the exhibition of 'good public relations' (p. 131). The need for 'public relations' is so engrained within the fabric of modern police forces – albeit to varying

extents – that for the individual police officer, responding to citizen queries and demands is largely seen as a routine feature of the job. In essence, though, such queries and demands provide one more set of expectations to be met. Interviews with both sets of police personnel reveal the use of one of three strategies for managing citizens' expectations, particularly in relation to those perceived as being media fuelled. The first of these tactics is 'appeasement', a variant on the public relations exercises that Ericson et al. (1989) have termed 'providing a gloss': police members seek to silence potential or real evaluations and/or complaints about their performance by responding to, or pretending to respond to, queries and demands as a means of giving citizens the impression that they are doing everything possible to solve a case. The second strategy identified is for investigators to view such queries and demands as opportunities to educate the public about the realities of policing. The third strategy investigators referenced involves a resort to authority: police officers simply referred to their expert and/or legal status as a means of shutting down perceived opposition to how they are handling a case.

In response to citizen demands that particular investigative strategies be pursued, some police personnel stated that they would acquiesce on the ground that it is easier to undertake a particular action, or pretend to, than to explain or argue with a civilian. Such 'displays of detective expertise and the use of particular investigative methods' are sometimes, as Ericson et al. (1989) have similarly noted, 'oriented to reproducing in the victim-complainant's mind that the detectives were doing what detectives are supposed to do' (p. 100). Evidence of the use of this tactic is demonstrated through the words of a Major Crimes Investigator: 'being realistic most of the time I will say, "Yeah, you bring in a good point", even if in my mind it's stupid.' A Forensic Ident officer also illustrates this particular form of 'public relations' approach: 'I've actually had people get angry at me because I wouldn't powder something. So now we just powder it in a sense of appeasing what their curiosity is going to be, and obviously we don't find anything.'

The majority of respondents interviewed, however, said that they chose to see citizen queries and demands as an opportunity to dispel some of the myths about police work perpetuated by mass media images. A Major Crimes Investigator exemplifies this approach:

The quickest way is to tell them. You can even use it as a humor thing, 'Hey, you watched that on TV, ha ha.' Then say, 'This is my job. This is what I have to do.' Then once you start to get them into that place, they are listening to you, I find that effect from TV goes away.

The head of a homicide unit responds to a question about the perception that public expectations are increasingly shaped by programs like *CSI*, 'Our guys have to educate people.' This contention is supported by a homicide investigator in the same unit, who notes, 'We have to actually talk about these shows. This isn't *CSI*. Things don't happen that way.' In dealing with victims and witnesses, a Sex Crimes Investigator states that:

*we try to explain to them that that happens on *CSI*, and we have a lab here that takes a little bit longer, because I think on *CSI* you can submit DNA and within ten minutes you get the results out of this little machine.*

The results of directly confronting the media myths of police investigative work, this officer suggests, is that 'it doesn't take much for [people] to understand that it doesn't work like that [in the real world].' A Major Crimes Investigator states that,

I think most times people are pretty good about it once you have kind of pointed out the reasons why you did something ... it's like; 'that's technology that doesn't even exist', and they're like; 'oh, it doesn't?' and I'll be like 'no!' And I'll even say that 'you've been watching too much TV'.

Closer scrutiny of the educational approach reveals that this method actually affords investigators an avenue for reasserting their expert status in the eyes of citizens with whom they are engaged. Perhaps not surprisingly then, the majority of interviewees who use this approach are also among those who stated that they are less inclined to feel role-related tensions when dealing with citizen queries and demands. This method, I suggest, allows the investigator to retain their expert identity and thus a sense of control over their case.

It is also worth noting, however, that although interviewees who use the educational strategy stated that this tactic is, in their view, the best means of managing citizen expectations in the field, several acknowledged what they see as two limitations of this approach. The first of these limitations is the time it takes time to respond to citizen queries, time that investigators often feel could be better spent on tasks directly related to the investigational process. As one Forensic Identification Officer acknowledges,

Sometimes I find myself speaking to those people, spending more time than I would otherwise telling them why I'm not going to do a particular thing ... and why we shouldn't expect the results that we see on TV, because from what I gather, on the show [CSI], there is never any dead ends.

One Forensic Identification Officer explained that he has developed a demonstration that he delivers when he encounters civilian queries as to why he is not fingerprinting particular objects.

A: I've got my little speech ready ... it involves, I could come in here ... and you're gonna hate me for the next three weeks because that's how long it's going to take for you to clean after me.

Q: That's probably pretty effective.

