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# (Not) One of the Boys: A Case Study of Female Detectives on HBO

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## Abstract

In 1997 HBO aired its first original drama series, *Oz*. In the years that have followed the network has positioned itself as vanguard in the television landscape, however, HBO drama series have remained a complicated, and often dangerous site for female characters. Moreover, with a few exceptions (*Sex and the City*, or *True Blood* for example), original HBO drama series remain focused on the network's primary audience demographic: the predominantly male, relatively affluent consumers of quality television. This research explores the representation of female detectives within original HBO crime drama series, *The Wire* (2002--8) and Season Two of *True Detective* (2014 -), in order to examine how female officers, operate within the male-dominated world of HBO drama. Two characters, Shakima Greggs of *The Wire* and Antigone Bezzerides of Season Two of *True Detective*, were selected as case studies and subjected to feminist textual analysis. While these representations provide some recognition of the challenge facing women working in law enforcement, namely the need to balance gendered expectations against what it means to be "good police," they also reinforce particular kinds of gendered narrative arcs and tropes. These findings help illustrate the limitations of the portrayal of female police, particularly within male-dominated genres and networks.

## Keywords

The Wire, True Detective, HBO, Shakima Greggs, Antigone Bezzerides, feminist textual analysis

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

My fascination with HBO came later in my television-watching life. I have a vague recollection in my late teenage years of seeing a few episodes of *Six Feet Under* (2001 - 05) and *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), however, it was not until 2012 that I was lured in by the promise of “quality television”. I somehow stumbled upon an episode from season two of *Game of Thrones* (2011- ) and that was the beginning of the end. I was entranced by the freedom with which they threw around language and did not stray from shocking or gruesome storylines. HBO brought me brief obsessions, like the first season of *Girls* (2012-17), however, I will gladly admit to such errors in judgment because the network also brought me my favourite show, *The Newsroom* (2012-2014). In the long off-seasons of the currently airing programs I began delving into HBO’s back catalogue. It took a while for the novelty to wear off and for my brain to begin to engage critically with the content I was consuming. While women were visible in lead roles in HBO’s comedy series, they were surprisingly absent in the gritty dramas for which the network is best known. With the exception of fantasy series *True Blood* (2008-14) and *Game of Thrones* (2011-) women in HBO’s drama series were largely relegated to small, recurring roles as wives and love interests. This is what initially piqued my interest in exploring the roles of women in the non-fantastical, reality-based drama series.

When I delved further into HBO’s repertoire of reality-based drama series the list was dominated by various offshoots of the crime drama genre. Women were still most



often cast in roles within the domestic sphere: wives, mistresses, daughters, however, there were also a select few female characters who evaded this characterization. The rarity of female characters within the workplace in HBO's crime dramas, particularly in police procedural<sup>1</sup> series, is what spurred my research into the portrayals of these women. With its narrative roots in detective fiction, police procedural television has, much like its predecessors, been long dominated by men. The women who do — often briefly — appear in these series are filtered through the experience of the hypermasculine antiheroes who have proliferated in the genre and are rarely cast as viewpoint characters. As with much of HBO's drama programming, the majority of these women are doomed to be little more than titillating love interests, be it wives, ex-wives, mistresses, girlfriends, or one-off flings. If they are not cast as a love interest, women are otherwise cast as victims.

Women have slowly begun to cross over into the work sphere of the precinct, though it should be noted that this has not meant that these women are much better off than wives or victims. The token women of the police procedural typically end up playing a role that is much more of the 'team mom' than a capable, fully-realized police officer. This sort of characterization places women at odds with one or more male colleagues in a good cop versus bad cop scenario. Characters like Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay) in the earlier seasons of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (1999 - ) want to follow established procedures and stick to the book, all while men like Liv's

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<sup>1</sup> These television series center on the accurate portrayal of established police procedures and strive to "accurately and earnestly reflect the political economy, policies, hierarchies, occupational subcultures, and decorum of actual... law enforcement agencies" (Arntfield 76).

longtime partner Elliot Stabler (Christopher Meloni), go rogue and end up saving the day. Other roles for women notably cast them in occupations that are undervalued, or not taken seriously to begin with. Women play medical examiners<sup>2</sup>, public defenders<sup>3</sup>, and even psychics<sup>4</sup>. These jobs often place female characters on the periphery of the ‘hard’ police work, leaving them doing many of the more thankless tasks.

American police procedural television is an extensive genre and to attempt to examine even a small percentage of the total content produced in the past decade would take years. My research focuses instead on HBO, which has only aired two police procedural series to date. My interest in HBO’s content is not strictly based in practicality, or in narrowing the scope of my research. The network is of interest due to the rise of prestige television in the current televisual landscape, as well as HBO’s relationship to masculinity in both its content and marketing strategies. In its infancy, HBO sought a straightforward way in which to differentiate itself from the rest of the television landscape. The network’s programming strategies, particularly in the early years of original television content, indicate a strong idealization of “hard boiled masculinity” as seen in series like *Oz* (1997-2003) and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007).

Television, unlike cinema, has had an:

ongoing association with the domestic sphere, and in the domestic’s abiding association with the conventionally feminine, the pre- or post-adult, and the underclass, all identities of economic, social and political subordination. The

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<sup>2</sup> Jordan Cavanaugh played by Jill Hennessy, *Crossing Jordan* (2001-2007).

<sup>3</sup> Shambala Green played by Lorraine Toussaint, *Law & Order* (1990-2003), *Chicago PD* (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Allison DuBois played by Patricia Arquette, *Medium* (2005-2011).

perpetuation of television's denigration can thus be seen as party to the perpetuation of a number of social inequalities. (Levine 393)

Television's link to domestic life once gave the medium a reputation as a feminized medium (Kim 322), as it has historically been women who inhabit these domestic roles. There is some truth to this reputation, in that programmers and advertisers did seek to target women in the early days of television. In her article "Distinguishing television: the changing means of television liveness", Elana Levine explores western media's seemingly compulsive need to hierarchize media. Levine posits that "discursive attempts to differentiate television from other media (and other media from television) depend upon constructions [...] that position television as the medium that caters most to 'popular', rather than 'legitimate', taste" (393).

More specifically, Levine, and other television scholars like Charlotte Brunsdon, have linked the perpetual denigration of television to various levels of social inequalities. The association between television and these subordinate groups, particularly women, has led to the continuing idea that television is something lesser, a populist medium that requires little intelligence or sophistication. The denigration of 'feminized' television created the niche that HBO would later fill. The success of HBO's early television series can be measured in terms of profit; however, HBO also achieved high levels of success in "intangible factors such as prestige, cultural influence and public awareness" (qtd in McCabe and Akass 84). While the network did not itself create the idea of quality television, nor has it ushered in any new benchmarks of quality television, HBO has been successful in defining "new rules for talking about, and understanding what we mean by, quality TV in the post-1996, post-network era" (McCabe and Akass 84). On the back of

its early success in original television HBO was able to rebrand, and, in doing so, it has become synonymous with quality television in contemporary culture. Part of HBO's 'rebrand' entailed the implementation of male identification strategies<sup>5</sup> (Edgerton and Jones 324) in an effort to differentiate itself within the industry. They did so by crafting a signature style of raw, hypermasculine original programming. HBO's key demographic was thought to be young, upper or middle-class, educated, and male-dominated. Therefore, in order to remain economically viable, the network had to make good on its promise to provide something to this particularly fickle sort of audience that they could not find elsewhere (McCabe and Akass 85).<sup>6</sup> If television is devalued because of its historically feminine alignment, then HBO has been careful to distance itself as much as possible from this history. It also makes HBO a particularly rich site to think about how women in crime dramas are represented.

Historically, HBO has been much kinder to women in the comedy genre. Women in comedy series have been allowed to take the forefront and carry the weight of the narrative in many of these series.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, female characters, particularly within the network's drama genre, exist in a world dominated almost entirely by men. Rarely are these women the focus of the narrative, instead being relegated to sidekick status as peripheral characters.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of their specific location within the narrative of the

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5 These strategies focus predominantly around the heavy usage of violence, coarse language, male narcissism, and traditionally male professions. While these strategies have dissipated somewhat in recent years, they are still abundant in HBO original drama series, which focus disproportionately on whiny male antiheroes.

6 This same principle has since become popular, particularly with other subscription-based services like Netflix.

7 *Sex and the City* (1998 - 2004), *Girls* (2012 - 17), and *Veep* (2012 -) being the most critically acclaimed examples.

8 The important outlier is the series *True Blood* (2008 – 2014); however, my focus is not on fantasy texts.

series, the individual narrative arcs of HBO's female characters are still being largely mediated by the 'tortured' men with whom they interact. Whether they are co-workers or wives, they are largely there to provide comfort and clean up messes, roles that are distinctly maternal, even when a character herself is not. These often-contradictory representations mean that, within the HBO television landscape, being a woman more often than not involves uneasy choices and irreconcilable compromises. Some of HBO's female characters are embodying conflicting and complex beliefs and ideologies; however, such depth is rarely given to the women who continue to operate within in the domestic sphere.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the intermittent existence of interesting female characters, HBO's original drama series remain fundamentally about men. This means that a woman's place within the overall narrative is mediated through her relationship with male characters, and the other men in her workplace. It is perhaps due to this lens that a woman's competence within the workplace is evaluated by her exhibiting more traditionally masculine traits, and often dress. Shakima 'Kima' Greggs (*The Wire*) establishes her competence as a detective early in the show's first season. As the only female detective among a sea of self-destructive men, Kima "gathers intelligence about [Barksdale's drug] syndicate while talking like one of the boys, presenting a masculine affect (jeans, ball cap, etc.), and exerting her authority over her underlings... [just] as a male detective would" (Drapela 303). Unlike *The Wire* which features a handful of women in various work-based roles outside of the Baltimore Police Department, *True Detective* has much less

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<sup>9</sup> One notable exception is Edie Falco's portrayal of mob wife Carmela Soprano in *The Sopranos* (1999-2007).

meat to it. In the first season the only women the audience sees are the wives of detectives, a few secretaries, one mistress, and, of course, the mutilated, naked corpses of murder victims. Fortunately, at least for female representation, *True Detective* is an anthology-style series with each season having a different cast and its own, self-contained plot. I say this is fortunate because, after the stereotypical representations of women put forward in season one, season two brought a female detective to the forefront of the narrative. Antigone ‘Ani’ Bezzerides initially fits into a similar role to Kim. The similarities between the two in terms of visual coding — particularly wardrobe — personality, and their positions as the token woman of their respective teams largely informed my decision to select these characters as the subjects for my case study.

## 1.1 Theoretical Frameworks and Research Questions

My research follows the belief that cultural and representational practices, in this case particularly those disseminated through television, have an effect on the lived realities of their audiences and, as such, are deeply linked to real hierarchies of power. Given this tie between representational practices and reality my research relies on Stuart Hall’s theories of encoding and decoding in conjunction with feminist textual analysis to determine through case studies of female characters in *The Wire* and *True Detective* if the HBO series deliver on their promise to provide subversive, complex female characters, or simply more carefully constructed branding.

In this thesis, I will discuss the portrayal of two female detectives in popular HBO police procedural dramas. My analysis will focus on Detective Shakima ‘Kima’ Greggs of *The Wire* (2002-08), played by Sonja Sohn, and Detective Antigone ‘Ani’ Bezzerides of *True Detective* (2014 -)<sup>10</sup> played by Rachel McAdams. Not only are *The Wire* and *True Detective* the only police procedural dramas created by HBO to date, but both characters operate as the only woman in a team of male detectives.<sup>11</sup> The fundamental question in my research is how does the male-dominance within HBO and the crime drama genre affect the portrayals of these female characters? Furthermore, I endeavor to explore how these women are represented in order to evaluate how successfully HBO police procedurals are able to produce a fully-realized, three-dimensional female characters.

In order to set the stage for this analysis, chapter two will provide an overview of the literature surrounding HBO’s programming strategies in regards to original television creation. It will further provide a brief rundown of the evolution of women’s roles on television through the 1970s, 80s, and into the 1990s when HBO began creating its own television content. The scope of the chapter will then narrow further to discuss police procedural dramas in particular including some of the stereotypical tropes of female representation and the gendered challenges and expectations that female characters have faced, and continue to face within these series.

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<sup>10</sup> Ani Bezzerides only appears in season 2 of *True Detective* which aired in 2015.

<sup>11</sup> There are other working women in both series; however, the only named characters we see are both women in legal professions who appear only occasionally. They are in no way central to any of the action in either series.

Chapters three and four will be case studies of the portrayals of Kima and Ani respectively and will explore how these women are coded visually with wardrobe choices and explore the specific relationships that they have with loved ones and their rapport with male colleagues. Chapter five will consist of discussion of the two characters. I will explore the similarities and differences in the portrayals of both women in order to illuminate particular gendered narrative arcs and tropes that have remained in use from the debut of *The Wire* in 2002, to the present.



## Chapter 2

### 2 Literature Review

By focusing on men and masculinity, HBO has made its crime drama series a difficult place for women to exist. The majority of women featured in the series fall into the categories of wives, girlfriends, mistresses, or, occasionally daughters. Regardless of their specific title, these women are all effectively brushed off as ‘less than’. They exist merely as object for the male characters to fetishize, or, alternatively, demonize. The few women that appear in HBO drama series and challenge the network’s narrow understanding of womanhood appear most often in the workplace and must buckle down and actively take on their traditionally masculine environments, becoming “one of the boys”, or risk being written off entirely. This negotiation of gendered expectations in these on-screen workplaces is of particular interest in my research. As HBO crime dramas already have such a small number of women, and an even smaller number of working women, the way these female characters are being portrayed is important as they are being left to speak for their gender. With so few visible working women the messages and meaning being conveyed can have real ramifications on viewer perceptions of working women and women in law enforcement.

Stuart Hall’s model of encoding and decoding posits that the audience is both the ‘source’ and ‘receiver’ of televisual meaning (Hall 119), making the reader, and not the text, the pivotal point in the creation of meanings. As HBO markets itself as a ‘luxury’ brand for the young, educated, affluent, and often male viewer, the ideologies being

encoded at the point of creation are going to reflect the dominant ideologies of those groups. Given HBO's targets a very niche demographic, the dominant ideologies being encoded largely reinforce rather than challenge a heteropatriarchal view of society. While these may be the ideological viewpoints being encoded in HBO's drama series at the point of creation, negotiated and oppositional readings among viewers are inevitable. No matter what group they target, HBO series will be viewed by people of many races, ages, orientations, and genders. This is why the few roles for women in these series are important, particularly for female viewers. More important still is the transformation of these decoded meanings into social practices. Hall states that after distribution, "the discourse must be translated — transformed again — into social practices if the circuit is to be both complete and effective" (118). If television audiences are translating what they see on screens into real-world social norms, then the treatment of women in the workplace on the small screen has very real implications for working women, be they in a police precinct or otherwise. Are the women of HBO reiterating these encoded norms, or do they find ways to challenge them?

