

Two Versions of the Victim: Uncovering Contradictions in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* Through Textual Analysis

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...for me it is about the victims. Especially the ones that die too young, too soon.

Horatio Caine (David Caruso), *CSI: Miami*: 'Bunk' (1.13)

In "Not the Usual Suspects," Kevin Denys Bonnycastle (2009) bemoans the lack of representation of a racialized underclass in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, 2000-present). By focusing on the white middle class as perpetrators, he argues, *CSI* can represent a neoliberal legitimization of the current American justice system which emphasizes the responsibility of the individual rather than societal factors in the perpetration of crime. Although I agree with Bonnycastle's assessment of the problematic representation of race in *CSI*, I do not believe that a changed representation in the perpetrators would have a significant effect, simply because *CSI*, more generally as a franchise, does not seem to be particularly interested in perpetrators, and hence also marginalizes concerns about motive and reason. Indeed, as the investigators of the three series again and again highlight, their job is to speak for the victims, and hence to put the victim at the center of their investigation. This suggests a remarkable shift in who we think is important when investigating crime.

In conventional crime dramas such as *Homicide: Life on the Street* (NBC, 1993-1999) or *Law & Order* (NBC, 1994-present),¹ the narrative revolves completely around the perpetrator. The central question is 'whodunit' which suggests that the investigation is primarily concerned with establishing the perpetrator's identity. There are other aspects of conventional crime drama that contribute to the emphasis on the perpetrator. John Sumser argues that the detectives of conventional crime drama do not actually examine murders, but instead investigate

actions leading to murder. The three things that need to be established in any investigation following murder are motives, opportunities and capabilities. (1996, 82)

Interestingly, all of these questions revolve around the perpetrator. They do not establish why the crime scene looks as it does, how the victim was murdered or how he or she came to be wherever the body was found. These last questions are instead the responsibility of forensic scientists.

This suggests a shift in the focus of crime drama as a genre, to which *CSI*, as Nichola Dobson (2009) argues, significantly contributes. The worldwide most successful franchise of the forensic science strand presents instead of a 'whodunit' a 'what happened,' as series producer Ann Donahoe points out.² This implies that the crime itself becomes more important and that the perpetrator is moved out of the center of the investigation. Potentially, this also means that the victim--in conventional crime drama often only an occasional absent presence, talked about but rarely pictured--becomes more important to the investigation and the solution of the crime.

The increased importance of the victim in forensic crime dramas is also apparent in the screen time that is dedicated to their portrayal. Whilst in conventional crime drama the body of the victim is often only visible in a few shots at the beginning and then perhaps in some additional ones in the early stages of the investigation when the pathologist delivers his or her report, in dramas like *CSI* the camera returns to and dwells on the body to investigate it for the clues it holds. These clues might be preliminary at the crime scene or substantiated in later scenes in the morgue. Interestingly, it is often this body that holds the vital

clue to solve the crime. This stands in sharp contrast to conventional crime drama which needs the perpetrator's partial or complete confession to resolve what really happened. In conventional crime drama, therefore, the perpetrator holds power over the victim to conceal or reveal the truth; in *CSI* and similar dramas this power seems to sit with the victim.

This article investigates the function of the victim in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. I will limit myself here to the first four seasons of the original series as there exists a relative coherence in these four seasons which is complicated by later episodes and in particular by the two spin-offs of the series as Steven Cohan rightly argues (2008, 12). Whilst the first four seasons of *Crime Scene Investigation* celebrate forensic science as the best tool to solve crime,³ later episodes increasingly play with the narrative possibilities of the procedural format. As a consequence, other aspects become more important--such as the freakish coincidences of crime in '4x4' (5.19) or the importance of subjectivity in the investigation of crime in 'Rashomama' (6.21). Similarly, there are other aspects foregrounded in the younger siblings of *Crime Scene Investigation*. *CSI: Miami* (CBS, 2002-present) revolves around the victim and tells stories of empathy and suffering; *CSI: NY* (CBS, 2004-present), particularly in its first season, is interested in the potential of the forensic sciences to work through mourning in which the attacks on the World Trade Center are of pivotal importance.