A: Yes ... I will deposit a print. I will tell them what type of surfaces I'm looking for. I will demonstrate a print on top of another print. Or on a cupboard handle that's already covered in grease and sweat. The fingerprint blends in, you don't get anything. I give them a demonstration, give them my speech. 'Now it's up to you. If you still want a show that's not going to help out to prove anything, or you going to let me do my work and look for suitable surfaces?'

Q: At that point they back down?

A: They back down. But it takes me ten minutes sometimes (sigh).

Investigators who are proponents of the educational approach also acknowledge that in some situations they believe their education efforts have, at best, a temporary 'neutralizing' effect. For example, a Sex Crimes Investigator wonders, 'maybe they're left with some doubt after I explain it ... maybe they are still thinking, "Well CSI they can do this."' Similarly, a Major Crimes Investigator wonders whether, despite attempts at educating citizens about the realities of police work, that views of policing perceived to be shaped by television shows 'might come back the second you leave.'

In response to the question 'do you find that by educating people up front, it minimizes their demands or maybe their frustrations with the process?' a Homicide Investigator responded,

sometimes yes, sometimes no. It really depends on the people you're dealing with. Some people will understand that. Some people simply won't. Maybe because they see these quick solutions on TV or they just want a quick resolution because their family members been hurt or killed.

A Forensic Identification officer complained,

people just don't understand. I try to educate them as much as I can, but they kind of think that if somebody touched the glass or somebody came in this window, then there has to be fingerprints. When we don't find anything it seems to be our fault.

An Ident officer from another police service offered a similar complaint: 'even when you explain what the real science is, there is still a little bit of doubt in people's minds as a result of CSI.'

The third strategy investigators referenced involves using their police authority and/or expert status as a means of shutting down potential complaints and/or perceived opposition from citizens as to how they are investigating a case. A Forensic Identification officer exemplifies this strategy in the following story about being offered unsolicited advice from the family member of a crime victim, advice that the officer ascribed to the man watching too much CSI:

I was in the West End, a fellow was there with his partner and they were at his mother's place and it had been broken into. And I was processing the exhibits and he says; 'Oh, you can get fingerprints off this, and you can get fingerprints off that.' So I went over and did that, knowing full well that I wouldn't get fingerprints off anything. And they had used the old wooden shovel that had been left out on the patio, and the handle on it was weathered and I knew very well that I wouldn't get a print off that and he said, 'Oh, you can get a print off that.' And so I turned around with brush in hand and said, 'Well I have been declared an expert in court, but I guess you know more than I do. So maybe you would like to take this and process the pieces of exhibit over there and see if you can get a fingerprint?' Then he shut up.

In some instances, however, an officer's resort to authority in the field results in complaints to his or her supervisor. In one such notable example, the Ident officer who told the story stated that the Sergeant, 'out of an abundance of caution and really a PR thing', advised the complaining victim that he would 'come down and take a look at

this', with the result that '[he] got some fingerprints, and they turned out to be the victims.' Although the victim was apparently satisfied, this 'PR' act created some tension between the Sergeant and the original attending Ident officers, who felt that their authority and expert status were undermined by his actions. As this officer explained,

the two officers who went in the first time were livid that he went back ... they said, 'Don't you trust us? Here we are declared experts by the court, we've got all the training you've got ... why would you do this to us?' It created a lot of hard feelings between the NCO at the time and the two technicians.

ROLE STRAIN

'Everybody is entitled to their opinion, but obviously it's easy for [the public] to say their opinion. They have no training, no experience, they have never seen a [crime] scene' – Major Crimes Investigator.

Role strain has been conceptualized as an emotional reaction to role-related stress that might lead an individual actor to experience feelings of frustration, anxiety, irritability or distress (Hardy and Hardy, 1988). When I began this study, it was with the expectation that should police investigative personnel report experiencing what they understood to be a 'CSI'-type effect' in relation to the performance of their job in the field, that they might also report feelings of role strain as a result of tensions caused by additional expectations and demands. After all, as one Forensic Ident officer made quite clear in his interview, what is essentially being challenged when citizens query the techniques used in an investigation is the status of the police investigator as *the* expert on crime and crime scene analysis. In obvious tones of frustration, this individual commented,

[CSI] makes us look like idiots when we go to scenes, because they all think that they know exactly where a fingerprint can be found and what technique to do. Then you get to the house and they're like, 'He touched that.' 'You know what? I can't get a fingerprint off a couch.' 'Yeah, you can.'