## 2.1 The Evolution of Working Women on TV

The successes of second-wave feminism had a lasting impact on the American televisual landscape. While other media throughout the 1970s, particularly Hollywood films, focused on masculinity, television became increasingly focused on the changing role of women (Sayeau 54). In this era Mary Richards (Mary Tyler Moore) defied expectations on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* by bringing a fulfilled, single, working

woman to the small screen. While the series was not the first to show a single woman in the workforce, it was among the “first to assert that work was not just a prelude to marriage or a substitute for it, but could form the center of a satisfying life for a woman in the way that it presumably did for men” (Dow 24). Before this ‘revelation’ the broadly accepted course of action was that women could work until they met the right man, whereupon they would get married, leave their job, and be able to live a life of domestic bliss and dirty diapers. Although it incorporated aspects from earlier workplace comedies, ensemble cast dramas, and popular sitcom formats, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* is of particular interest because of the new way in which it approached single women located outside of the domestic space. Mary was also not a subplot or a recurring character, but the lead viewpoint character through which the other characters are filtered. Its predecessors dealt with the “novel” idea of women in the workplace by sorting female characters into three broad categories: “husband hunting... charming incompetence and/or troublemaking [...] or widowed motherhood” (Dow 34). In *Prime Time Feminism*, Bonnie J. Dow posits that “Mary Richards signaled a major difference from previous representations [of the single, working woman] because she was single by choice, had no explicit familial protection, and saw her job as a career rather than as a stopgap on the journey toward marriage” (34). The concerns and issues that Mary bumps up against throughout the show are first and foremost issues of her career, rather than issues of romance and childrearing. Furthermore, “Mary was in a job traditionally assigned to a man, ending the string of single-woman teachers and secretaries in past sitcoms” (Dow 34). The inclusion of timely second-wave feminist narrative arcs was meant, at least in part, to help *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* in appealing to younger audiences. These

women, experiencing the benefits of the second wave feminist movement, had more freedom in their real lives to pursue careers, delay — or refuse — marriage, and control when and how they became mothers through the rising popularity of the pill and ongoing fight for women's reproductive rights. When we look at the women of this era, particularly American women, it makes sense that the television narratives were changing drastically. These women looked very little like the housewife demographic sought out by the creators of soap operas in the 1950s and 1960s

While *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was a departure from the “husband-hunting” single-woman comedy, it should be noted that the series is not without fault. Although Mary is savvy enough to “recognize sexism when she sees it... she is not necessarily assertive enough to do anything about it” (Dow 31). Therefore, what Mary Richards embodies is a safe, non-threatening vision of second-wave feminist gains. Although she subverted televisual norms by being single well into her thirties, Mary also “displayed all the traditional signifiers of femininity: young, slim, white, classically pretty, and usually deferential to men” (Bodroghkozy, “Where Have You Gone Mary Richards?”). Really, what *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* did was adapt popular feminist discourses of the period and cherry-pick which attributes would make the idea of the “new woman” both marketable and likeable. By making Mary a white, conventionally attractive, middle-class woman, creators enabled a direct comparison to one of the 1970s symbols of liberal feminism, Gloria Steinem. When *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* debuted in 1970, “liberal feminism’s most visible symbol... was the attractive, thoroughly heterosexual, thirtyish, never married Gloria Steinem” (Dow 29). In this way, Mary Richards functions much like a watered-down, televisual counterpart to Steinem, offering a chance for many of the

more reluctant viewers at home to ‘make sense’ of feminism in a way that did not have direct consequences on their real lives. In *Prime-Time Feminism* Bonnie Dow further argues that, “what Mary Richards and Gloria Steinem had in common was the potential to make liberation marketable” (32). The show was not only successful among younger women and second-wave feminists. In order to be a successful show, Mary Richards had to appeal to these women, while simultaneously not ‘scaring off’ those who did not necessarily identify with the feminist cause, but who may, nevertheless, have seen themselves in Mary’s struggles.

As the 1970s waned there was a strong shift in women’s roles on television, anticipating the backlash against feminist gains that permeated American discourse throughout the 1980s (Faludi 2). Although characters like Mary Richards were far from perfect, 1980s television programming brought with it a new, less idealistic angle of the single woman at work. In *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, Susan Faludi writes that “in prime-time television shows, from *thirtysomething* to *Family Man*, single, professional, and feminist women are humiliated, turned into harpies, or hit by nervous breakdowns... [while] the wise ones recant their independent ways by the closing sequence” (3). Television series, particularly many of the sitcoms produced in the 1980s, disseminated the message that it was dangerous for women to try and truly “have it all”. The message was that these women would be happier if they returned to their kitchens and had babies. This particular message is one that has not died out over time and is still very much present in HBO’s crime dramas in particular. The idea that strong women must recant or be punished is something that has been visible in many HBO drama series across genres, from Kim of *The Wire* and Ani in *True Detective* all the way

to Cersei Lannister of *Game of Thrones*. The idea that women must sacrifice is one that has endured.

In the wake of second-wave feminism, the media backlash of the 1980s was eager to “post” feminism and pen its obituary. While on the surface this might sound like ‘postfeminism’, even if only in a linguistic sense, it is important to note that the two cannot be considered synonymous. The term postfeminism, and in turn ‘postfeminist’, “suggests a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the [...] framing concept of “backlash” allows” (Tasker and Negra 1). In *Prime-time Feminism*, Julia Dow writes that this “backlash implies a wholesale rejection of feminist ideals, an attempt to demonize women’s liberation and to return women to the subordinate roles of a bygone era” (87). The backlash effectively rejected all of the gains and ideologies of feminism in a sort of blanket generalization. Although many backlashers were eager to declare the end of feminism this did not in turn make them postfeminist. While the backlash deals in wholesale rejection, Judith Stacey posits that postfeminism is “the simultaneous incorporation, revision, and depoliticization of many of the central goals of second wave feminism” (qtd in Dow 87).

Postfeminism is mostly used within television studies to refer to a surge of empowered, complex, female characters that began appearing on television screens throughout the 1990s. However, these vague criteria make it difficult to pin down postfeminist representations, as it employs terminology that can be highly subjective. Audience interpretations of what it means to be complex or empowered vary greatly depending on factors like race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious background, socioeconomic status, and other intersections. These ambiguities are something media

scholar Rosalind Gill takes into account in her conception of postfeminism, which understands the term “postfeminism as a sensibility characterizing large parts of contemporary culture” (3). Moseley and Reed provide a more precise explanation, particularly in terms of television, when they argue that these female characters, particularly in the 1990s, are representative of “the lucrative 18-34 female market, a generation that [had] grown up taking for granted the feminist victories won by their mothers and thus for whom feminism exists at the level of popular common sense” (238) and for whom the goals of feminism had largely been won, or assumed to have been won.

One of the many complicating factors in identifying, or agreeing on, postfeminist television is this complexity of character. Not all women on the small screen are empowered in the same sectors of their lives, nor to the same degree. Amanda Lotz writes that:

For many years academic analyses of feminist representations focused on the ‘new woman’ character type, with US critics commenting most expansively upon Mary Richards of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. But feminist critics writing on the television characters and programs emerging at the end of the 1990s [needed] new tools and perspectives to explain US television phenomena (105-6)

If women like Mary Richard were classified as ‘the new woman’, then postfeminist television was grappling with what could only be “characters who are ‘new, new women’ in comparison” (Lotz 106). These ‘new, new women’ often deal with plot-lines and backstories that, had they been written twenty years before, would never have made it to air. All of these women are arguably empowered in different intersections of their lives,

creating complex, often contradictory characters. These contradictions are largely what separates the women on these shows from their feminist predecessors, who were often represented in a more straightforward manner with depictions of women's social progress. It could be argued that the women of HBO's *Sex and the City* are empowered chiefly through their attitude towards casual sex and female pleasure, as well as success in their respective careers. Much like Mary Richards of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, these women do not measure their success strictly by marriage and family. While they are upper-middle class, straight white women, the ladies of *Sex and the City* live a life made possible only by the gains of previous feminist movements, wherein feminism and gender equality exist as common sense but not as an ongoing political struggle. Similarly, it could be argued that titular character of CBS series *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) is empowered predominantly through her career success. Murphy, too, lives in a world where the successes of second-wave feminism are viewed as a given. Instead of her struggle to work in an all-male environment, this show focuses on the complexity of Murphy's character, as she is a recovering alcoholic working in a newsroom dominated by men, and struggling with her own internalized misogyny.

## 2.2 The Shift to the Postfeminist Protagonist

*Murphy Brown* is often cited as a show which provides a strong example of the 1990s-era postfeminist protagonist. In *Prime-time Feminism*, Bonnie Dow posits that "if Mary Richards was the feminist television icon of the 1970s, [then, by extension] *Murphy Brown* is the postfeminist icon for the 1990s" (137). Both women operate within a



similar, traditionally masculine work environment, though the results are drastically different. Like Mary, Murphy inhabits a traditionally masculine position at a television station, albeit as a news anchor as opposed to an associate producer. One of the key differences, aside from job titles, is how each woman deals with the inherently masculine nature of their workplace. Dow argues that “unlike Mary Richards, Murphy does not achieve success by playing a domestic role in the workplace; rather, she has adapted successfully to the masculine culture of television journalism and made her way to the top of her profession through rugged individualism” (140), just like ‘one of the guys’ would. Mary and Murphy can arguably then be seen as two sides of the same coin. Unlike Mary, whose character is just happy to have a seat at the table, in order to actually compete in a male-dominated professional culture, Murphy internalizes this culture and becomes an extreme version of it. When the series begins the audience finds Murphy coming back from rehab where she was undergoing treatment for alcohol abuse. She is a hard-headed, take-no-shit woman who verbally cuts down the men around her. The audience knows little of Murphy’s romantic life before the narrative, only that she is still single into her forties because she is married to her job. While *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* is content to show the evolution of women’s roles in the workplace, *Murphy Brown* acts as a critique of liberal feminism and the idea that women can somehow “have it all”. She commits herself to her work fully and completely, and though her professional life flourishes, it is only because her personal life is essentially non-existent.

This evaluation of Murphy resonates with an idea that provides part of the analytical framework through which I will approach my exploration of women’s roles in HBO’s celebrated police dramas. In “Women of the Wire and the Sociological

Imagination”, Laurie A. Drapela introduces the “Masculinity-Competence Continuum” (302), an idea based around the phenomenon specifically within television crime drama wherein “the more masculinized a female character... is written/portrayed, the more efficacious she is portrayed in her professional life” (Drapela 302). Job dedication is a trait associated predominantly with male characters, who have, for the most part, always been in the workplace. The onus was not on the man to have a work-life balance or to run his household, and this allowed him to focus almost entirely on his work. Similarly, dedication to ‘the job’, and, by extension the “police family”, is one of the most valued traits in police procedurals, as it is an excusable and valued character flaw. The more a character allows the precinct to dictate their entire life, the better a cop he or she must be. This framework will be further discussed in later chapters; however, the continuum can be seen at work in the differentiations between Mary Richards and Murphy Brown. Mary Richard’s professional competence is often called into question throughout the course of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, largely due to her relationship to traditional femininity.<sup>12</sup> Not only are her decisions often questioned by the men around her, but she is also frequently called upon to take on any domestic or pink-collar work that might come up. Murphy, on the other hand, rarely has her professional competence questioned, as she

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<sup>12</sup> Traditional femininity, in this context, encompasses various aspects of physical appearance, personality, behaviour, and interests that have historically been associated with women and girls. Traditional femininity and masculinity both “[assume] that there are certain bodies, behaviors, personality traits, and desires” (Schippers 89) that can be ascribed to one gender. Such social constructions have dictated that women maintain their bodies in a certain fashion, particularly that they be thin and free of body hair. In a contemporary American context, it can be argued that there is also the expectation that women regularly wear make-up and longer hairstyles. Traditional femininity also came with certain assumed personality traits, particularly the assumption that women ought to be passive, nurturing, emotional, and empathetic.

takes on a masculinized demeanor<sup>13</sup> within her traditionally masculine environment of her workplace. However, she has little in her life outside of her work and what happens in the newsroom, as she has devoted herself entirely to her job and fitting into the environment.

Although the 1980s were a contentious time for women on the small screen, one of the key texts in the police procedural genre dealing with women, CBS series *Cagney & Lacey*, debuted in 1982. The series was critically acclaimed, running for seven seasons before ending in 1988. The narrative centers around two police detectives, Christine Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey, who live distinctly different lives. Cagney is a single, career-driven woman descended from a father who also served in the NYPD, while Lacey is a married working mother who still maintains an intense career focus. In a 2008 interview, executive producer Barney Rosenzweig credits the conceptualization of the series to his then-girlfriend Barbara Corday, who introduced him to the ideas of feminism through conversation and literature recommendations. Rosenzweig states that:

[Barbara] was backing up conversation with a lot of books, which she gave to me. Betty Friedan, you know, *The Feminine Mystique*. One of the books was a book called *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* by Molly Haskell. It's a textbook, really, on the treatment of women by Hollywood films

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<sup>13</sup> Like traditional femininity, traditional masculinity "assumes that there are certain bodies, behaviours, personality traits, and desires" (Schippers 89) that can be ascribed uniquely to men and boys. This classification is not always as rigid as femininity, as many bodies, behaviours, traits, and desires are classified as masculine only because they are not inherently feminine. This oppositional definition means that many of the attributes of traditional masculinity are simply the opposite of traditional femininity. The social constructs of masculinity dictate that men need not be thin, nor groom their body hair in any particular way. Masculinity is further associated with shorter hairstyles and an aversion to cosmetic products. In terms of traditionally masculine traits, they also mirror traditional femininity. Masculinity values assertiveness, power, and stoicism. All traits that are highly valued in fictional police work.

and television [...] In that book Ms. Haskell said, in effect, that there hadn't been a buddy movie for women. There's never been a Paul Newman/Robert Redford movie for women [...] and I thought, that's interesting. I'll make one. And so, that's how the idea came across. (Barney Rosenzweig, 2008)

Although it may have feminist origins, this anecdotal evidence does not in itself qualify *Cagney & Lacey* as a feminist text. Beverley Alcock and Jocelyn Robson note that “the presence of such [strong female] characters do not necessarily subvert the patriarchal working of the text” (43). *Cagney and Lacey* work in a traditionally male profession in which their gender is expected to be a detriment to their ability to perform police work. Before the show's debut, women had little place in police procedurals. If a woman did find her way into the televisual precinct, then she was typically the one exception to the unspoken gender rule of the genre. *Cagney & Lacey* was therefore different in that “traditional gender roles appeared to be challenged by the casting of two women as active professionals in a cop partnership” (Alcock and Robson, 44). Interestingly, HBO has returned to the ‘token woman’ model of previous police procedurals and crime drama series. Both Kima in *The Wire* and Ani in *True Detective* are the only women surrounded by entire organizations of men.