Further to my limitation to these four seasons, I will here focus on male victims of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* as they make up the larger part of the corpses (55 percent of all victims in the first four seasons are male). Academic writing about *CSI*, however, often suggests a predominance of female victims. Sue Tait, for example, writes:

A misrecognition of death informs the way in which the victim's body is initially displayed to the viewer. Because the woman's flesh remains so life-like (after all, the corpse is played by a living actor) [...] in death the body is still produced as an erotic object. The necrophilic gaze becomes specifically about sex in moments where cues of the erotic are used: panning and tracking shots which evaluate the body are largely reserved for slender, young female corpses. (2006, 52)

This emphasis on female victims raises the question why the male victims who actually predominate remain so invisible to the academic eye. I will argue that this is due to a complex gendering of male victims which brings them into the realm of the feminine at the same time as their masculinity is emphasized. This gendering is intrinsically linked to their construction as powerless objects and is counterpoised to how the text itself conceptualizes the victim. This suggests that there are indeed two versions of the male victim in *Crime Scene Investigation*: the powerful holder of the truth and the powerless object. These two conceptualizations continue to compete with each other, without the series resolving the contradictions. The two versions of the victim sit on the one hand on the explicit level and on the other hand on the implicit level of the text. With explicit, I mean how *Crime Scene Investigation* itself talks about the function of the victim. Traces of this explicit level can be found in the dialogue between characters which draws attention to the consciously chosen politics of the series. This is often accompanied by carefully chosen camerawork. With the implicit level, I mean how the audiovisual construction of the text creates meanings that are underlying, but not necessarily consciously articulated or indeed chosen.⁴

The contradictions between these two conceptualizations are never resolved, allowing for different interpretations of the text that depend on where one locates the dominant construction. This suggests that the text offers several "forces of openness" (Fiske 1987, 84) which allows the text to contain a polysemy which can be negotiated by viewers in the way John Fiske (1987, 95) describes 'producerly texts' do. Whilst Fiske reserves this function to particular drama, I will argue that this can be found in any text. Television series and serials create such a polysemy because they will inevitably present contradictions during their long run on the more explicit level in the form of character development or serialization.⁵ Furthermore, I will argue that "forces of openness" structure each detail that creates meaning in the text--such as the camera work or the soundscape. This is fundamentally opposed to the arguments of gaze theory.

Gaze theory argues that, as the gaze in the cinema is exclusively directed to the screen, the film text provides a distinct and definable viewing position which is essentially coherent (Mulvey 1975; Baudry 1986). Jean-Louis Baudry proposes that the gaze onto the screen closely reflects the processes of the mirror stage in which the child identifies a more complete self in its image in the mirror. When watching a film, the viewer experiences a similar identification with a "transcendental subject" whose place is taken by the camera and which creates unity in what is essentially a fragmented text (1986, 309-312). I will argue that the text is not structured by such a coherence or "forces of closure" (Fiske 1987, 84) that revolve around the camera. I will show that a text can be contradictory in relation to just one aspect of the text, namely the

construction of the victim. These contradictions might indeed be the basis for the viewer's potential to read television from different positions (Hall 1973; Morley 1992).

One might argue, however, that cinema provides a very different form of engagement with the text. As John Ellis (2000, 100-101) continues to argue, the dominant form of engagement with most television is closer to that of the glance. Although we might make an appointment to watch a particular program (Jancovich and Lyons 2003) and television programs might be increasingly constructed like cinema (Caldwell 1995), and *CSI* in particular (Cohan 2008, 70), it is doubtful that we direct as much attention--and therefore a gaze--to the television screen as we do in the darkened and sound-proved cinema. Importantly, however, there are moments in *CSI* when the characters gaze at people or objects and when we are invited to gaze with them. In the following, I will show that even in these moments the camera does not create coherence. In order to investigate this I will have to adopt the methodology of a shot-for-shot analysis of the images and sounds of the text which will be embedded in an analysis of the wider narratives as well as the dialogue. This form of close textual analysis, however, takes the text completely out of its televisual context which significantly contributes to its meanings (Williams 1974; Rixon 2006). So what can such a methodology contribute to our understanding of a text? I will argue that it is exactly the ability to locate the sources of the text's polysemy, as I will show in the following analysis.