Of the 31 individuals interviewed for this study, only nine directly stated that they experienced any sense of frustration or role strain as a consequence of what they perceived to be unrealistic civilian expectations of their performance, whether those expectations were based on myths and stereotypes perpetuated in television programs or not. Indeed, most interviewees offered one of two responses to questions related to role strain. The first, and most common, response noted is to see responding to such queries as simply a part of the people management tasks that the job requires under the rubric of 'serving the public.' This particular viewpoint is expressed within a statement made by another Major Crimes Investigator: 'I think it's part of our work to try to serve people.' A sympathetic Ident officer noted that he understood that victims 'are traumatized', and thus rather than seeing their queries and comments as threats to his

expert status – and thus as a source of role frustration – he opted instead to explain his techniques to victims, giving them a sense of being a part of the process. In this way, the investigator retains his/her expert status, while not only providing the victim a sense of inclusion in the task, but also reducing the potential for strain caused by an unhappy victim.

A second, and less frequent response, was to simply ignore such comments and carry on with one's work. In the words of one Major Crimes Investigator, 'you kind of brush it off.' In such ways, investigators literally 'brush off' what are seen as challenges to their expert status, thus removing a source of role strain (although at the risk of creating further frustration generated by dissatisfied victims and/or witnesses).

Of those nine respondents who did report having experienced a sense of role strain as a result of citizen misperceptions of their work attributed to television crime programs, the most simple answer was that offered by Forensic Ident Officer: 'it can be frustrating.' In response to a question about whether managing public expectations fuelled by *CSI* images and other media myths is a source of role strain for him, a Major Crimes Investigator sighed and said, 'I do agree, and I think that's totally valid.'

When respondents' answers were examined further, two major themes emerged in relation to media myths as a source of role strain. The first was that some interviewees took exception to what they perceived to be challenges to their expert status by those who, as the quote that leads this section suggests, have very little real understanding of the nature of their work. One aggrieved veteran Forensic Ident officer stated the problem quite succinctly:

What I don't like is because of the show [CSI] is the second-guessing. I've been doing it for eighteen years. I used to walk in and nobody second-guessed me. 'We don't have a clue. He knows. He'll tell us.' Now it's second-guessing. They think they know because they've seen shows.

For Forensic Ident officers who, depending on the jurisdiction, may be expected to attend scenes in various geographical locations while working several files at the same time, the addition of what is perceived to be increased public demands on their limited time adds to case workload. 'I might not say frustration levels or tension levels, but certainly, it adds work,' one Ident officer noted. Another officer sees such people management not as public service but as public relations work that competes with other demands of his job, 'We're busy. We don't always have time to do PR work.' An Ident officer from another police force echoed this sentiment: 'Essentially what *CSI* has done is that it now take us longer to process a scene, because we have so much explaining to do to people because they have an expectation that is unrealistic because of that show.' Still another stated,

It's tiring, people management ... you've got to balance all that, do these scenes and then get back to the office and start the paperwork. It starts stacking up. I mean, yeah, I am a little gruff. I don't give them much opportunity to argue with me.

This exasperated Ident officer added, 'I don't really have much patience for it. I just tell them, "If you're watching *CSI*, it's not real."'

CONCLUDING REMARKS

'I think the biggest influence on how the public views us is TV and the media' – Forensic Ident officer.

Within the present article, I attempted to move beyond the media effects question – does *CSI* alter viewers' perceptions of police investigative work – by focusing instead on what I see as an infinitely more interesting proposition: the issue of whether the objects of representations in *CSI* and other police procedural shows feel that such programs impact their interactions with the public. To answer this question, I explicitly drew upon the contention of Reiner (2005), Perlmutter (2000) and other policing scholars, who claim that glamorized images of policing create the perception among police officers that the public expects them to perform at near superhuman capacity in order to match the dazzling work of their media 'rivals', as Perlmutter (2000) terms such representations.

Through analysis of qualitative interviews with 31 police detectives and Forensic Ident personnel from police forces in multiple jurisdictions in Canada, I draw the conclusion that some police officers – the majority in my sample – do perceive programs such as *CSI* as having an impact on their interactions with the public. This perceived 'effect' is experienced as a form of 'Monday-morning quarterbacking', as one frustrated officer termed it, whereby citizens query the conduct of an investigation, suggesting alternative methods or, in some cases, attempting to 'assist the investigation' through interviewing witnesses, identifying 'evidence' and so on. Although this particular pattern of civilian behavior at crime scenes was first remarked upon by Stenross and Kleinman in their 1989 study of detective work – a study that clearly pre-dates *CSI* – the majority of interviewees in the present study cited *CSI* and its clones as being a primary source of erroneous ideas and expectations about police work encountered when dealing with the public. Three strategies were identified as police responses to this 'effect': (1) appeasement; (2) education; and (3) resort to authority and/or expert status.