## 2.3 Gender Politics of the Police Procedural

Crime drama has become one of the most popular genres of television in recent decades. One 2009 study even goes so far as to claim that "over the past several years

prime-time crime dramas have ranked as one of the most popular forms of entertainment among viewers" (DeTardo-Bora 154) regardless of medium. Shows like the *Law & Order* franchises, *CSI*, and *NCIS* have inspired multiple spin-offs. With so many crime dramas, particularly police procedurals, on the air, it becomes easy to pick up on the accepted tropes and patterns of the genre. One such pattern is the stereotypical roles of women and ethnic minorities within the police procedural. The prevalence and popularity of the police procedural today underscores the importance in these patterns and representations as they may help reinforce audience's perceptions of reality regarding issues of gender and race. The key to understanding representations of gender and race in media texts is Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding. The creative minds behind television texts select the codes that seem natural and more often than not the encoded material aligns with the dominant or expected ideologies. The specifics of what is the 'dominant ideology' varies from one genre to the next. Similarly, different television networks have different standards and political leanings, and at times seek to target different niche demographics. The process is not a one-way street and the decoding portion of the process occurs on the other side of the screen, when audiences consume the content. Despite the intentions of creators, during the decoding phase audiences can either draw — entirely, or in part — on encoded material to create meanings, or make their own readings of the text. In the decoding portion of the meaning-creating process Hall's theory gives three ways in which audiences can decode a text: dominant, negotiated or oppositional. The dominant, or mainstream, ideological reading refers to the intended meaning and messages encoded by the creators of the text. While many audience members receive and accept the dominant reading, Xu notes that:

The social situations of readers, viewers, and listeners may lead them to adopt different stances. Negotiated readings are produced by those who inflect the preferred reading to take account of their social position. Oppositional readings are produced by those whose social position places them in direct conflict with the preferred reading. (Xu, "Reception Theory" 315)

Given that television's success is measured first and foremost on the number of viewers, creators typically seek to draw in as large an audience as possible. By encoding hegemonic messages these creators appeal to the status quo. It is crucial to remember the circulation aspect of Hall's model. If television creators are largely disseminating dominant messages, then according to Xu, the bulk of negotiated and oppositional readings are coming from people who live outside of these hegemonic groups. This can explain why an overwhelming number of actors in both film and television are white or white-passing. It can similarly account for the continued lack of interesting roles for women or members of the LGBTQ community. The dominant ideology, or 'status quo', in the world of the police procedural is the worldview of the straight white male. This would mean that many women, people of colour, and members of the LGBTQ community read these texts from a negotiated or oppositional standpoint. For minority groups the encoding of these messages has very real consequences. As Parrott and Parrott state in their 2015 study of race and gender in the crime drama, "both short- and long-term television exposure may inform viewers' gender- and race-based perceptions of reality" (70). I seek to tease out possible negotiated and oppositional readings from my chosen media texts. How Kima Greggs and Ani Bezzerides are coded visually, behaviourally, and narratively conveys messages to audiences. I believe that once these

messages are decoded by audiences they are fed back into the media machine and contribute to the heteropatriarchal world of law enforcement, both in reality and on the small screen.

## 2.4 Gendered Portrayals of Female Police

Despite the increased level of inclusion, female law enforcement workers are still stuck in highly gendered portrayals. Although they operate within traditionally masculine fields, “female criminal justice professionals [are] portrayed as young, White, and single... more provocatively dressed, and [are] more likely to be victims of crime” (DeTardo-Bora 153). Male colleagues tend to exist across the various spectrums of age, ethnicity, and marital status. However, the inclusion of an older woman, a married woman, or a woman of colour within a police procedural series core cast is uncommon. Given that we are still stuck in a very narrow, Eurocentric model of beauty, youth and whiteness are highly marketable traits and cornerstones of contemporary societal beauty standards. These standards are applied more strictly to female characters, with most female characters in police procedurals being white, relatively young women. Many stereotypes of female law enforcers in prime-time dramas were examined by DeTardo-Bora in a 2009 study. The results of this feminist content analysis provide a more comprehensive look at the physical appearances of these women, and how typecasting has become prevalent as the genre has expanded. Researchers found 69 female law enforcement professionals from the 10 programs studied between January and May 2007. The dominant characteristics of these women were that they were single (64.3%), Caucasian (71.4%), with brown or

black hair (35.7% each) and in their thirties (67.9%) (161). While the sample in the study was limited, the results shed a light on the narrow physical expectations of female law enforcement workers within these series. A 2012 study commissioned by The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media examined several aspects of gender roles and occupation in family films, prime-time television, and children's shows. One of the key findings of this study was that "sexiness is gendered across all three media" (Smith et al). When examining appearance indicators in prime-time television series the study found that women were more than four times as likely to be wearing "sexy" attire. Furthermore women were more than three times as likely to be shown with exposed skin, or to be referred to as physically attractive by another character. Additionally, the study found that women were almost three times as likely to have thin, conventionally attractive body types. When this data was further broken down by the potential age groups of female characters, the 21-39-year-old age group dominated the first three categories (sexy attire, exposed skin, and being called attractive), and came in a close second in the final category. The 13-20 age group had the highest percentage of thin bodies at 52.2%, but was only slightly ahead of the 21-39 group which, at 40%, still had a high percentage (Smith et al). Overall, one of the key conclusions from the provided prime-time data is that women in drama series are most often relegated to lower job titles, and are expected to be significantly younger and sexier than their male counterparts.

The stereotypical portrayals of female law enforcement officials exist beyond the realm of the physical. Studies have indicated that many behavioral stereotypes about women have persisted on television, despite an overall increase in female inclusion in these programs. Traditional gender role stereotypes have endured within the television



landscape. While women are now in key roles as doctors, lawyers, and police officers, “stereotypical images of women as subordinate, nurturing, affectionate, and sexually attractive still prevail” (DeTardo-Bora 153). These stereotypical traits are part of why women on television were previously restricted to pink-collar jobs, or domestic roles as wives and mothers (Parrott and Parrott 72). Showing women as indecisive and tender-hearted serves to reproduce the power imbalance between them and their male counterparts. Both studies (Smith et al and DeTardo-Bora) found that women are disproportionately underrepresented when it comes to the more physically demanding aspects of police work. However, DeTardo-Bora does note that “the number of women cast in professional occupational roles, women in law enforcement, for instance, increased from the 1970s to the 1990s” (156). This does fit with the conclusions of Parrott and Parrott who found that women were overrepresented in higher-ranking, less physical roles like special investigators, detectives, and special agents, but underrepresented at the lower levels where they would need to really get their hands dirty. Television creators, particularly those in charge of police procedurals, seem to be under the impression that they only have to meet a quota of one or two women, a ratio that does not in any way reflect actual workplace gender balance. With this sort of gender disparity, the token female officer often falls into the trope of being ‘team mom’, doe-eyed love interest or, of course, the damsel in distress. In the police procedural, the power dynamic between male and female law enforcement officials illustrates the continuing inequality and stereotypical representation of women in the field. Davidson describes the status-quo for scripted crime dramas, stating that the “strongest and most powerful crime fighters tend to be depicted as male, [while] females are subordinate to men and more

likely portrayed in caring and empathetic ways” (1019). Female crime fighters are more likely to be portrayed as ‘nurturing’, often following the trope of being the ‘team mom’ wherein the character acts as the mother figure for everyone else in the group, regardless of age or family relations. DeTardo-Bora had similar findings, though her analysis found that female characters managed to be as self-confident, assertive, and competitive as their male counterparts. These positive findings were counterbalanced by the fact that “female characters, even as professional career women, [are] depicted as being dependent, subordinate to authority, and less verbally aggressive” (164-5) compared to male colleagues. Some series have begun to subvert this expectation in recent years, like Olivia Benson of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. While she began the series as a detective working in a squad full of men, over the show’s many seasons, Benson has slowly risen to the rank of Lieutenant, and became the Commanding Officer of the Manhattan Special Victims Unit. However, in an American television landscape overflowing with varieties of police procedurals, Benson comes across as the exception rather than the rule.

Contemporary crime dramas often ascribe to a very narrow understanding of work-life balance when it comes to female law enforcement workers. While women are now welcome in the televisual workplace, they must sacrifice their home and personal lives in order to have a successful work life. These texts assume that men are able to be objective and separate their work and home lives, while women are likely to be subjective and unable to focus on the job. This is particularly the case for any women working in law enforcement who have children. Harkening back to Drapela’s discussion of competence, women in law enforcement fields are subject to harsher expectations in the form of gendered double standards. In order to be “good police”, their lives must

revolve around the job. These women are expected to be married to their job and to put it above anything else in their life, even their own children. However, if these women do make this sacrifice they are portrayed as cold or negligent in their home life, or unfit as a mother altogether. Similarly, if a woman places her family first she is seen as not committed to her work and, as an extension, less competent. In the police procedural, successful women in the workplace are often portrayed as “workaholics” who stay late and only go home when forced to do so. However, in many of these series there are also narrative arcs that focus on a woman’s attempt to “have it all”. These narratives are largely a return to some of the content that was being produced in the backlash against second-wave feminist gains. Women are expected to devote themselves to their families, but also devote themselves entirely to their job. This is an impossible task and one that is almost never expected of men in the same situation. Eventually the female character’s work or home life will suffer, and the audience will see her either as a failure of a wife/mother or a failure of a law enforcer. Little narrative depth is given to these arcs, in the sense that they typically focus more on the shortcomings than they focus on the systems and pressures that cause the ‘failures’ in the first place. The women of current police procedurals have achieved the professional ranks enabled by the feminist movements, but such gains are perceived to come at the expense of their femininity (Busch 89-90). This is often one of the shortcomings of post-feminist representations, while some issues are brought to light, they avoid the political roots that cause the issues in the first place.

In a role where femininity is considered a weakness, women must dress, speak, and act, like “one of the boys” if they are going to survive in the precinct. These

characters are stripped of conventional femininity in order to function in the workplace as created by showrunners and writers, the bulk of whom are men. A list of prominent police procedural showrunners from 1959 through 2016 listed twenty-six men and only four women. Since *Cagney & Lacey* went off the air in 1988 only one American police procedural has been run by a woman, Meredith Stiehm's *Cold Case* (2003-10). Female police are plagued with narrative arcs wherein they struggle with dating, marriage, and above all the desire to have children. DeTardo-Bora found in her study that "[few] women in criminal justice occupations were married with children... In other words, the message [there] may be that women employed in a criminal justice occupation cannot have it both ways" (166). Though no current studies have been done, there does appear to be a correlation between some of these reductive storylines and the massive gender gap in police procedural showrunners. DeTardo-Bora does acknowledge that the lack of wives and mothers among female crime fighters may be "in line with the times," (166) as more women are postponing marriage and motherhood. However, the narrative arcs around family life and motherhood keep following the old, familiar patterns. Men in law enforcement professions typically don't have restrictions placed on their family lives. Like their female counterparts they arguably spend too much time at work, but have partners and family support systems that are more than ready to step in and assist in the parenting duties. Even the womanizing divorced men of the precinct just so happen to have an obliging ex-wife who is there to pick up their parenting slack. Some series have shown male police officers whose dedication to the job ultimately compromises the functioning of their family life, but such narratives are a rarity. In these instances, the

viewer's sympathy is supposed to be with the man as his partner is seen as making unreasonable or 'selfish' demands.

## 2.5 Victimization of Women in Police Procedural

The concept of women in crime drama television series as the "ideal victims" (Parrott and Parrott 71), encompasses not just civilians, but women in police force as well. However, I believe that the women who work in law enforcement are victimized in a very different context than civilian women. Female police officers, detectives, or other law enforcement workers, are victimized in a more punitive fashion, to expose how their gender still inherently hinders their professional performance. Even if they are competent police officers, their gender will always make them vulnerable, like an Achilles heel. Female law enforcement workers are additionally also shown to be "culpable in their own victimization" (Davidson 1017). This further shows the heteropatriarchal ideologies of these texts as, even if a woman is the victim of a crime, it is simultaneously shown to be partially her doing. This is particularly evident in one of television's longest running police dramas, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. *Law & Order: SVU* uses this trope repeatedly on the same officer, the perennially victimized Detective Olivia Benson. Over the more than 17 seasons of the series Detective Benson is sexually assaulted, kidnapped, tortured, and consistently victimized by men. Benson is shown time and time again to be a hardworking, competent detective — she eventually rises to the rank of Captain — and yet despite her all of her ability, precautions, and even weaponry, she is never safe. This idea or trauma, particularly in the form of sexual assault, is both common and almost entirely limited to female officers. The 'punishment' for these women defying traditional

feminine norms is often a sadomasochistic spectacle where a man asserts his masculinity through physical and sexual domination. The constant victimization of women in the genre reinforces the notion that no matter how capable she may be any woman can be reduced to a damsel in distress. Even when police procedurals want to be seen as diverse, there is an underlying need to return to 'homeostasis' wherein the woman needs to be brought down from her pedestal — even if her 'pedestal' is just her normal job as a police officer. These plot points provide not only the opportunity for men to demonstrate their ability to rescue women, but also functions as a punishment for women stepping outside the gender norms.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Shakima Greggs: Good Po-lice

The presence of a lesbian, mixed race homicide detective on television screens was something that had not been seen before *The Wire* aired in 2002. Shakima Greggs arrived on the heels of a surge of lesbian visibility in American television with shows like *Ellen* (1994-8), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and *Queer as Folk* (2000-05) having prominent storylines featuring, or sometimes even centering on, queer women. While same-sex relationships between men had trickled onto the small screen as early as 1977, the representation of queer women lagged sadly behind. It was not until the mid-to-late 1990s that prime-time television began to have visible roles for queer women. What makes the portrayal of Kima even more noteworthy was the portrayal of her and her partner Cheryl as a normal domestic couple. In the early to mid-2000s the television landscape was still caught up in what Rosalind Gill dubs the “relatively stable representational practice for [a] ‘sexualized’ depiction of woman-woman relations” (151). Although both women would be considered conventionally attractive, Kima and Cheryl’s relationship is not fetishized and is shown in the early seasons to be almost unexceptional or boring compared to the dramatic, messy love lives of her male coworkers at the Baltimore Police Department. While Kima is a queer woman, it is not used as a major plot point.

As a viewer, my initial reaction to Kima was almost entirely positive. Despite being the token woman on the force she was a skilled and competent detective, and often

revered by her colleagues. Under a more critical lens, what began to complicate the way that Kim's character was represented was not gender alone, but the relationship between gender and femininity. She inhabits a grey area in the spectrum of previous television representations of queer women. Kim's character is neither a conventionally feminine "hot lesbian," (Gill 151) nor is she overtly butch. Actress Sonja Sohn is a thin, conventionally attractive woman, and although Kim dresses in androgynous or masculine styles, her representation comes across as more of a 'tomboy' rather than the more 'threatening' butch lesbian. While Kim is not explicitly sexualized throughout most of the series, she exists in a limbo that defies that often black and white representations of queer women that had previously made it to television screens. She is not a butch-type woman, whose presence might feel threatening to all of her straight male coworkers, nor is Kim a character who dresses or styles herself in a very feminine manner.

In the police procedural genre women have fraught relationships with femininity, particularly in the workplace. Having taken on traditionally masculine jobs these women adopt more masculine traits as a way to be taken seriously by their male colleagues. Drapela argues that "the more masculinized a female character in a crime drama is written/portrayed, the more efficacious she is portrayed in her professional life" (302). Similarly, the more feminized a female character is in a crime drama series, the less competent she is portrayed in the workplace. This trope has become pervasive in the genre; however, it is worth noting that the prevalence of aligning masculinity with competency for women in police work can have very real ramifications on the women who work in this field. The constant portrayals of competent female officers as



masculine, ‘tomboy’ characters puts increased pressure on real women to adopt similar mechanisms in their workplaces. Drapela herself puts Kima at the most ‘masculine’ point of the spectrum, therefore positioning her as the most competent working woman in the series. Kima’s portrayal is particularly important in my research because she is the first female detective in an HBO original series and this serves as a benchmark against which later representations, including Ani Bezzerides of season two of *True Detective*, can be analyzed.