The Explicit Function of Victims

Particularly in its first season, *Crime Scene Investigation* includes scenes in which the role of the victim in the investigation is made explicit as in the following scene from "Cool Change" (1.2). Interestingly, a part of the conversation is drawn attention to by the underlying soundtrack in which a whistle sound marks the beginning of what is considered important.



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The episode here creates a distinction between the regular police, personified in the detective, and the forensic scientists, headed by Gil Grissom (William Petersen). The police detective can only investigate crime by talking to everyone but the victim, whose voice has to remain unheard because it has effectively

been silenced. The victim in the eyes of the police detective therefore has to be denied voice because the voice can no longer be produced. The forensic scientists of *Crime Scene Investigation* suggest that this voice is still there for the forensic scientist to hear. The series creates a distinction between the voice of the victim as the sound produced by vocal chords and the voice of the victim as an expression of his or her agency. By separating them out, the forensic scientists can “listen” to the expression of the victim’s agency.

In *Crime Scene Investigation*, the victim is presented as enabled to tell the story of what happened him- or herself. This suggests a complete reversal of the hierarchies of power of conventional crime drama: no longer does the perpetrator hold the power to speak about the victim and reveal the truth about crime, here, the victim is in the position to tell and therefore empowered with the key to the truth. The idea that the victim enters into a conversation with the investigator is in this scene emphasized by the (impossible) shot from below the street surface up to Gil and the detective, which is framed on the left by the profile of the victim:



This shot follows the established convention of film and television to frame the close-up of the speaker with a body part of the listener. The framing itself thus suggests a dialogical relationship between investigator and victim.

This--the conversation between investigator and victim--is the central motif which runs through the series' first four seasons in order to signal how *Crime Scene Investigation* conceptualizes the victim explicitly. In the same episode, Gil tells the perpetrator it was her boyfriend who told him what happened, and in another episode ("Who Are You?", 1.6), he leans down to whisper to a skeleton: "Who are you?", suggesting that the victim will reveal her identity herself. Importantly, *Crime Scene Investigation* suggests that it is the investigator learning from the victim, not vice versa: the victim is in the knowledgeable and therefore powerful position, while the investigator can only listen. However, this is rendered problematic by the way the television text is constructed around the victims, and this becomes most apparent when looking at male victims.

The Implicit Function of the Victim

As Cohan (2009, 30-32) highlights, the conceptualization of "hearing" of the evidence which suggests a direct and conclusive understanding, rather than interpretation of the clues, needs to be problematized. In such a conceptualization, victims can indeed directly tell the investigators what happened, suggesting that they do hold power over the truth. However, it is the investigators interpretive work that brings this truth to light, suggesting a more involved process than that of hearing and hence a more complicated power structure. This power structure becomes more clearly problematic when we consider the gendering of male victims.