The second research question informing the present study was the issue of whether police officers who report experiencing such an 'effect' would also report an increased sense of role strain. After all, when civilians query an investigator's methods and/or make demands in relation to how an investigation is conducted, they are: (1) increasing the investigator's workload, and (2) questioning the individual's expert status. Interestingly, the majority of officers interviewed tended to view such queries and demands as a routine element of the job related to the service component of their police role. However, nine of the police officers in the sample did express feelings of frustration, or what we might term role strain, as a result.

Although most interview respondents did not identify their concerns about the impact of glamorous media images of police work on public confidence in the institution as a source of role strain, it is interesting to note that a significant number raised this issue in interviews. As may be recalled, investigators worried that the real 'effect' of what they perceived to be unrealistic images of policing was not individual role strain *per se*, but public frustration when expectations fuelled by such images are confronted

by the realities of modern policing. Indeed, much of the discussion in interviews centered on various discrepancies between portrayals of well-resourced police units engaged in high-tech sleuthing, and what police respondents viewed as their own chronically under-staffed, under-resourced and under-funded departments. This gap between myth and reality led many of those interviewed for this study to express concern that the ultimate 'effect' of *CSI* could be decreased public confidence in their organization. While it is clearly beyond the scope of the present study to offer an evaluation of the possibility of such a media effect occurring, it is worth noting that police officers do see this as a viable concern. To the extent that perceived '*CSI* effects' tie in with pre-existing institutional concerns about media representations of police work, police officers and their organizations will continue to worry about the impact of their mediated counterparts on the public.

Note

- 1 Ironically, in a study of the investigations of 278 CID files of a major Quebec police force, the authors found that 'investigative work, electronic surveillance, forensics, and intelligence are of marginal importance and were significant in less than 2 per cent of the cases [examined]' (Brodeur and Ouellette, 2006, reported in Brodeur and Dupont, 2006: 13).

Acknowledgement

This study was funded by the *Fonds Quebecois Rechercher Sur la Societe et la Culture*.

References

- Brodeur, J-P. and Dupont, B. (2006) 'Knowledge Workers or "Knowledge" Workers?', *Policing & Society*, 16: 7–26.
- Brodeur, J-P. and Ouellette, G. (2006) 'L'enquete Policiere', *Criminologie*, 38(2): 39–64.
- CBC News. (2006). 'CSI Effect' Adds Drama to Real-Life Crime Solving', CBC News online. (consulted October 2007) <http://www.cbc.ca>
- Cavender, G. and Deutsch, SK. (2007) '*CSI* and Moral Authority: The Police and Science', *Crime, Media, Culture*, 3(1): 67–81.
- Clark, JP. (1965) 'Isolation of the Police: A Comparison of the British and American Situations', *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science*, 56(3): 307–319.
- Cole, S.A. and Dioso-Villa, R. (2007) '*CSI* and Its Effects: Media, Juries and the Burden of Proof', *New England Law Review*, 41, 435–470.
- Doyle, A. (2003) *Arresting Images: Crime and Policing in Front of the Camera*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Doyle, Aaron. (1998) 'Cops: Television Policing as Policing Reality' in Mark Fischman and Gray Cavendar (eds). *Entertaining Crime: Television Reality Program*, pp. 95–114. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Ericson, Richard V. and Kevin D. Haggerty. (1997) '*Policing the Risk Society*'. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Ericson, R.V., Baranek P.M. and Chan, J.B.L. (1989) *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ericson, R. (1983) *Making Crime: A Study of Detective Work*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Gever, Martha (2005) 'The Spectacle of Crime, Digitized:CSI: Crime Scene Investigation and Social Anatomy', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(4): 445–463.
- Goode, W.J. (1960) 'A Theory of Role Strain', *American Sociological Review*, 25(4): 483–496.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.
- Goffman, E. (1963/1986). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gottschalk, P. and Holgersson, S. (2006) 'Stages of Knowledge Management Technology in the Value Shop: The Case of Police Investigation Performance', *Expert Systems*, 23(1): 183–193.
- Gunter, B. (1987) *Television and the Fear of Crime*. London: John Libbey.
- Haghihi, B. and Sorensen, J. (1996) 'America's Fear of Crime', in T. Flanagan and D. Longmire (eds) *Americans View Crime and Justice: A National Public Opinion Survey*, pp. 16–30. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hardy, M. and Hardy, C. (1988). 'Role Stress and Role Strain', in M. Hardy and M. Conway (eds) *Role Theory: Perspectives for Health Professionals*, 2nd edition, pp. 159–240. Norwalk, CT: Appleton and Lange.
- Henry, V.E. (2004) *Death Work: Police, Trauma and the Psychology of Survival*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Herbert, S. (2001) "'Hard Charger" or "Station Queen"? Policing and the Masculinist State', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 8(1): 55–71.
- Houck, M.M. (2006) 'CSI: Reality', (consulted November 2007), available at: <http://unjobs.org/authors/max-m.-houck>
- Innes, M. (2004) 'Signal Crimes and Signal Disorders: Notes on Deviance as Communicative Action', *British Journal of Sociology*, 55(4): 335–355.
- Innes, M. (2003) "'Signal Crimes": Detective Work, Mass Media and Constructing Collective Memory', in Paul Mason (ed.) *Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice*, pp. 41–72. Portland, OR: Willan Publishing.
- Innes, M. (2002) 'Organizational Communication And The Symbolic Construction of Police Murder Investigations', *British Journal of Sociology*, 53(1): 67–87.
- Jackall, R. (2000) 'Investigating Criminal Violence', *Social Research*, 67(6): 849–875.
- Mann, M. (2006) 'The 'CSI Effect': Better Jurors Through Television and Science?', *Buffalo Public Interest Law Journal*, 24(1): 157–183.
- Manning, Peter K. (1997) 'Police Work, 2nd ed. Prospect Heights, Ill', *Waveland Press*.
- Manning, Peter K. (2003) 'Policing Contingencies. Chicago', *University of Chicago*.
- Mawby, R. (2003) "'Completing the 'Half-formed Picture"? Media Images of Policing', in P. Mason (ed.) *Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice*, pp. 214–237. Portland, OR: Willan Publishing.
- Mawby, R.C. (1999) 'Visibility, Transparency And Police-Media Relations', *Policing & Society*, 9(3): 263–286.
- Mopas, M. (2007) 'Examining the 'CSI Effect' Through an ANT Lens', *Crime, Media, Culture*, 3(1): 110–117.
- O'Sullivan, S. (2005) 'UK Policing and its Television Portrayal: 'Law and Order' Ideology or Modernising Agenda?' *The Howard Journal*, 44, 504–526.
- Oliver, M.B. and Armstrong G.B. (1998) 'The Colour of Crime: Perceptions of Caucasian's and African-Americans' Involvement in Crime', in M. Fishman and G. Cavender (eds). *Entertaining Crime*, pp. 19–36. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