### 3.1 “I mind you asking”: The Politics of Queer in Baltimore

Shakima Greggs is not the only beloved queer character tangled up in the Baltimore drug scene on *The Wire*. In fact, she is in the company of notorious stick-up man, and fan favourite, Omar Little. Operating like a twisted Robin Hood figure, Omar adheres to a strict moral code. He routinely robs Barksdale and Stanfield stash houses, all the while refusing to do any violence against anyone who is not a part of ‘the game’. Unlike Kima, who was already out as lesbian to most of her colleagues at the Baltimore Police Department at the start of the series, Omar’s sexuality is something that is left — at least initially — in the shadows. The initial revelation of his sexual orientation is meant to shock the audience, given the hypermasculine demeanor he portrays when operating within the Baltimore streets. This hard-boiled masculinity that Omar performs in his life as a criminal is in contrast to the private scenes in which we are encouraged to think we see the “real” Omar Little. He is shown in tender, intimate scenes with his partners, while simultaneously being careful to ensure that his romantic life has no bearing on his

‘professional’ life. Despite having few other similarities and existing on opposite sides of Baltimore’s own war on drugs, it is interesting that both Omar and Kima have narratives that challenge conventional ideas about sexuality, particularly as they existed when the series aired in 2002.

In a 2012 interview with FOX sports reporter Jason Whitlock, series creator David Simon offered his personal insight on how both Omar and Kima’s queer identities operate within the broader narrative of *The Wire*. Regarding his choice to make Omar gay, Simon replied that there “was no way for a man to be openly gay in either of [the show’s] ultra-masculine hierarchies [the precinct or the corners], so the only man who could be gay... had to be one of the few characters who functions outside of these systems” (Simon, 2012). In male-dominated hierarchies like drug-dealing and police work, survival can ultimately be boiled down to power, or the perception of power. To have a drug runner or police officer be openly gay would upset these delicately crafted hierarchies, and likely lead to chaos. This idea, particularly in the context of the police force, is grounded in what Simon witnessed while working as a journalist in Baltimore. Later in the interview, Simon contrasts Kima with Omar, as he implies that being a gay woman actually works in her favour professionally. While being gay would undercut the masculinity of a man at work within the drug trade or the BPD, Kima’s sexual orientation is seen by others — particularly men — as an implicit advantage: or a core contributor to her prowess as a detective. In the male-dominated line of police work, particularly in *The Wire*, we can see that masculinity is assumed to directly correlate with competency in the workplace. The series reproduces a rigid hierarchy of gender and sexuality that plays out within both milieus — the precinct and the street corner. In these structures a gay man

would be seen as less “manly”, and therefore less worthy of inclusion in a man’s world. A lesbian woman, on the other hand, is seen as more masculine than other women, and thus, assumed to be more competent, in turn gaining recognition from her male colleagues. This idea is affirmed early on in the third episode of the series after Kima confirms her sexual identity to McNulty.

MCNULTY. I should’ve known.

GREGGS. Should’ve known what?

MCNULTY. I worked with one other female police officer who was worth a damn, only one.

GREGGS. A lesbian.

MCNULTY. Yeah. (1x03, “The Buys”)

This particular scene confirms that there is some small gain to be had for Kima. McNulty claims that he has only ever known one other competent female officer, and that both she and Kima were lesbian. Naturally, McNulty is not the most reliable character in terms of judgment, so while this does not in itself mean that there strictly are no other competent women in the BPD, it does illuminate the thought process of the typical male cop.

In this way, *The Wire* paints coming out as being an almost wholly beneficial move for Kima. In the eyes of her straight male colleagues, being a lesbian woman makes her seem more ‘macho’, and therefore more competent. However, as Drapela outlined, “critics writing about female characters in the series tend to reach consensus on one

single point: Fundamentally, *The Wire* is about men” (300). In this world, like most HBO drama series, masculinity is the ideal, and the closer to that ideal, the better detective – or drug dealer – you are. In David Simon’s framework, a queer woman would be more readily accepted ahead of a straight woman, or a gay man, within the masculine economies of the show, as they would have more in common with the straight men who dominate the force. This is reflected by the fact that McNulty seems to think more of Kima *after* her admission, since it gives the two more in common — an attraction to women and their love of the job. It also, evidently, gives Kima more in common with the single other competent female officer McNulty has met.

When we further examine the same scene from “The Buys”, the story of Kima’s coming out at work seems to defy the easy binary laid out by Simon after-the-fact. In the beginning of her exchange with McNulty the audience is given a brief look into Detective Greggs’ life before the show began.

MCNULTY. So pretty much everyone in CID has worked this out but me?

GREGGS. There wasn't nothing to figure out. I told them.

MCNULTY. I guess I missed the press conference.

GREGGS. It's better that than to have every police on three shifts hounding you every goddamned day.

MCNULTY. Cops are dogs.

GREGGS. Yeah. It's not like I was walking around waving some dyke flag in the air, or some shit. I know I look like I could go either way.

MCNULTY. Lord, yes, you do. Yes, you do.

GREGGS. It was something I had to put out there to get through the day.  
(1x03 "The Buys")

This exchange with McNulty is the only scene of the show's five seasons in which Kima discusses her experience of coming out. Even so, it sets the tone early on that being a queer woman in the Baltimore Police is not as easy as David Simon allegedly thinks, but, at least in the eyes of Kima, it is still easier than being a straight woman. Her coming out at work was not something that stemmed from feeling comfortable in her environment, but was, rather, deployed as a defensive tactic. Simon's analysis is centered around Kima's experience as a gay woman; however, it relies heavily on divorcing that experience from other women's issues in policing. While Kima's identity might, according to Simon, theoretically increase her status and perceived competence on the force, the need to come out stemmed from what we can assume is a common issue for women at the Baltimore Police Department. Given the gender disparity in this particular televisual workplace, and the attitudes expressed by male characters, it makes sense that sexual harassment might be a real problem within the BPD. This sort of toxic environment essentially forced Kima's hand, pushing her to come out under the assumption that it would be "better... than [having] every police on three shifts hounding [her] every goddamned day" (1x03 "The Buys"). This was a particularly brave move, as Kima had no way of knowing if it would actually be better having to navigate the politics

and challenges of being out at work. This move is particularly telling, both in regards to Kima's character, and how the Baltimore Police Department operates as a working environment. What it boils down to is that Kima was willing to risk homophobia and discrimination, if it meant she could go through her work day without being plagued by unwanted "flirting" or sexual harassment. While the audience has little knowledge of how Kima's life was before she was out at work, according to the logic set out by Simon, the showrunner, she likely experienced a boost in her perceived competence as well.

## 3.2 Relationships

For the majority of the first season Kima and Cheryl are seen in a state of domestic bliss. However, the first serious trial of their relationship appears in the wake of the undercover shooting gone wrong near the end of season one. The politics of the shooting itself will be discussed at length in subsequent sections; however, Kima's brush with death had a lasting effect on her relationship with her partner, and also provided a perspective on how Kima's personal life still complicates her work life. Kima's return to street duty early in the second season quickly became a point of tension in her relationship with Cheryl, and is the first time that we, as the audience, see "the job" actually conflict with her home life. The two women clearly have conflicting goals, with Kima still focused on work, and Cheryl thinking more about family and the future. This conflict is particularly interesting as it showcases clearly how Kima and Cheryl fit into a rather heteronormative model. Cheryl, being the more traditionally feminine of the two, is focused on settling down and starting a family. Conversely, Kima, who inhabits a very masculine space in her career, is

almost entirely disinterested in motherhood. The roles that both women undertake serve to reinforce stereotypes regarding same sex couples, that one of them must be the 'man' while the other is the 'woman'. In "The Subversion of Heteronormative Assumptions in HBO's *The Wire*", Hillary Robbie explains that in television "heterosexual relationships are normalized and homosexual relationships are either absent or most often portrayed as sexually driven" (1). While Robbie does believe that Kima, and her relationship with Cheryl, are remarkable in some ways, she argues that a closer look would show that their dynamic seems to adhere rather closely to the normalized heterosexual relationships seen in every other crime drama television series. With the exception of her one undercover gig, Kima appears and behaves in manners more traditionally associated with masculinity. She works in a male-driven field, and dresses with an masculine style, both on the job and off. On the other hand, we see Cheryl inhabiting a more traditional idea of femininity. This is also communicated in her way of dressing, and her adamant desire for motherhood. After Kima recovers from the shooting Cheryl takes on the role of nagging spouse like many of the other women who appear, albeit briefly, in the series. This heteronormative model later becomes a problem when Kima agrees to support Cheryl through pregnancy and motherhood, all the while having no real desire to become a parent herself. When Cheryl is pregnant, and even once their son Elijah arrives, Kima cares much more about "the job" than she does about her burgeoning home life.

Once Elijah is born in season three, Kima becomes dissatisfied with Cheryl and their personal life together. Her friendship with McNulty solidifies, eventually escalating to the point where she solicits advice from him on how to successfully cheat on Cheryl. It is through the disintegration of her relationship that Kima's masculinity is solidified. The

men of the BPD have always had a level of respect for Kima that stemmed largely from her dedication to the job. In this way Kima epitomizes this ideal seen across the police procedural genre, which has evolved to become a key indicator of competency among law enforcement positions. Characters who sacrifice their personal lives, time, and physical well-being for their job are seen as better cops than those who manage to maintain happy marriages and do not spiral into alcoholism or addiction. This trope is best expressed, albeit in an exaggerated manner, by *The Wire*'s tortured anti-hero, Jimmy McNulty. Although Kima and McNulty are seen sharing a close relationship from season one onward, the audience sees her slowly adopt more of his destructive traits and behaviours in subsequent seasons. While this progression was previously harmless, it becomes problematic after Cheryl gives birth; with Kima complaining about Cheryl's negative opinion of her job, she asks:

KIMA. How come they know you're police when they hook up with you, and they know you're police when they move in, and they know you're police when they decide to start a family with you, and all that shit is fine until one day it ain't? One day, it's: "you should have a regular job", "you need to be home at 5:00"

MCNULTY. "You need to call more"

KIMA. I'm sayin' (3x03, "Dead Soldier")

This is perhaps the first time the audience sees Kima make any specific complaint about her relationship with Cheryl. In the first two seasons of the show, the couple exists in relative happiness. As Robbie sums up succinctly:



Like other couples on the show [Kima and Cheryl] go through turmoil over the dangers of Kima's job, Kima's desire to quit law school, and the prospects of having a child together. They are pictured engaging in sexual activity as well as fighting. (3)

Their relationship is neither idealized nor demonized, but portrayed as a standard romantic relationship in a drama series. This level of normalcy is what makes the relationship remarkable in terms of queer visibility. However, as Kima's work life evolves, we see Cheryl become more protective, controlling, and at times jealous, towards the end of the second season. These behaviours have evidently worked their way under Kima's skin, and the arrival of the baby she didn't even want becomes the catalyst of total dissatisfaction. Later in the same scene we see how far Kima's aversion to domestic life has escalated. Her increasing identification with McNulty is shown in a scene where the two are drinking heavily in an abandoned lot:

KIMA. When you were humping a radio car in the Western was this your hole?

MCNULTY. Yeah. Here and down on Winchester, under the bridge.

KIMA. Bet there were a lot of nights you didn't go home to the missus. Don't tell me I'm the same kind of asshole.

MCNULTY. Pucker up, girlfriend.

KIMA. Jesus, I'm turning into McNulty (3x03, "Dead Soldier")

Cheryl and Kima's domestic discomforts fade into the background over the next several episodes, as the CID pursues Baltimore's newest drug kingpin, Marlo Stanfield. The building tension in Kima's home life is left to simmer on the backburner of the show's narrative.

Although Kima had made her dissatisfaction clear early in the third season, the actual idea of cheating on Cheryl isn't expressed until season three, episode eight when she and McNulty are on a stakeout in a seedy motel room. By this point in the season the audience has witnessed Kima's curiosity about McNulty's cheating ways burgeon until she seems to be seeking permission and advice about the logistics of how he was able to carry out so many of his affairs undetected. Now that she is suddenly trapped in unwanted parenthood and Cheryl is becoming increasingly protective and demanding, Kima is clearly unsatisfied with her home life. The exhausted expression and defeated tone of voice add a nuance to this particular scene that foreshadows her later actions. In this scene, Kima is already certain that she wants to cheat on Cheryl, but simply does not know how best to carry it out.

MCNULTY. It was easy. Just tell her I was on the road working an extradition. Lots of extraditions. Brought back something like 500 fugitives in a three-year period, I think.

[...]

KIMA. Extraditions, huh? Cheryl'd see right through that shit.

MCNULTY. Nah, it's easy. Just keep your cell off, make sure she can reach your partner. Partner tells her: "Kima's in court" or whatever. Partner calls you in the motel and gives you the heads up, you call her back later like: "Hey, what's up?" (3x08, "Moral Midgetry")

Four episodes later, in season three, episode twelve, McNulty's exact maneuver is put into action by Kima, who is with another woman. Covering for her is an oddly sober McNulty, who tells Cheryl that he spoke to Kima about ten minutes ago. He seems to heed Kima's advice that Cheryl would "see right through" the extraditions lie, and tells her instead that Kima is picking up a prisoner and likely had to check all of her personal effects.

The cheating can be seen as a turning point for Kima's character as she becomes increasingly like the men that surround her in her professional life. In the first two seasons we see Kima struggling with balancing her personal life with the gendered expectations of her workplace. In season one, when Carver asks when Kima first realized she liked women rather than men, the only reply she gives is, "I mind you asking" (1x02, "The Detail"). Kima is shown to be a rather private person, who doesn't bring her personal life into the workplace. This also explains why McNulty needed to seek confirmation regarding Kima's sexuality, although he may have heard, or assumed, that she was a lesbian, despite working together for some time, she had never told him herself. This stark line between home and work life becomes blurred as Kima and Cheryl's relationship begins to strain. Kima begins to talk about her relationship, particularly in a disparaging tone. This behaviour mimics what we see from male detectives throughout

the series, who spend large periods of time complaining about ex-wives, current wives, and girlfriends.