Throughout the first four seasons, *Crime Scene Investigation* feminizes its male victims while at the same time emphasizing their masculinity. I will demonstrate this by looking at two average examples. These examples stand for the wider pattern which I have established in the close textual analysis of the first four seasons (Weissmann 2006), and which can be discussed as a pattern because *Crime Scene Investigation* follows unusually rigidly the series format. Jane Feuer points out that from the 1980s onward, series have increasingly become serialized (1992, 154), therefore combining the series format with aspects of the continuous serial or soap opera. Contemporary American dramas such as *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004-present), *24* (FOX, 2001-present) and *Lost* (ABC, 2004-present) seem to have moved so much to this serialized format that the continuous serial aspects seem to dominate the episodic structure of the series. *Crime Scene Investigation* is on the opposite end of that spectrum: although it tells some backstories and creates some narrative arcs that continue over episodes (Sara's and Gil's attraction to each other, Catherine's failed marriage, etc.), the largest part of its time is dedicated to the cases that are resolved each week. In other words, *Crime Scene Investigation* tightly follows the episodic structure of the series format, which relies on repetition, as John Corner points out, and which allows for economical storytelling (1999, 57). This essentially means that aspects of the text become so established that they become invisible and instead allow for an exploration of other elements of the narrative. The depiction of the male victim belongs to the established aspects of the series, which allows the program to develop the particular story of crime in more detail.

"Assume Nothing" (4.1) revolves around the murder of several couples by another couple who invite them to a swinger party and then kill them. At one point in the investigation, the emphasis shifts to one male victim who was the sexual object of the female perpetrator. This subverts the traditional set-up of western culture: not the woman, the man is delineated to sexual object, which here also goes along with notions of passivity as it eventually leads to his murder. The female perpetrator here seems in command of the action while the man, once sexually objectified, cannot escape his victimization. The signification of the objectification is noteworthy here too: the woman penetrates the man's ear with her tongue. The penetration of a natural orifice brings the male body into the realm of the feminine--it is normally the female body that is penetrated--as does his victimization, Karen Boyle highlights, because "to be a victim is to be powerless, feminized" (2005, 60).

The male victim's feminization does, however, not end with his death. As the object on the pathologist's slab, he remains within the realm of the feminine. In the morgue, the male body becomes the object of the scientific investigation, looked at by a medical examiner. As Mary Jacobus *et al.* argue, the medical gaze has traditionally been gendered masculine while its object has been considered feminine (1990, 6). Through the discourses of science, the normally abject corpse can become an object of study (Kristeva 1982, 4). Moreover, by constantly foregrounding the artificial recreation of the body, as Basil Glynn and Jeongmee Kim argue, *CSI* more generally represents "the body...as an object, rather than an *object* thing" (2009, 97), and hence removes some of the body's power to disrupt. In *Crime Scene*

Investigation, the gaze onto this object is indeed male--both medical examiners are men; and unlike their colleague in *CSI: Miami*, a woman, the two pathologists in *Crime Scene Investigation* do not look at the bodies with empathy or in order to care for them. Instead, they remain scientifically distanced, emphasized by medium shots that show them standing over the corpses, and close-ups that remove their image completely from that of the corpses.⁶ There is, however, more going on as the following clip demonstrates:



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First, a word on the sound design: the music here indicates that this is one of the central scenes of the episodes which will lead to the eventual cracking of the case. It builds up in tension which underlines the suspense in the narrative: will the investigators be fast enough to stop the medical examiner from washing away important evidence? The first motif of the music is suspended when they find out that the corpse still holds this evidence, but the music continues and builds up again as they get the DNA evidence from the corpse's ear. This second musical motif is resolved when a second narrative strand is completed, namely Nick's jeopardizing and exclusion from the center of the investigation. The music, therefore, highlights that the scene has a particular narrative function as a key point for two narrative strands of the episode. These are only marginally connected to the male victim--he is only the site from which the evidence has to be recovered in order for resolution to be achieved. In other words, this is a classic example of where the episode can focus on other elements of the narrative because our gaze onto the male body has been trained and normalized throughout the seasons.