- Oliver, M.B and Armstrong G.B. (1995) 'Predictors of Viewing and Enjoyment of Reality-based and Fictional Crime Shows', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 72(3): 559–570.
- Perlmutter, R. (2000) *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement*. London: Sage.
- Podlas, Kimberlianne. (2006) 'The CSI Effect: Exposing the Media Myth', *Fordham Intellectual Property, media and Entertainment Law Journal*, 16: 429–431.
- Ratcliffe, J.H. (forthcoming) 'Knowledge Management Challenges in the Development of Intelligence-Led Policing', in T. Williamson (ed) *The Handbook of Knowledge-Based Policing: Current Conceptions and Future Directions*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.
- Reiner, R. (1992) *The Politics of the Police*, 2nd edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Reiner, R.. (2005) 'Policing and the Media', in T. Newburn (ed.) *Handbook of Policing*, pp. 259–281. Cullompton, UK: Willan Publishing.
- Scharrer, E. (2001) 'Tough Guys: The Portrayal of Hypermasculinity and Aggression in Televised Police Dramas', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(4): 615–634.
- Schweitzer, N.J. and Saks, M.J. (2007) 'The CSI Effect: Popular Fiction About Forensic Science Affects the Public's Expectations About Real Forensic Science', *Jurimetrics*, 47, 357–364.
- Shelton, Don, Gregg Barak and S. Kim Young. (2007) 'A Study of Juror Expectations and Demands Concerning Scientific Evidence: Does the "CSI Effect" Exist?' *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law*, 9: 31–368.
- Skolnick, J. (1966). *Justice Without Trial: Law Enforcement in a Democratic Society*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sparks, R. (1992) *Television and the Drama of Crime: Moral Tales and the Place of Crime in Public Life*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Stenross, B. and Kleinman, S. (1989) 'The Highs and Lows of Emotional Labor: Detectives' Encounters with Criminals and Victims.' *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 17(4): 435–452.
- Tyler, T.R. (2006) 'Viewing CSI and the Threshold of Guilt: Managing Truth and Justice in Reality and Fiction', *The Yale Law Journal*, 115(5): 1050–1085.

LAURA HUEY, Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Western Ontario, Canada. Email: lhuey@uwo.ca