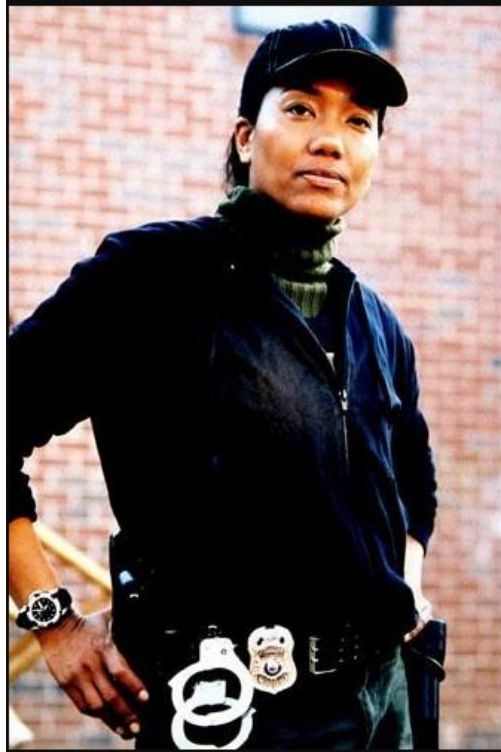
### 3.3 “Shorty was a cop, and she ain’t dead”

Before the disintegration of her relationship with Cheryl and before she started getting life advice from McNulty, Kima was meant to die. Of course, killing off gay characters is now a time-honoured tradition in drama series, so the knowledge that Kima’s season one shooting was meant to be fatal does not come as a particular shock. The routine victimization of female law enforcement officials has become a staple of the police procedural in particular in recent years. This is a narrative trope used time and time again on network crime dramas, where threats of kidnap and, especially sexual violence against women run rampant. In contemporary media, including television, “tropes are utilized in a variety of ways to depict both cultural norms and transgressive images of gendered action, behavior, and being” (Krieger, *Encyclopedia of Gender in Media*). As such, gendered tropes on television represent cultural values and norms. By continually putting female police at risk for rape, assault, and other forms of gendered violence, the police procedural is reinforcing the idea that even when they are police officers, women are meant to be the victims and men the rescuers. Although police work comes with unique risks and challenges, these specific dangers are represented as overwhelmingly affecting women, especially when these risks are of a sexual nature. The best example would be *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*’s long-suffering detective, Olivia Benson. Throughout the many seasons of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, Benson is

repeatedly harassed, assaulted, and at one point she is kidnapped. In a precinct that is almost entirely full of men, it is Olivia Benson who somehow always ends up as the victim. The victimization of female police officers takes many forms, from overt narratives of sexual assault to smaller microaggressions, and, taken as a whole, these victimization narratives operate as a homeostatic mechanism through which series can return to their natural patriarchal state. These acts serve to punish women who deviate from traditional gendered expectations and return the narrative to ‘normalcy’ — the heteropatriarchal order. By being a capable and respected detective Kim is going against the gendered expectations of her workplace. In order to return some amount of normalcy to the precinct Kim must be punished from deviating from the expectations of her gender. In *The Wire* this punishment comes in the form of Kim being shot while on an undercover sting operation.

When it comes to going undercover, Kim is chosen because she is a woman, and so will apparently elicit less suspicion among Avon Barksdale’s men. In the show’s representation of the Baltimore drug economy, women are treated more like accessories than fully realized people. This culture socializes the men to naturally be suspicious of other men and; by contrast women, as objects, are less likely to be seen as a threat. Daniels describes Kim’s role in the bust as “[being] in the car for the buy, front as our [informant’s] girl” (1x10 “The Cost”). While a man could be police, a competitor, or a snitch, a woman’s presence is not seen as noteworthy in such a scenario. Her being there, as the heterosexual partner of the informant, is unremarkable and easily understood by the men of Barksdale’s organization. Due to the nature of this undercover role Kim must be, as Carver states, “looking the part, too” (1x10 “The Cost”). If Kim were to dress as

she normally does, she would quickly arouse suspicion, firstly because she would risk being recognized, but also because her masculine coding would contradict her undercover backstory, as she would not look the part. She needs to take on the norms of traditional femininity if she is going to pass, both as civilian and as straight. Kima's hair is loose instead of pulled back in her signature ponytail, and she is wearing tight jeans and a form-fitting pink top. Although this new look makes sense within the narrative of the operation, it is hard to separate the sudden appearance of feminine attire from Kima's fate later in the episode. Just as her more masculine attire connotes competence, this more feminine look reinforces a sense of gendered vulnerability. Not only is Kima shown as feeling out of her element by virtue of wearing these foreign clothes, but they also render her vulnerable because they prevent her from using many of the standard police protections to which she is accustomed, like vests and concealed weapons. The form-fitting nature of Kima's undercover outfit leaves no room for concealing her gun, or any other weapon. Furthermore, in anticipation of a "pat-down", Kima and her colleagues decide that her gun would be stashed underneath the car's back seat, out of view. However, the gun slips out of reach when the car is ambushed.



**Figure 1 Kima's typical attire.**



**Figure 2 Kima's undercover look.**

When Kima is shot the episode ends with a cliffhanger and the audience, at least for a short while, does not know what becomes of the one woman in the Barksdale detail. The next episode, season one, episode eleven — aptly called “The Hunt” — frustratingly focuses less on Kima’s fate, and more on the reaction of the men in the detail. Despite being the subject of the episode, Kima is never seen, but frequently talked about, instead the audience is meant to focus on the anguish of all the “complex” men of the BPD and show us their true characters. The halls of the hospital are crawling with male police officers of different ranks. Scenes of this nature are very common in the police procedural genre; however, they are part of a long standing trope that assumes the best way to build tension and sympathy for male antiheroes is to show their reaction to violence against their prominent female counterparts. This strategy has worked quite well for HBO, which is why the trope seems to be in frequent rotation throughout all genres of drama series they produce. Most recently this has been seen in season five of HBO’s *Game of Thrones* wherein Sophie Turner’s character Sansa Stark is raped after her forced marriage. Leading up to the assault the camera is intently focused on Turner, but as the rape happens, the camera cuts to a tight, cropped shot of Alfie Allen’s Theon Greyjoy, who is forced to watch the ordeal. Although it is the female character that is suffering, HBO’s “male identification strategies” endure. We see this play out in episode eleven when Kima is on the operating table fighting for her life and the episode instead focuses on the emotional aftermath for McNulty. When the men of the BPD are huddled around a tape player in the hospital waiting room, McNulty is so affected by the audio of Kima’s shooting that he becomes physically ill. This show of “weakness” leads to a profanity-laced speech from Major Detective Rawls:



[...] You, McNulty, are a gaping asshole. We both know this. Fuck if everyone in CID doesn't know it. But fuck if I'm going to stand here and say you did a single fucking thing to get a police shot. You did not do this, you fucking hear me? This is not on you. No it isn't, asshole. (1x11 "The Hunt")

Although this speech seeks to absolve McNulty of any wrongdoing, it also touches on a very key fact. Believe it or not everything *isn't* about Detective Jimmy McNulty. But, instead of focusing on Kim, or even on her partner Cheryl, the episode focuses almost entirely on the pain felt by the men of the BPD.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Antigone Bezzerides: “You're a cop, right? Lady cop.”

After the runaway success of *The Wire*, HBO steered clear of the police procedural, opting instead to branch out into previously unexplored territories like fantasy (*Game of Thrones*, *True Blood*) and period drama (*Boardwalk Empire*). It was not until 2014 that the network aired another police procedural drama, the anthology crime series *True Detective*. The first season of the series was met with critical acclaim and high ratings. This much-loved first season centered on dysfunctional detectives Rustin “Rust” Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) and Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson) and their attempt to put an end to a run of cult-based serial killings. However, this debut season was dominated by men, with the only recurring female characters being love interests. Entire precincts of police were staffed by men alone, with only a few female extras put in the background to play secretarial roles. While the first season of *True Detective* spanned eight episodes, only two women had any sort of recurring speaking role. Actress Michelle Monaghan played Maggie Hart, the long-suffering wife of Detective Hart, while Alexandra Daddario appeared in four episodes as Lisa Tragnetti, Hart’s mistress. In season one women only existed as wives, girlfriends, or mutilated bodies. This narrow characterization did not go unnoticed, and among all of the praise and accolades, *True Detective* was called out for its lack of gender representation. Criticisms circulated predominantly online and in some entertainment magazines, reprimanding the series for its evident “woman problem”. One piece in *The New Yorker* didn’t mince words when the reviewer titled her March 2014 review “Cool Story, Bro”, and claimed that:

On the other hand, you might take a close look at the show's opening credits, which suggest a simpler tale: one about heroic male outlines and close-ups of female asses. The more episodes that go by, the more I'm starting to suspect that those asses tell the real story. (Nussbaum, 2014)

This claim is in reference to the Emmy Award-winning opening credit sequence used in season one. The creators of the credits used a double-exposure technique to superimpose bleak stills of the desolate south, with brooding shots of the show's cast — predominantly McConaughey and Harrelson — before switching to extreme close-ups of women's naked, or nearly naked, bodies. This results in photos from Richard Misrach's *Petrochemical America* — a book of haunting photographs of the industrial-ravaged south — appearing as if they are projected onto the bare back of a dead woman, or the ass of a sex worker. Before the audience can even situate themselves within the narrative, they are given a glimpse of *True Detective*'s true colours. When the casting for the much-anticipated second season was announced, Rachel McAdams was billed as County Sheriff Detective Antigone Bezzerides. In having a female lead character intrinsic to the narrative and played by an A-list actress, it seemed like *True Detective* showrunner Nic Pizzolatto took a direct shot at the criticisms from season one.

When examining HBO police procedural crime dramas Antigone (Ani) Bezzerides is the natural — and only — successor of Kima Greggs. In order to properly examine the lineage between these two women, it is important to first examine Ani and her relationship to the long legacy of the police procedural. Much like Kima in *The Wire*, Ani is the sole female detective among the ensemble cast, meaning that she is left to 'speak' for her gender in the realm of *True Detective*. Much like Kima, Ani's life is

devoted to ‘the job’, and she has adopted many behaviours that mirror what would be traditionally expected of a man, including her tough, no-nonsense attitude. When she goes home at the end of the day the audience sees her spending her time practicing her self-defense techniques with a variety of knives that she keeps in her apartment. In the early episodes of the season she also has a friend with benefits whom she uses for casual sex. Both of these activities appear to be used as a release for her stress and frustration that builds up from her work life. These activities, combined with Ani’s affinity for alcohol situate her closer to the masculine ideal of good police. Her hobbies, with the exception of her obsession with knives, mirror many of the behaviours exhibited by McNulty in *The Wire*. Ani resembles the sort of character that Kima becomes towards the end of *The Wire*, meaning that she is, essentially, identical to the male characters, but with breasts.

## 4.1 Father-Daughter Relationship

Ani’s home life is shown chiefly through interspersed flashbacks. As the show’s narrative progresses, Ani seems to unearth long-buried memories about her childhood that shed light on her unconventional upbringing and, it is implied, explain who she is today. In the first episode Ani’s relationship with her estranged father is illuminated when the investigation into a missing woman leads to his spiritual retreat, “The Panticapaeum Institute”, as her last known location. It is the return to her father’s commune that begins to trigger Ani’s recovered memories. Ani’s father, Eliot Bezzerides, is one of the leaders of a new-age commune at the institute called the “Good People”, which Antigone later describes to her new colleague Ray Velcoro (Colin Farrell) as a “commune around

Guerneville in the late 70s, 80s. Hippie shit” (2x02, “Night Finds You”). Her clear disdain for Good People, as evidenced by her body language when she visits and her tone when she speaks of the commune. Antigone later reveals Good People as the place where she and her sister Athena grew up. This is not only a nontraditional upbringing, but the dysfunctional adult lives of both Bezzerides sisters call into question the true nature of the commune, which often seems a bit more like a cult than a ‘spiritual retreat’ or an institute. The younger of the two girls, Athena, grew up to become tangled up in drug addiction and sex work, while Antigone pursued a life in law enforcement and engaged in reckless behaviours of her own, particularly in relation to sex and alcohol.

There is a clear physical contrast between Ani and the people living at Good People. Those living at the retreat dress in light, flowy linens, while Eliot himself has long grey hair falling well past his shoulders and dons only light coloured fabrics. By contrast Ani is dressed from head to toe in black, wearing her sheriff’s badge visibly on her belt, and sporting at least one visible weapon. Appearances aside, the differences between Ani and her father are acknowledged from her first visit to the commune, where Eliot states “your entire personality is an extended criticism of my values” (2x01, “The Western Book of the Dead”). With a father heavily involved in the leadership of an alternative community, and a mother who is alluded to have abandoned her at a young age, Ani never had a strong parental figure. Although she lived in a communal environment, the flashbacks show that the adults around her were very much preoccupied with their own affairs, as opposed to watching out for children. This is confirmed in the series when Ani questions Dr. Pitlor, a psychiatrist and former acquaintance of her father:

DR. PITLOR. I did some social theory with the Good People. He had a daughter, I remember. Good Lord, Was that you?

ANI. I left all that behind; it was a fucked-up place.

DR. PITLOR. Well, all kinds of secrets in the world. All kinds of truth.

ANI. Five kids living there when I was growing up. Two are in jail now, two committed suicide. How's that for social theory?

DR. PITLOR. And the fifth?

ANI. She became a detective. (2x02, "Night Finds You").

These precarious aspects of her upbringing are what pushed her to become a detective, something that comes to light in one of her few conversations with her father. As the show slowly reveals details about Ani's life, we learn that the commune is where she experienced childhood sexual abuse. It then makes sense that she wishes to distance herself as much as possible from the philosophies of Good People, and in turn became an "extended criticism of [Eliot's] values" as a way of protecting both herself and others.

Ani's childhood trauma, and the defining factor in her relationship with her father, is revealed towards the end of the season, when she goes undercover as an escort to infiltrate a human trafficking operation that is linked to the death of Ben Caspere. The flashback to her abuse is key to her relationship with her father as it shows how his absence allowed for the abuse to occur, leaving her vulnerable. At the party, the drugs that Ani was given allow for a hazy memory of her childhood to resurface. First the man

appears as a hallucination at the party, but at the next cut, the background of the scene changes. Ani has been transported from the mansion to a bright sunny field, with the man crouched down as if he is talking to a child. He coos that Antigone is “the prettiest little girl that [he has] ever seen” (2x06, “Church in Ruins”). As a child with absent parents, positive attention from an adult could well have been a welcome change in Ani’s life. Eliot Bezzerides is not visible in any part of this memory; however, it makes sense that Ani would still think of him as some way complicit in her abuse. as it was his absence as a parental figure created the vacuum that allowed it to occur.

## 4.2 Working Relationships

Ani appears to embody the key trait that makes for a good cop in the world of television crime dramas. Even when she goes home at the end of the day she remains completely and totally devoted to “the job”. The bulk of the season’s story arc focuses on the Caspere detail, which takes her out of her usual domain working in the County Sherriff’s department and places her in a detail with officers from two other jurisdictions. However, there is a particular scene in episode one that sets the tone for Ani’s work life. The camera pans across a busy men’s locker room, with male detectives showering, changing, and chatting. The scene then cuts to Ani alone in the women’s locker room. The scene showed dozens of men in a space of camaraderie, meanwhile Ani is alone. Aside from numbers, there is a distinct difference in attitude between the two rooms. While the men’s room is busy, it is also very laid back. Men are walking around in various stages of undress, and the room is filled with idle chatter. Conversely, Antigone is focused. She is

fully dressed, once again, from head to toe in black, and is seen slipping a knife into the holster in her boot. This falls into line with what the audience has already learned about Detective Bezzerides: that she never lets her guard come down, even when she is alone.