The gaze here remains in the realm of the erotic due to the camera work. The first shot of the male body is a pan up the man's legs. This pan is one of those which Sue Tait saw reserved for "slender young female corpses" (2006, 52), suggesting that these are indeed also, and as often, used with male bodies. Although the pan here seems to follow David's water hose and is therefore motivated by narrative, it still directs our gaze toward the man's genitalia which, throughout the scene, remain invisible. A white pot is placed strategically between the camera and the man, drawing attention to what is not shown, namely the man's penis. This is in line with other representations of the male body as Peter Lehman highlights as it focuses attention onto the invisible and also enables "the privileged signifier of the phallus most easily [to retain] its awe and mystique when the penis is hidden" (Lehman 2001, 27). Thus, in the eroticization the male body is also constructed as the bearer of the phallus, thereby emphasizing his masculinity. The penis

is also excluded from the high angle medium shot onto the man's torso which is held rather long and repeated when the investigators have recovered the evidence. Here, we are allowed to ponder if this is a beautiful body, worthy of eroticization. Again, the body's masculinity is emphasized as this is a 'hard body', well toned and trained, which, as Susan Jeffords (1994) argues, has become established since the 1980s as a signifier for masculine strength. This suggests that the male body is here still--even after his death--also displayed as erotic object, apparently feminized through its objectification at the same time as his masculinity is highlighted.

In terms of viewing position, we seem placed alongside the female perpetrator, a position that enables the objectification of the male body. In fact, the whole scene relies on the mirroring of the perpetrator's actions towards the victim: not only do we look at the body in the same way, the investigators do the same thing to this body, namely penetrate the body through the natural orifice of the ear. Importantly, it is a woman, Catherine (Marg Helgenberger), who we see lean down, look at his ear and stick her cotton bud into it, not Nick (George Eads), even though we can assume he does the same. The scene therefore suggests that the male body can only wield its truth when the investigators retrace the steps of the perpetrators, which here includes the objectification and eroticization of the male body as well as its penetration. This raises the important question of how much power the male victim really has if he remains passive, objectified and penetrated by the perpetrator and the imitating investigator.

Furthermore, the penetration does not end with the cotton bud: the camera itself seems to move into the body. This sequence has become known as the "CSI-shot," which the series markets widely as its own innovation. As Karen Lury points out, however, similar sequences were already used in *The Human Body* (BBC1, 1999) and a similar move into the body is implied in the set-up of public science displays (2005, 53), and very similar images were used in the film *Three Kings* (David O'Russel, 1999). The sequence has gained in significance, however, through *CSI* as other programs use similar imagery in order to emulate the success of the *CSI* franchise.⁷ The apparent move into the body is achieved through a cleverly edited sequence of zoom onto a life body and then seamless cut into either computer generated imagery or a plastic model where the movement of the camera continues, thereby giving the impression of a continuous move from the outside to the insides of the body.

In the *CSI*-shot, the penetration of the body is doubled as the sequence shows us the penetration through an object (a bullet, a knife, or, as in this case, a cotton bud), but also gives the impression that we, too, penetrate the body ourselves. Moreover, the *CSI*-shot relies on and therefore emphasizes the natural and unnatural orifices which are perceived as passageways to the body's insides. In respect to its focus on and fascination with orifices, *Crime Scene Investigation* resembles the possession film, as Carol J. Clover describes it:

But insofar as [the possession films] concern themselves with bodies penetrated, invaded and colonized [...], they also attest to an archetypical horror story. And insofar as that story turns on bodily orifices, –natural passages to an inner space – it would appear to be a story built around the female body. (1992, 80)

Of course, there is a difference. The possession film is concerned with the invasion and colonization of the body through spirits while *Crime Scene Investigation* focuses on the material invasion of the body. Both, however, use imagery that highlight the orifices of the body: in the possession film this might be through vomiting or masturbation, in *Crime Scene Investigation* it is through close-ups of the wounds and natural orifices such as the mouth and the blood leaking from it, as in the images below.



This emphasis on the orifices of the body and the dripping of blood bring the male body again into the realm of the feminine which, Julia Kristeva points out, is associated with the leaking body (1982, 72).

Interestingly, the *CSI*-shot is again primarily used with male bodies: 61 percent of all *CSI*-shots in the first four seasons of *Crime Scene Investigation* show us the insides of male bodies. This percentage is even higher than the occurrence of male in comparison to female corpses, suggesting that the *CSI*-shot is fundamentally about the investigation of male bodies.

As in the other *CSI*-shots, in “Assume Nothing,” when the camera moves into the body, the body is also made audible.

The scratch and squelch sounds that can be heard here fulfill several functions. Firstly, they stress that we are now very close to the body: we can hear as well as see it. Secondly, they add to the effects of the *CSI*-shot which, because it shows us the bare insides of the body, looks disgusting. The penetration of the ear is relatively harmless, but in cases in which a bullet or knife ruptures an artery or explodes a heart, the body is displayed as gory and abject to which the sounds add a level of reality as it proposes that this is what a ruptured body looks and sounds like (Weissmann and Boyle 2007). The body therefore appears as troubling presence which undermines its status as passive object. Third, and contrary to this, the sounds highlight the body’s materiality: its flesh. It is this emphasis on the flesh that brings the body again into the realm of the feminine, which has traditionally been associated with the body as material while masculinity is culturally connected to the mind. Although this has been challenged by writers such as Lehman (1993), Brown (2002) and Jeffords (1994), who all highlight how cinematic representations of men are connected to the physical materiality of their bodies, what is different here is that this body does not represent anything other than itself. The materiality of the bodies Lehman, Brown and Jeffords describe are connected to its representation of prowess, strength and power (or the lack of them); in *Crime Scene Investigation*’s *CSI*-shot, the body, displayed as interior landscape, is removed from agency and therefore becomes “pure flesh.” Divorced from agency and therefore also from mind, the body no longer serves the needs of masculinity.

In short, the body in “Assume Nothing” is feminized through different means: through narrative, which places him into the position of sexual object and victim of a female perpetrator; through image, which displays him as object of the erotic and medical gaze and which conveys a sense of penetration; and through sound, which highlights its pure materiality. At the same time, particular shots and pans allow his masculinity to be emphasized, while the display of the body as masculine troubles the notion of the victim as passive object. Interestingly, while his masculinity is stressed through the *mise-en-scène* and the use of physically well-built actors, therefore suggesting the victim himself is masculine, it is what is done to the body that feminizes it: the active objectification by the perpetrator and the medical examiners, its penetration and the investigation of its insides that reveals the body’s pure fleshy materiality. Only through its feminization, however, can the body become a troubling presence that subverts its status as passive object.

A similar pattern can be established for the second example I want to discuss, namely “Friends and Lovers” (1.5). The episode begins with a young man running naked through the desert. Again, it is a well-toned man whose penis remains invisible.

His nakedness evokes his vulnerability, but also invites speculation about his potential status as yet another sexual object who will also be victimized. The speculation about his potential victimization is brought about by the repetitive series format and the use of genre conventions: we know if we have watched similar programs or some episodes of *Crime Scene Investigation* before,⁸ that each episode begins with the crime without revealing the perpetrator. In other words, this first scene, we know, sets up the puzzle of the narrative and therefore invites our speculation.

As in “Assume Nothing,” the male body is again the object of the medical gaze, although it is covered up for the most part with a white sheet. Instead, feminization is achieved through another means, which is another consistent pattern in the first four seasons of the series. *Crime Scene Investigation* gradually reveals what happened in several flashback scenes. In “Friends and Lovers,” the victim is not heard to speak once in these scenes. He remains a silent character, is denied voice as sound, but also voice as expression throughout the episode. Feminists have highlighted that women have regularly been denied voice throughout history. One recent example is the denial of female voices in the responses to the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Lemish 2005; Byerly 2005). This denial of voice implies an even greater passivity than the victimization through crime, as it suggests that the victim never actively sought to have his voice heard,

that he was already rather passive when still alive. It suggests that the victim is inherently, by nature, essentially passive.