Throughout the season, Ani is repeatedly assigned leadership roles in the Caspere murder investigation. In episode two her superiors take her aside to inform her that she will “be primary commander of the detail” (2x06, “Night Finds You”). This conversation affirms that Antigone is held in high regard in her job, and trusted with spearheading a sensitive and complicated investigation. It is also in this conversation that Antigone is first alerted to her superior’s suspicions about Vinci Police detective, Ray Velcoro. The State’s Attorney goes on to explain the detail in greater depth, informing Ani that the “Vinci detective with you, word is he's bent. Work him. Leverage something to turn him.” (2x06, “Night Finds You”). Not only is Ani assigned the role of commanding officer of the investigative detail, but she is also entrusted with sensitive information regarding Velcoro’s alleged ulterior motives. The complicating factor in this arrangement is that Ani is leading a group in which she is the only woman: the other three officers — Detective Ray Velcoro, Officer Paul Woodrugh (Taylor Kitsch), and Detective Teague Dixon (W. Earl Brown) — are all white men. As is typical in the genre, male police don’t take well to a woman in charge, no matter how strong her job performance. Of the three men in the detail, Dixon is the most pointed about his dissatisfaction with the arrangement. From the moment Dixon’s character is introduced in this scene, any interaction between him and Ani is strained, with him appearing determined to do as little work as possible. Ani is younger than Dixon, female, and has a higher-ranking job with the state police, while he works for the Vinci police. Ani does not appear to be fazed by



Dixon's little acts of insubordination, which implies that it is not the first time she has encountered this attitude from a male colleague.

As the investigation continues, Ani does also encounter some friction when trying to control Velcoro, which she initially believes to be insubordination. Late in episode two we see him following a lead fed to him by mobster Frank Semyon. When scoping out Caspere's second home, Velcoro is shot multiple times by a man in a giant, lifelike raven mask. Early in episode three we see Velcoro being treated in the ambulance, and Ani arriving on the scene:

ANI. What the fuck, man? I'm commanding officer of this detail. You call me you got something.

VELCORO. Well, I got shot. That's something. I found our murder scene. That's something else.

ANI. You don't enter a scene without your partner — me.

VELCORO. I didn't know it was a scene. I walk in, next thing somebody shot-gunned me. Twice. (2x03, "Maybe Tomorrow")

Ani's frustration is palpable at the beginning of the scene. This is the man who she has been tasked with keeping a special eye on, and thus far she has no idea exactly how "bent" Velcoro may, or may not, be. This scene is the first time that Ani refers to Velcoro as her "partner". This acknowledgement of Velcoro as her partner is important in that it ties into one of the long-standing generic tropes that has plagued female detectives in crime dramas. Much like the heteronormative assertion on television that men and

women can never be just friends, *True Detective* ultimately falls back on the idea that male and female police can never be *just* partners. Although Ani has been ordered to get close to Velcoro, and warned that he is a corrupt cop, she is slowly beginning to soften up to his company despite her better judgment. While at this point in the season the budding partnership is strictly platonic, it is also laying a foundation for the later, rapidly-developing, romance.

The relationship between Ani and Velcoro is complicated from the very onset of the Caspere investigation. They are detectives from opposing police forces — city versus state — and the State’s Attorney makes it clear from the moment the team is assembled that Velcoro is crooked and she wants to use that to her office’s advantage. The dynamic is further complicated by the fact that Ani is Velcoro’s superior and his ulterior motives lead to frequent acts of insubordination. This creates a natural power struggle between the Ani and Velcoro, which becomes more and more tangled as time goes on. Although Ani is first and foremost tasked with investigating the bizarre circumstances surrounding Ben Caspere’s death, the State’s Attorney makes it clear that Ani would be very well compensated if she gets Velcoro to “flip”. This means that early on Ani’s loyalties are tested, and she must choose between the men in her detail, and the prospect of furthering her own career. Her decision becomes complicated by her evolving rapport with Velcoro. As the two spend time working as partners, Ani begins to warm up to him, and is more willing to compromise her own position:

VELCORO. Look, I’m trying to effect transparency between us.

ANI. The reason being...

VELCORO. I don't know if you know this, but us, the investigation, I don't think it's supposed to work.

ANI. Why is that?

VELCORO. State attorney's investigation. They must have tapped you. You know, the kid, too. Why wouldn't they have a team of state grand jury investigators working Vinci instead of just you and [Woodrugh]? Why wouldn't the SA do a full-court press on this?

ANI. You want honest? Tell me, just how compromised are you? (2x02, "Night Finds You")

Although Velcoro indicates in this scene that he is aware of the investigation into Vinci and his own corruption, Ani makes no effort to conceal the truth from him, or deny that she has been tasked with using his corruption to help take down the Vinci PD. This scene indicates an early bond forming between the two. As the investigation becomes increasingly complicated, so does their relationship. With mounting pressure from Ventura County, the city of Vinci, and mobsters, Bezzerides and Velcoro quickly develop a very intimate, trusting relationship. However, this exchange is not just indicative of their growing trust and intimacy, it is also evidence that Ani is the sort of detective who is not going to betray her team, even if she does stand to benefit.

Given her previous sexual relationships, forming an intimate emotional connection with Velcoro seems a bit out of character for Ani. When her romantic past is brought up in the show it is always in an effort to cast her as someone who is

unemotional and incapable of commitment, much like McNulty. Looking back through the years of crime drama television, women on the force have typically acted as romantic interests for male colleagues. With the notable exception of *Cagney & Lacey*, female law enforcement officials almost always end up romantically entangled with a male colleague, and these romantic subplots drive a lot of the plot action as they become a vulnerability and almost always ends up compromising the woman's work life. Women who were once competent, hard-working police officers or detectives are suddenly demoted to damsels whose distress compels the heroism of the male protagonists.

A variation of this pattern appears in the latter half of the second season of *True Detective*. The investigation into Caspere's death has been closed and the members of detail have all gone their separate ways; however, Bezzerides, Velcoro and Woodrugh reunite 'off the record' in effort to tie together all of the loose ends left behind by the abrupt end of the investigation. This unsanctioned investigation leads the group to take extreme measures, including Ani's rogue undercover investigation. In the aftermath of the undercover operation, Bezzerides and Velcoro are thrown together romantically, a 'twist' that audiences probably saw coming by the end of episode two. The pair don't actually get together until the penultimate episode; however, their relationship escalates rapidly. As the Caspere investigation spirals wildly out of control Ani literally entrusts Velcoro with her life. Although this might be the dynamic of some police workplace partnerships, it is inconsistent with how the pair had been portrayed *before* consummating their sexual tension. While some allowance can be made for the pair bonding together during the stress and danger of their investigation, the abruptness with which Ani and Velcoro devote themselves to one another, feels so out of place after

spending so much time establishing Ani's character as 'damaged' and emotionally unavailable. Her getting together with Velcoro so quickly undercuts this established foundation of her character, as the short, eight-episode anthology style of *True Detective* doesn't allow for the necessary character development that would allow the relationship to feel authentic.

### 4.3 Trauma and Victimization

When the audience is introduced to Bezzerides she is determined to keep herself from being a victim. As previously mentioned, she is typically armed with at least two hidden knives, whether she is on-duty or off. Ani's knives are such an integral part of her character that she keeps a large, man-shaped wooden target in apartment so she can 'work out' whenever she feels the need. In episode two the subject of the knives comes up while she is riding in her car with Velcoro:

VELCORO. What's with all the knives?

ANI. Could you do this job if everyone you encountered could physically overpower you? Forget police work, no man could walk around like that without going nuts. (2x02 "Night Finds You").

Despite the tough exterior that the audience had seen thus far, the reasoning behind the constant carrying of the knives is meant to show that no matter how proficient she is, Ani understands herself to be constantly under threat simply because she is a woman. Both in Ani's professional life and in her personal life she apparently has to live with the idea that

many men she encounters could physically overpower her, especially if she were caught unarmed and unaware. This paranoia seems exaggerated at first, but makes sense when it is later revealed that Ani is a survivor of sexual abuse. This hypervigilance foreshadows a vulnerability to Ani that only comes to light later and further codes her as ‘damaged’.

Despite her no-nonsense attitude, street smarts, and high-level police training, Writer and showrunner Pizzolatto would like us to believe that an unarmed Ani thinks she could be injured or killed by almost any man she might cross. While her job provides some protection in the form of ‘safety in numbers’ as well as equipment — weapons, bullet proof vests, other protective clothing — Ani believes that she must extend that protection to her personal life. Although she is seen carrying concealed knives while on the job, the chief purpose of her weaponry is for when she is off duty and has the ‘safety net’ of her police persona stripped away.

Although Ani is relaying a common female sentiment when she describes her vulnerability, it could be argued that her anxieties about her physical safety — particularly around men — stem from her past sexual abuse. As I discussed earlier, this abuse is part of Ani’s relationship with her father; although he is not her abuser, he created the circumstances in which the abuse was able to happen by failing to protect her. If Ani was not safe as a child on her father’s commune, then she might not have any reasonable expectation of safety anywhere else. Although Ani is expressing a fairly typical feeling of vulnerability, most women, even in similar fields of work, don’t feel the need to be perpetually armed. However, we do see similar behaviour in female law enforcers from other crime drama series. This sort of hypervigilance is seen almost exclusively when the female character in question has undergone some sort of trauma.

One such example would be Detective Olivia Benson of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Benson is repeatedly victimized throughout the nearly two-dozen seasons of the series. In season nine of the series she is almost sexually assaulted while undercover in a women's correctional facility. Once she has returned to her 'real life', Benson suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and attends group therapy (*Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, 10x09 "PTSD") She undergoes an exponentially more intense trauma several seasons later when she is kidnapped by a serial rapist and murderer (*Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, 14x24 "Her Negotiation"). While under her captor's control Benson is forced to watch him rape other women, and murder anyone who gets in his way. Benson is also physically abused for several days before being able to escape when he finally attempts to rape her. While *Law & Order* is upfront about Benson's trauma, and makes the direct link between what happens to her and the aftermath of her PTSD, *True Detective* is less direct. Unlike Benson's abuse, the audience is only given stylized flashbacks of what happened to Ani, and no overt correlation is made between her childhood trauma and her hypervigilance as an adult. Given that the abuse is only revealed very late in the season, the onus is on the audience to reinterpret Ani's actions and behaviours. Ani's trauma doesn't occur in a linear cause-and-effect' type narrative. In many crime dramas, the audience sees the trauma and then can make the connection to later effects. Ani's trauma is revealed in bits and pieces throughout the season, leaving the audience unsure of exactly what they are seeing and how it relates to her character as a whole entity. Furthermore, her past is rarely discussed with other characters, making it impossible to deduce if there *is* a correlation between the abuse and her behaviour as an adult. This narrative structure may have been chosen deliberately to add this level of

mystery to Ani's character. Having a less linear narrative structure allows *True Detective* to leave a lot of questions unanswered, and leave a lot of events — past, present, and future — open to interpretation. By leaving a lot of Ani's character open-ended and unexplained a lot of the onus is left on the viewer to 'make sense' of the character. This technique may have been employed strategically to compensate for the fact that *True Detective*'s anthology format does not allow much time for in-depth character development.

#### 4.4 Undercover work and Vulnerability

Aside from the occasional gender-based expletive, there is only one main event wherein the audience truly sees Detective Bezzerides as a victim. Although her childhood sexual abuse is hinted at throughout the series, she is at much more risk when she poses as her sister — a former sex worker — to gain access to a party of Ventura County elites. Ani trades in her usual functional clothing — loose fitting pants, t-shirts, and often bulletproof vests — for a form-fitting short black dress. She is further disguised by covering her short hair in a longer, dark wig (2x06 "Church in Ruins"). Without her usual equipment, and with only Velcoro and Woodrugh as backup, the typical power dynamic surrounding Ani has shifted. The weaponry and attire that she has earned, and come to rely on as part of her professional training have been literally stripped away, leaving Ani as a scantily clad woman at the mercy of the whims of these elite orgy attendees.





**Figure 3 Ani's typical attire.**



**Figure 4 Ani's undercover look.**

When Ani and the other escorts arrive at the party we see them lined up as servers pour flutes of champagne and fill bowls with what appears to be Viagra. The camera then cuts back to the line of women, who are all obediently opening their mouths and allowing a liquid to be sprayed onto their tongues. Ani looks towards the front of the line skeptically before speaking to the women on either side of her in line:

ANI. Uh, what is... what is that?

LEFT ESCORT. Like pure molly. It's pretty great.

RIGHT ESCORT. Keep you in good mood. (2x06, "Church in Ruins")

Although Ani had no choice in the matter — to refuse would be both suspicious and dangerous — being impaired was not something she, Velcoro, and Woodrugh had accounted for in their planning and strips her of her consciousness and volition. This sort of situation often appears in police procedural narratives about undercover work. The officer is typically put in a dangerous situation and must put themselves or others at risk to maintain their cover. Interestingly, when we see men going undercover they typically have clothing that allows them to conceal some sort of weapon or a wire. In Ani's case, she has all of her competences and tools taken away, and is once again a target for potential sexual assault. After the women are drugged, they are paraded into a room of eagerly awaiting older men. Tense music accompanies the leers of the men allowing the audience to feel Ani's anxiety and vulnerability in that moment or participate in it as a voyeur. As the night goes on she becomes increasingly impaired, a fact that is conveyed through the hazy editing added to later party scenes, and superimposed flashbacks. By having the visuals deteriorate in time with Ani's mental state the audience is forced, at

least in part, into her perspective. This is an interesting choice, given how strongly HBO, and *True Detective*, have catered to men. However, while her surroundings become hazy, Ani herself is still clear in frame so as not to deprive the audience of partaking in the voyeuristic pleasure of the situation.

Although things had been twisting around her and fading in and out earlier in the episode, visually cuing Ani's impairment to the audience, at this point Ani is seeing a full corporeal manifestation of a man with long hair and clothing previously seen at Good People. Given his resemblance to the men of her father's commune, we can piece together that this is the memory of the man who abused Ani when she was a child. The placement of this hallucination, and the partial flashback that accompanies it, is drawing a deliberate connection between that childhood abuse and the vulnerability of her current undercover situation. In the former she was a defenseless child, and although she is now a grown woman, Ani has been stripped of all her usual weapons and, more importantly, her ability to reason clearly. She eventually manages to escape the older man at the party by insisting that she needs the bathroom and will return. Nevertheless, despite escaping her 'suitor' Ani is still visibly shaken. Although Ani succeeds in evading any sexual violence, her earlier statements about gender and violence seem to be prophetic in this episode. In episode two she asked Velcoro if he could "do this job if everyone [he] encountered could physically overpower [him]" (2x02, "Night Finds You"). Evidently her anxieties were well-founded, as she is physically overpowered in episode seven by a security guard when trying to flee the mansion. Ani successfully frees herself with a knife she had managed to obtain and conceal earlier in the evening; however, even with her weapon of choice, it is a close call.