Interestingly, the episode includes a second case with a second male victim. Here, the male body is not the object of the medical gaze. Indeed, the episode uses several devices to draw attention *away* from the body: in the scene in which the crime scene is investigated it is often framed only at the margins of the image and in the only medium shot in which it is at the center a chair obscures the man's face. Moreover, this is the only scene in which the male body is visible as a corpse--all other scenes are flashback scenes in which the man is still alive. This is in stark contrast to the male body of the A story which is returned to at several points in the investigation and therefore remains a presence as a corpse, the manifestation of the victim of crime.

Moreover, the male victim in the B story is shown to speak excessively in the flashback scenes. He tells his perpetrator what he will do and what he could do, therefore clearly emphasizing his status as active man. The episode eventually reveals that the man has blackmailed his perpetrator over years and threatens to expose the perpetrator's lesbian relationship to the school board. As a result, he seems to have brought his death on himself by cornering his perpetrator, and he appears to deserve his death. He is thus marked as a guilty victim, while the victim of the A story appears innocent.

Guilt in a male victim in *Crime Scene Investigation* therefore appears intrinsically connected to his activity. In "Friends and Lovers," there is also a suggestion that his guilt is also in line with an aggressive, masculine sexuality as he is shown to sexually attack his murderer in the flashbacks. This points to a connection between masculinity and violence and a continuation of masculine aggression beyond the individualized incident. Innocence and victimization, on the other hand, seem intrinsically linked to the potential to be feminized as the complex gendering of male victims discussed so far indicates. A true victim, therefore, is a victim who can be gendered feminine--although visibly masculine, they are objectifiable, penetrate-able, passive and without voice.

Two Versions of the Victim

This implicit conceptualization of the "true victim" is opposed to the explicit conceptualization of the victim as actively contributing to the resolution of the crime narrative. While the series includes references which propose that it is the victim who holds the power over the truth of crime, the gendering of the true victim indicates that he or she has to be passive in order to reveal its clues. As the feminization renders the victims powerless and silent, how can they tell themselves what happened?

The series seems to propose a solution to this dilemma. In "Sex, Lies and Larvae" (1.10), Sara (Jorja Fox) says to Gil: "[...] we are the victim's last voice." In other words, the investigators speak for the victims because the victims can no longer speak for themselves. This, however, still implies a power hierarchy in which the victims are the more powerful; the investigators serve them, speak through their voice the words which the victims dictate. The feminization of the victim, however, suggests otherwise. The victim's status as passive, penetrate-able object is reinforced by the actions of the investigators. Moreover, in order for the investigators to be able to speak for them, they need to retrace the steps of the perpetrators which implies that the murderers still hold power: although the truth is no longer revealed through their confession, it can only be recovered when the investigators imitate their actions.

This is only possible because the victims can be feminized: passive and silent, they cannot decide on the course of action themselves. Notably, however, they are never hyper-feminine, despite their troubling presence in the *CSI*-shot. Deborah Jermyn discusses the female corpses of *Copycat* (Jon Amiel, 1995) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) and points to the fact that the gore of their bodies invests them with a hyper-femininity that enables them to disrupt the narrative in which they connote *to-be-looked-away-from-ness* (2004, 163). In *Crime Scene Investigation*, female bodies are not depicted in their gory detail as the male victims. Rather, the female corpses are relatively clean, not invested with the same abject qualities as the male ones. The corpses therefore remain on the safe side of femininity--a spectacle to be looked at, an object to be investigated, a passive object without a voice.

Rather than giving greater power to the victims to reveal the story of the crime, *Crime Scene Investigation* therefore appears to take the power away from the perpetrators only to give it to the investigators. Yet the investigators rely on the evidence of the body and their gaze onto it, which indeed suggests that the victim ultimately holds the truth. Moreover, the corpses remain troubling. These contradictions remain unresolved within the text, shifting from episode to episode to a greater

empowerment of the victim or to a greater empowerment of the investigator. These contradictions, however, become only apparent when we direct our analysis to both the more explicit narrative and the more implicit construction of the narrative in image and sound.