Ani's fate while in the mansion is best analyzed with HBO's core demographic in mind, particularly given that the network, as reflected by the show's very successful first season, is highly geared toward appealing to young, affluent men. With this in mind, Ani fleeing the mansion may have two very distinct meanings. One reading would be that, no matter how accomplished or tough you may be, womanhood equal weakness. While female viewers of the show are reminded frequently, that as a woman, you cannot escape your biology — particularly when impaired or unarmed. Ani is able to manage, but she is a highly-trained professional.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Discussion: The State of Female Detectives on HBO

Six years passed between the 2008 series finale of *The Wire* and the debut of *True Detective*'s second season. In that time female detectives, or any type of female law enforcement official, were completely absent from HBO's screens. As the police procedural boomed on standard network television, HBO broadened their horizons to other genres. Given the whirlwind popularity of *The Wire* and the avant-garde nature of *Kima Greggs*, one would think that when HBO did return to the police-centered crime drama genre that they would return to push the envelope and attempt to once again assert their dominance by revolutionizing the crime drama genre, much like they did with *Deadwood* and the western, or *The Sopranos* and the mob-themed drama. While *True Detective* is certainly a big departure from typical crime drama fare in terms of style, season two of the series does largely follow the same sets of stereotypes and assumptions, particularly regarding women in the workplace.

Both *The Wire* and *True Detective* exist within the same, broad crime drama genre. While *The Wire* more closely resembles the police procedural genre of crime drama, *True Detective* takes a very different route. One of the key differences between the two is that *The Wire* appears to be more grounded in reality, and uses the "blending of cinematic realism and journalistic methods" (Wilson 60) to portray the dynamic between the police and drug trade in Baltimore. The series strives for a sense of gritty realism, which is emphasized by showrunner David Simon's very real connection to the world of

crime in Baltimore. Simon sought to convey many of his experiences as a crime reporter in Baltimore through the dynamics of the show and, as a result, many of the events in *The Wire* are partially or fully taken from Simon's experiences while on the job. This relationship to reality is something that is fairly typical of police procedural television, as the focus of the police procedural is the day-to-day operations of police. The realism that is imbued in the narrative of *The Wire* is a key stylistic difference when we compare the series to *True Detective*. However, as previously mentioned the two series do also differ drastically in their format. Although each of *The Wire*'s five seasons undertakes a different aspect of life in Baltimore, the series retains its core cast throughout the entire duration of the show. This format allows for key characters to develop slowly over time, both through plot action, and through continued interactions with other recurring characters. This is why the bulk of the analysis about Kima in Chapter 3 relies on a breakdown of her relationships and how they transform over multiple season, more so than how specific plot events shape her character. When analyzing Kima's portrayal there is a large amount of material with which to work, and it should be taken into account that Simon had several years to craft her development and build up audience attachment.

Unlike *The Wire*, and many other police procedural series, *True Detective* is less reality based and more fantastical and cinematic in its scope.<sup>14</sup> Although the second season is set in the fictional town of Vinci, California, the creators largely used sweeping visuals of the landscape to convey the harsh, industrial nature of the city they had created.

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<sup>14</sup> The more cinematic nature of *True Detective* is in line with the style and production value favored by HBO series in the past several years. Technological advances have allowed for quality television to more closely resemble film in terms of high production value (Dhoest 3).

In both seasons of the series, the cases that are profiled are tangled webs of deviance and intrigue. These mysterious storylines help liken the show to the more to the stylized detective stories of the film noir era. One example that shows the stylistic differences would be the shooting of Kima and Velcoro in their respective series. Kima gets shot by men in an alley, whereas Ray Velcoro is shot by a man in a hyper-realistic raven mask. While *True Detective* is technically based in reality and police procedure, both the cinematography and plot itself invite a certain suspension of disbelief. Part of the reason that *True Detective* does take such a stylistic and fast-paced approach can arguably be linked to the format of the series. While *The Wire* has ample time to develop characters and relationships, *True Detective* is an anthology series. Creator Nic Pizzolatto intended from the beginning to have each season of his series be its own, self-contained narrative. This anthology-style narrative is a departure from the norms of police procedural drama, and while it does serve to set the series apart from its predecessors, it also comes with certain downfalls. Time restrictions placed on *True Detective* do not allow for as much character depth as serialized dramas spanning several years. There is so much going on in each episode to further the plot, that character development and relationships need to take a back seat in Pizzolatto's form of storytelling. With only one season of content to Kima's five, it is understandable that Ani, as a character, seems comparatively underdeveloped. While Ani does have professional, romantic, and familial relationships throughout the season, the narrative style of *True Detective* deliberately leaves a lot of the character background details to the viewer's imagination so that it can focus on tying together all of the threads of its plot.

Despite the many contextual and stylistic differences between the two programs, there is a common ground found between the two female leads of these series. Both Kimble Gregg and Ani Bezzerides are the only female cops in their precincts and operate in hierarchies dominated by men. Given the masculine nature of their work, both women have adopted tough, no-nonsense attitudes in order to succeed in their careers. Their devotion is focused not on family or friends, but rather on the job, to the point where when these women try to juggle family life and work life, it is always the job that wins out in the end. The shows represent these women as required to sacrifice all other aspects of their life in order to be considered good police. Kimble and Ani play heavily into standard police drama tropes. Women who work in law enforcement are often portrayed as “one of the boys”, which is somewhat logical, given the heavy emphasis on masculinity in police work and the relative absence of women. In the world of crime drama femininity is often used as a sign of weakness, something that is reinforced by the heavy emphasis placed on women as victims. Like women in many male-dominated fields, Kimble and Ani need to devote more time and attention to their work than a man just to get that same level of respect or recognition. It is not enough to just be competent, these women are expected to be hyper-competent. Of course, this power imbalance is rarely addressed in police procedurals, particularly the one on a network like HBO, which, instead reinforces this expectation. Both Kimble and Ani are female characters working in a male-dominated workforce. Both characters were written and largely directed by men, and their shows were aired on a network that targets a primarily male audience.

In the world of the police procedural the everyday sexism that comes along with being a woman in law enforcement is not enough of an issue, so we see writers and



showrunners often taking things to extremes to justify why a female officer behaves the way that she does. While both Kima and Ani are given extra obstacles in their narratives, Kima's shooting and Ani's childhood assault have drastically different implications. Kima is not given a tragic backstory to fuel any of her less desirable character traits or as an attempt to 'explain away' any of her wrongdoings. She is not portrayed as deeply damaged, be it from her past or from the job. Essentially, Kima is portrayed as just a normal, hard-working woman and, despite the lack of added melodrama, she still managed to become a fan favourite. When we look at the portrayal of Ani we see something that is less three-dimensional and that plays into even more stereotypes regarding female detectives. The daily microaggressions, sexism, and harassment from former lovers in the Ventura County Sheriff's Department is not enough hardship or struggle for Ani. In order to make her character more compelling and explain her behaviour she is given a traumatic backstory of childhood sexual assault. While it is unclear whether Ani recalled her past trauma or if it was uncovered during the Caspere murder investigation, her past is used as a narrative crutch. It implies that Ani could not be a compelling character without this trauma defining her portrayal. Given that *True Detective* is created by a team of men and marketed to a predominantly male HBO audience, this portrayal of Ani is highly mediated by the assumptions of the show's writers and what they think their audiences want. Ani's trauma is framed in such a way that it is used to 'explain' her behaviour. Her experience of childhood sexual abuse allows for male audiences to see her as damaged, and explains her aversions to intimacy and vulnerability. Conversely, the closest thing to a trauma that Kima endures is the shooting at the end of season one that almost took her life. What distinguishes these two

traumas is the timing. Kima survives an event that is a real everyday threat to police officers. Even in season two when she has recovered fully, Kima is not deeply changed by what happened and only takes a desk job at the request of her partner Cheryl. The incident becomes a measure of her mental toughness, not her fragility. While no viewer would fault Kima for being skittish after her brush with death, the shooting in no way defines who she is nor does it drastically change any of her motivations.

## 5.1 Different Series, Same Narrative

With the exception of being in the same genre, there are few similarities between *The Wire* and season two of *True Detective* as a whole. The two series take place on opposite sides of the continent, Baltimore, Maryland, versus the fictional city of Vinci, California. Similarly, *The Wire* takes an in-depth look at various microcosms of crime over several seasons, while *True Detective* squeezes all of its action into a brief 8-episode season. Despite the stark differences between the two series, both Kima and Ani fill very similar narrative functions within their respective shows. Both women have adapted to their hypermasculine environments by becoming more like their male co-workers, both in the matter of dress and behaviour. According to Drapela, in order to be seen as competent in their professional lives both Kima and Ani dress, speak, and act like the masculine ideal that is valorized in police work. While there is not much known about their lives before joining the force, to be traditionally feminine and a skilled detective is something rarely seen anywhere in crime drama television. In order to excel in their work and be taken

seriously, it appears that both Kima and Ani need to sacrifice their relationship with femininity.

What is particularly interesting in the case of both *The Wire* and season two of *True Detective*, is that Kima and Ani must revisit the very parts of themselves that would otherwise be thought of as 'weaknesses'. The taking up of femininity as part of undercover work is not something that is not acknowledged in Drapela's continuum, and acts as a complicating factor in the analysis of both women. As the only women on their respective teams it falls on Kima and Ani to take on the dangerous undercover roles that come up in both series. This particular trope can be read as a way of returning these hypercompetent women to female stereotypes. In *The Wire* the members of the detail explain that, particularly in their scenario, a woman would draw less suspicion. Since the drug trade is a similarly structured masculine hierarchy, the dealers would be inherently more suspicious of a man infiltrating their circles than they would be of Kima. Although she is portrayed as a competent, respected officer, those reasons are not referenced at all in the conversation. Kima is ultimately only chosen because of her gender. Interestingly, there is no framing conversation in *True Detective* where it is decided that Ani should be the one to go undercover. Given the secretive nature of the party they wish to infiltrate, it could be argued that the same logic applies to both scenarios; however, in *True Detective* Ani takes the situation more into her own hands. Given her sister's previous work at these events, it is the easiest and most logical way to get in. In both situations male officers could have taken on undercover roles, albeit with a more creative backstory than, 'girlfriend' or 'escort'. Though, to be fair, they could also give the female detectives more creative cover stories, too. While having male characters take the undercover roles

would still provide tension and drama within the narrative, it would come at the expense of showing female detectives in form-fitting or revealing outfits. This level of visual titillation is something that, presumably, is aimed at the predominantly male audience. Going undercover sets up these women to be consumed by the men within the narrative, but also by the men at home in their living rooms.

The expectation that female detectives need to rid themselves of any sort of femininity in order to be ‘good police’ is not only playing into gendered stereotypes, but also ends up backfiring in both series. When their respective cases are at stake, both Kima and Ani are expected to inhabit these hyperfeminine roles and put themselves in significant danger out of sheer dedication to the job. So, while Drapela argues that in crime drama television, “the more masculinized a female character in a crime drama is written/portrayed, the more efficacious she is portrayed in her professional life” (302), this model does not take into account the nature of undercover work. When they go undercover Kima and Ani are going above and beyond the dedication that we see from any of their male colleagues. While in their day-to-day professional lives Kima and Ani are expected to embody the masculine ideal in order to garner respect; however, they can never truly be just ‘one of the guys’. Although the two series present an illusion of equality between the lone female detectives and their male counterparts, the female body is used as bait as soon as the investigation allows. The undercover clothing worn by both women leaves little to the imagination, particularly when contrasted to their everyday work attire. Both Kima and Ani are stripped of all protective gear, and the form-fitting nature of their outfits allows neither woman to wear any sort of concealed weapon. Not only would such a weapon likely be visible due to the nature of their outfits, but they are

also entering into high-risk areas where they could reasonably expect some sort of pat down. *The Wire* does at least acknowledge the conflict of sending Kima into a drug deal without easy access to a weapon, though they ultimately decide to stash her gun under the back seat of their informant's car. The only character in *True Detective* to express uneasiness about Ani going undercover is her sister Athena, a former sex worker who once worked at the very parties the detail wishes to infiltrate. Athena tells her sister that "they're not going to let you take in a purse or a phone or anything. They're going to make you turn all that stuff in." (2x06 "Church in Ruins") All of Athena's words of caution are brushed aside by Ani, who answers only with an "okay" and returns to slashing at the wooden target in her apartment. She, much like Kima, seems hardly concerned about the dangerous situation she will soon be facing. While Drapela posits that in crime drama femininity is equated to a perceived lack of professional competency, in these undercover situations, it is much more akin to a very real vulnerability.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Hope as we may, there is only so much that we can expect when female characters are created by men, for men, in genres that have long been dominated by men. While HBO has created two complex, interesting characters with Kima Greggs and Ani Bezzerides, both women are unfortunately subjected to the same overdone series of tropes and assumptions. As the only female detectives the audience sees in each series, both women must work twice as hard and rid themselves of anything traditionally associated with femininity in order to garner the same level of respect their male colleagues incur naturally. To be seen as competent in their field of work, female detectives in the

television landscape must align themselves as closely as possible with the masculinized notion of what it means to be ‘good police’. Despite all of this extra labor, Kima and Ani are later expected to pivot at a moment’s notice and revert back to ‘real womanhood’ for the sake of their investigations. The experiences these women go through are used in attempt to cement the notion that femininity is incompatible with police work. While undercover both Kima and Ani have brushes with death. Kima is shot in a sting gone wrong, while Ani is nearly strangled to death by a security guard. However, it is not the competence of these characters that has changed, it is only their outward appearance. To compare the abilities of these women when undercover to their day-to-day work is doing nothing but prolonging the misconception that police officers cannot be female, feminine, and still competent and respected workers. Of course Kima is better at her job when she is dressed in her standard attire, for it allows her to wear protective gear and carry both visible and concealed weapons if she so wishes. This logic perhaps applies even more aptly to Ani. The creators of *True Detective* on several occasions show Ani concealing one or more knives on her person. Her relationship to her weapon of choice is so paramount to her character that her training montages was featured heavily in promotional materials for the season. Both on duty and off she is rarely seen without some sort of weapon on her person. Naturally, neither Kima or Ani will be able to protect themselves to the same degree as they are used to when they are left unarmed and alone.

The gendered lens under which these characters are created has significantly impacted their narratives. Kima and Ani are not allowed to just be seen as competent detectives. In order to appeal to HBO’s desired demographic — predominantly male, relatively affluent consumers of quality television — these tough, capable detectives are

inevitably turned into objects of the male gaze. For Kima, this moment is admittedly brief, as after her shooting she takes on even more traditionally masculine behaviors and becomes closer with McNulty. The case for Ani is much more problematic. She is entering into a show that — although it is an anthology and each season features its own narrative — has only ever featured women as romantic interests or dead bodies. *True Detective*'s first season, while achieving critical acclaim, did receive criticism for its treatment of its few female characters. Ani's character largely seems like Nic Pizzolatto's attempt at slapping a band-aid onto a bullet hole. Although she is an interesting character, when examined within the broader context of *True Detective*, and its creator Pizzolatto, the inclusion of Ani in the main cast is mostly an easy way for him to incorporate an actual woman into his obsessive fascination with masculinity. What is troubling about Ani when taking a step back, is that she begins the narrative as a male character with boobs, and finishes the season as a 'real' woman. It is not a storyline that is meant to appeal to a female viewership. Of course, when it comes to original drama series on HBO, not many storylines are meant to appeal to a female viewership.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: True Detective season two episode summaries <sup>15</sup>

<p>2x01: Western Book of the Dead</p>	<p>City manager Ben Caspere disappears shortly before he is to present plans for real estate development near a new high-speed rail line in the industrial town of Vinci, California. His corrupt business partner, Frank Semyon (Vince Vaughn), is forced to make the presentation on his own. Vinci Police Detective Ray Velcoro (Colin Farrell) is seeking custody of his son, who may be a product of his ex-wife's (Abigail Spencer) rape, years before. Through flashback, Velcoro is shown meeting Semyon at a bar, where Semyon gives him the name of his wife's rapist. Velcoro is now burned out and unhinged, and also works as an enforcer for Semyon. Ventura County detective Antigone "Ani" Bezzerides (Rachel McAdams) conducts a raid on a suspected illegal brothel, which turns out to be a legal porn studio, where she finds her sister Athena working as a cam girl. Later, the search for Vera Machiado, a missing woman, leads Bezzerides to the woman's last known place of employment, a spiritual retreat run by Bezzerides' estranged father, Eliot, leading to a tense confrontation. A third cop, Highway Patrol officer Paul Woodrugh (Taylor Kitsch), is put on paid leave after an actress, Lacey Lindel, tries to seduce him and later falsely accuses him of sexual misconduct when he refuses to look the other way to her speeding and violating her parole. While visiting his girlfriend, Emily, Woodrugh secretly takes Viagra and does not answer her questions about the scars on his body. Late at night, racing his motorcycle without headlights and with near suicidal ferocity, Woodrugh discovers the corpse of Caspere propped up on a bench, with his eyes burned out. Velcoro and Bezzerides converge with Woodrugh at the crime scene.</p>
<p>2x02: Night Finds You</p>	<p>Led by State Attorney Katherine Davis, Velcoro and Bezzerides form a special investigation into Caspere's murder. Lamenting on the news of Caspere's death, Semyon wonders how he'll get out of his financial issues, as he discovers that the money he gave Caspere for the high-speed rail deal was embezzled and he has lost over \$5 million – most of his fortune. Enraged, he begins to investigate Caspere's death in his own way. State investigators still want to push into the rumors of backdoor deals and corruption in Vinci, and recruit Woodrugh as a Special Investigator to gather</p>

<sup>15</sup> The contents of the appendix were adapted from the episode summaries provided on the Wikipedia page for *True Detective* season two. Summaries were edited for length and clarity.

	<p>evidence in exchange for quashing the Lindel solicitation scandal. Bezzerides is warned by her superiors that Velcoro is corrupt and to find a way to make him an informant, while Velcoro is asked by Austin Chessani, the mayor of Vinci, and his own superiors, Police Chief Holloway and Lieutenant Kevin Burris, that the investigation move where they want it. A fourth detective, Teague Dixon, is placed alongside them by the Vinci PD. An autopsy of Caspere's body shows that he was tortured for information and his genitals shot off with a shotgun before being placed at the rest stop. Drunk, Velcoro seeks time with his son and instead gets a cruel backlash from his ex-wife who now seeks full custody of their son and threatens a paternity test to force him away. After an enigmatic visit to his mother, Cynthia, Woodrugh gets into an argument with Emily, who thinks he is cheating, and he leaves her on bad terms. While driving with Velcoro and discussing the case, Bezzerides questions just how compromised he is, a question he leaves unanswered. At the bar, Semyon informs Velcoro about Caspere's secret second house, information which he obtained from a prostitute. As Velcoro enters the home searching for clues, a person in a raven mask appears and shoots him twice with a shotgun, once at point blank range.</p>
<p>2x03: Maybe Tomorrow</p>	<p>Velcoro awakens revealing the shot was non-lethal, and discovers that a hard drive containing footage of Caspere's sexual encounters has been stolen. Bezzerides and Woodrugh investigate Mayor Chessani's possible connection to Caspere's death by going to his home. They discover his intoxicated young trophy wife, moody daughter and problematic son much to Chessani's dismay who threatens to have Bezzerides and Woodrugh fired. Semyon meets an old business partner in the construction business who already paid his debts, but demands more capital in exchange for new favors. Semyon meets with Osip who hints he is bailing on the deal. Semyon's criminal associate, Blake, enters and reveals his other criminal associate, Stan, was just killed as well. Woodrugh meets an old friend from private security firm Black Mountain, Miguel Gilb, who reminds him of their homosexual encounter during the war. Woodrugh responds by pushing him to the ground. Later Woodrugh uses a gay escort to get into Danny Santos' club for further investigation where he briefly bumps into Semyon. While Bezzerides and Velcoro share a drink at his house, Velcoro's ex-wife shows up at his door to inform him he is under investigation by the state for corruption and the prior assault on her rapist; Bezzerides hears the conversation behind the door. Velcoro's ex-wife attempts to give him \$10,000 to drop the custody battle, which he refuses. A tip from Caspere's assistant Laura leads Bezzerides and Velcoro investigate a movie set learning that a car had been stolen in the weeks prior, presumably the same car which carried Caspere. As they interrogate a boy with a history of auto theft,</p>

	<p>around the corner a masked man sets fire to the car which transported Caspere's body. Bezzerides is nearly hit by a truck during the pursuit as she and Velcoro chase the masked man before Velcoro pulls her out of the way. She thanks Velcoro, who tells her she can thank him by telling him what the state has against him. She says she does not know.</p>
<p>2x04: Down Will Come</p>	<p>Semyon starts to rebuild his empire, working his way back into the ownership of clubs and properties that he once owned, and negotiating deals with the city's drug suppliers in a bid to reclaim his lost money. Bezzerides and Velcoro follow Caspere's movements. A visit to the commune run by Bezzerides's father reveals that Chessani, Caspere, and Caspere's psychiatrist Dr. Pitlor have been in business for decades, prompting Velcoro to admit that the State investigation into Vinci is little more than a shakedown. He warns Bezzerides that Chessani did not get to his position without having faced similar pressure in the past, and that he could not survive without powerful friends or amassing power of his own. Political forces—implied to be Chessani's influence—see Bezzerides suspended from her job after a co-worker files a sexual harassment complaint against her, though she is allowed to remain on the special task force. Throwing himself back into the investigation, Woodrugh and Dixon follow up on a lead at a pawn shop where he uncovers a prostitute named Irina selling a watch owned by Caspere. Velcoro approaches Semyon with this, which Semyon dismisses as unlikely as Stan was killed under similar circumstances and there is no connection to his death. Under pressure from Vinci PD to close the case, Velcoro, Bezzerides and Woodrugh lead a raid against Irina's pimp, Ledo Amarilla, but are ambushed when the building is found to be a methamphetamine lab which promptly explodes when the police open fire. As Amarilla tries to escape, he crashes his SUV into a city bus during a demonstration against the rail project. He and his accomplices open fire on the crowd as the police move in, with Dixon among the dead, and while the gunmen are killed, Velcoro, Bezzerides and Woodrugh are left horrified at the mass civilian and police casualties.</p>
<p>2x05: Other Lives</p>	<p>Two months after the shoot-out, the special investigation into Caspere's death has been shut down, with the State Attorney, Geldof, satisfied that Amarilla was responsible. Velcoro has since quit the Vinci PD and works private security for Semyon while fighting his ex-wife and her husband for custody of his son; Bezzerides has been demoted to the sheriff's office evidence lock-up, attending sexual harassment seminars, and has returned to investigating Vera's disappearance in her own time; and Woodrugh has been promoted to detective and investigating insurance fraud. Semyon approaches McCandless, owner of Catalyst—the company holding the lands to be bought for the</p>

	<p>rail project—with information that the person he sold his waste disposal company to has died under suspicious circumstances. This, combined with McCandless' complicitness in having Semyon use said company prior to its sale to contaminate the lands around the rail project to lower its value are used as blackmail by Semyon to get back into the rail project. McCandless instead gives him the chance to buy back into the project if he can recover the hard drive stolen from Caspere's apartment the night Velcoro was shot. Meanwhile, Bezzerides makes a connection between Vera and the cache of blue diamonds found in Caspere's safe deposit box. This prompts Davis to re-open the investigation into Caspere's death under the pretext of finding Irina, bringing Velcoro, Bezzerides, and Woodrugh back together. Davis also reveals to Velcoro that Gena's rapist had been arrested six weeks previously. After confirming this with Gena, Velcoro realizes that the tip Semyon gave him years ago was a set-up to corrupt him. Woodrugh follows up on the diamonds and discovers Dixon had been looking for them prior to their discovery but had kept that information to himself during the original investigation. This leads Woodrugh and Bezzerides to conclude that Vinci PD had been using Dixon to manipulate the investigation. Velcoro returns to Pitlor's clinic and beats Pitlor for information, confirming that Caspere and Chessani were in business together linking influential men with prostitutes at secret parties. They subsequently used pictures taken at the parties to blackmail men like McCandless who attend them. Bezzerides approaches Athena to try to get an invite to an upcoming party before she and Woodrugh, following a previous lead from her old partner, match Vera's last movements to an abandoned house in Guerneville. Deep in the woods behind the house they discover a blood-stained shed with a torture chair inside.</p>
<p>2x06: Church in Ruins</p>	<p>Velcoro and Semyon discuss the tip that led Velcoro to his wife's alleged rapist, with both men grasping their guns under the coffee table. Semyon swears to Velcoro that he thought the information was genuine at the time. Satisfied that Semyon did not intentionally mislead him, Velcoro confronts the man arrested for the rape in prison, promising to kill him. After an awkward supervised visit with his son, Velcoro goes on a cocaine- and alcohol-fueled bender before calling his ex-wife and agreeing to drop the custody case on the condition that she never reveal her son's true parentage. Meanwhile, Woodrugh follows up on the missing diamonds to find that they were part of a cache stolen during a double homicide and robbery in the 1992 riots that orphaned two children, making the diamonds untraceable. Semyon starts searching for Irina, making an agreement with a Mexican cartel that will allow him to meet Irina provided the cartel are allowed to move drugs through his clubs. Irina calls Semyon and reveals that she had been given the items from Caspere's home by a police officer. Semyon</p>

	<p>arranges to meet her so that she can identify the man from a photo, but arriving at the meeting point finds her dead, having been killed by the Mexicans for dealing with police. Outnumbered and empty-handed, Semyon is forced to accept the deal with the Mexicans. Bezzerides goes undercover, posing as Athena to infiltrate one of the secret elite parties in Monterey. With no phone, transmitter or weapon, she is forced to rely on Woodrugh and Velcoro for support. At the party, she is drugged and taken to the guests with a busload of other girls. Her attempts to search the party are hampered by the male guests and hallucinations of a strange man from her childhood, implying that she was sexually abused. As Woodrugh and Velcoro sneak in, they steal a set of contracts from McCandless' office. Bezzerides locates Vera at the party and attempts to get her out, but is forced to kill a guard in the process. She and Vera are found by Woodrugh who escorts them to Velcoro in a waiting car. As the four escape, Woodrugh goes over the stolen contracts and starts to realize the scale of what they are involved in.</p>
<p>2x07: Black Maps and Motel Rooms</p>	<p>The task force regroupes after the party to allow Vera and Bezzerides to recover from the drugs they were given while Velcoro and Woodrugh go over the documents that link Catalyst and McCandless to Osip. When morning comes, Woodrugh and Bezzerides move their families to safety while Velcoro reports to Semyon. Velcoro approaches Davis with their evidence but finds her shot dead in her car. Woodrugh discovers that Bezzerides is wanted for questioning over the death of the security guard she killed at the party while Velcoro has been named as a suspect in Davis' murder. Using information from Semyon, Vera and the police database, the three are able to formulate a theory on Caspere's death: that a group of corrupt police—including Caspere—used the 1992 riots to steal the diamonds which they used to buy into the Vinci power structure; however, Laura, a child orphaned during the robbery, tracked them down and after posing as Caspere's assistant, killed him after confirming his involvement. Everything from their discovery of the diamonds through to the shoot-out with Ledo Amarilla has been manipulated from behind the scenes by Vinci PD to cover up their involvement in the original crime. Semyon arranges for Jordan to leave town. When approached by Osip, Semyon bows out gracefully and accepts a role as manager of Osip's clubs. Faced with the realization of just how powerful their enemies are, Velcoro and Bezzerides sleep together. Meanwhile, Woodrugh is lured to a meeting with his blackmailer, Holloway, who demands the documents taken from the party. Woodrugh overpowers him and is drawn into a shootout with the Black Mountain private security accompanying Holloway on behalf of McCandless, but as he makes his escape, he is shot twice and killed.</p>

2x08: Omega Station

After a night of sex, Velcoro and Bezzerides recount their respective traumas—Bezzerides' childhood molestation and Velcoro's murder of his wife's supposed rapist. Semyon convinces Jordan to leave the country for Venezuela where he will rendezvous with her two weeks later. He then goes to Chessani's mansion, where he finds the mayor dead, and the mayor's wife Veronica, while high, implicates his son Tony as his murderer. Meanwhile Velcoro and Bezzerides learn of Woodrugh's death and resolve to close the case. They identify Laura, Caspere's secretary, and Lenny, a photographer from the movie set of the stolen prop car, as the Osterman siblings. Visiting Lenny's home, they find Laura handcuffed to the fireplace, and the bird's head mask from the earlier episodes that belongs to Lenny identifying him as the murderer of Caspere, and the man who shot Velcoro. Laura confirms that Lenny murdered Caspere, and plans to kill Holloway under the pretense of a public meeting at a train station in Anaheim to trade Caspere's hard drive for money. Bezzerides puts Laura on a bus to Seattle while Velcoro intercepts Lenny at the train station and convinces him to entrap Holloway. Velcoro takes Lenny's place, leading Holloway into a discussion of the blue diamond conspiracy with him, while Lenny sits behind them. Holloway reveals that Caspere fathered Laura illegitimately and that their mother was pregnant with Caspere's second child at the time of her murder. This revelation sends Lenny into a rage and he attacks Holloway, thereby starting a shootout. Velcoro and Bezzerides meet Semyon at a secret bunker in a bar where Velcoro convinces Bezzerides to head to Venezuela while he and Semyon plot a revenge attack on Osip. They then carry out the two-man assault on the money drop at a secret cabin, killing McCandless and Osip. On their way back, both men are ambushed—Semyon is apprehended and driven out to the desert by the cartel members who invested in the clubs he burned, while Velcoro visits his son at school in Laurel Canyon and is spotted by Vinci PD searching for him and they place a transponder on his vehicle that Velcoro spots but is unable to remove, and drives off anyway knowing his fate is sealed. Semyon cooperates with the cartel members and pays them off, but refuses to give one of the men his suit when the man demands it, as he has the last of his money liquidated into diamonds in his pocket. Semyon is stabbed and attempts to walk back to civilization, but succumbs to his wounds in the middle of the desert after a series of four hallucinations and dies. Velcoro is still being tailed by Vinci police, and bids Bezzerides goodbye on the phone before making a last stand in the woods. Velcoro accepts his fate, confronting Burriss and a tactical team who shoot him to death. In an epilogue sequence, Tony Chessani becomes mayor of Vinci, the rail project goes ahead as scheduled, Velcoro is remembered as a cop killer, a newly constructed highway is named in Paul Woodrugh's memory and Woodrugh's girlfriend



has given birth to his child. In Venezuela, Bezzerides is revealed to have given birth to Velcoro's son and is living with Jordan Semyon. She meets with the journalist Velcoro assaulted in episode one, and passes all the incriminating evidence, including the Caspere case files, on to him to start a crusade against the corruption in Vinci before she and Jordan disappear in a crowd.

## Curriculum Vitae

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