Conclusions

This article provided a discussion of the function of the male victims in the first four seasons of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. By separating out the explicit references to the victim, which suggest that the victim is empowered to tell his own story from the implicit construction of the male victim as passive, objectified and penetrated, I have been able to point to the fundamental contradictions in the text that are never resolved in the series. *Crime Scene Investigation* presents disempowered victims who can only reveal their truth when they are penetrated in the same way by the investigators as they were by the perpetrator. At the same time it is the victim who holds the key to the truth. It is the existence of these conceptualizations of the victim that allows viewers to read the text from different points of view and negotiate their own reading.

These conclusions need to be contextualized in order to highlight that this is specific to the original series of *CSI* and is not a generic trait of the subgenre of forensic crime drama. Compared to *CSI: Miami* and *Silent Witness* (BBC, 1996–present), the victims' stories in *Crime Scene Investigation* remain relatively marginal. By centering on female medical examiners, *CSI: Miami* and *Silent Witness* emphasize the empathetic over the scientific, distanced approach to forensic science that is prevalent in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. This empathetic approach allows the body to be read in relation to its life story rather than only in its relevance to the story of crime. As a consequence, the victim's life looms larger in the narratives of *CSI: Miami* and *Silent Witness*. In *CSI: Miami* this is often emphasized by a number of images of the victim's face displayed on several monitors that hang over the medical examiner's head in the morgue. In other words, there are degrees of importance that forensic crime drama can give to the victims of crime which undoubtedly affect how the victim is constructed both on the implicit and the explicit level of the text. Whilst *CSI: Miami* and *Silent Witness* put the victims center-stage, *Crime Scene Investigation* is more contradictory as to their impact on the narrative resolution. Importantly, however, the victim is comparatively more central than in conventional crime drama. What my analysis, however, highlighted is that this might not be cause to celebrate: the polysemy of *Crime Scene Investigation* allows for an understanding of the hierarchies of power within the series that suggest that the investigators, and with them the law, are the ones who hold the ultimate key to the truth.¹⁰ This indeed suggests that despite its tendency to present crime as messy and to highlight that it is truth rather than justice that the investigators seek (Cohan 2008, 5, 14), the series nevertheless legitimizes forensic procedures as unproblematic, and hence does little to challenge the current status quo in the American penal system.

About the Author

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Endnotes

1 The original series of the *Law & Order* franchise plays with this format and suggests there are other ways to prove guilt, that guilt, potentially, cannot always be proven. The two newer series of the franchise, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC, 1999–present) and *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* (NBC, 2001), however, rely heavily on the confession of the perpetrator.

2 In the commentary to *CSI: Miami: 'Blood Brothers'* (2.1) on the region 1 box set.

3 This is a perception reflected in *Crime Scene Investigation*'s star William Petersen's attempts to lobby for funding for crime labs in the United States.

4 These meanings, I would argue, are ingrained in the wider culture and appear “normal,” which is why they might be invisible to program makers and viewers alike.

5 One might think of how Marg Helgenberger’s character, Catherine Willows, has been portrayed over the years in *Crime Scene Investigation*, and how season 5 in particular saw her change from an assertive woman to someone driven by self-doubt and anxieties.

6 The female medical examiners in both *CSI: Miami* and *Silent Witness* in comparison tend to lean down, close to the bodies, thereby emphasising their emotional closeness.

7 See for example *House* (FOX, 2004-present), *Prison Break* (FOX, 2005) and *Jake 2.0* (UPN, 2003).

8 *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* does not change this pattern until “Killer” (6.15), which is the first episode to reveal the identity of the murderer in the opening scenes. It is changes like these that make a generalisation about *Crime Scene Investigation* over the nine seasons that have been shown by the time of writing (September 2009) so problematic.

9 A particularly interesting episode is “Blood Lines” (4.23), in which a very articulate woman is shown to be empowered enough to describe her rape and rapists in detail and in which the investigators inability to understand DNA evidence leads to eventual disaster.

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