

LAW & DISORDER:
THE IMAGE OF THE JOURNALIST IN TELEVISION'S
LAW & ORDER SERIES

by

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ABSTRACT

There isn't much to like about most of the journalists in the Law & Order version of New York City. Manipulative journalists abuse the power of the press and rarely repent their sins. Anonymous journalists populate the show with hordes of cameras, microphones and flashbulbs. The easy manipulation of media – tricking the press into reporting untruths or publicity stunts – is common. *Law & Order* even forces a discussion of journalistic ethics and traditions. With only a few watchdog journalists in the storylines, many of these journalists aren't very likable. Some star reporters do shine through, breaking important stories, protecting their sources or pursuing a crooked cop, but those instances are few and far between. In a show that bills itself as “ripped from the headlines,” the audience may be balancing their opinions of journalists on a show that has trouble drawing a line between fact and fiction.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rushed, sensational and willing to do anything for a story, journalists in television's longest-running crime series are characters caught between fact and fiction. When there's a story on the line in the *Law & Order* version of New York City, cops and journalists are usually on opposing ends of justice.

The original *Law & Order* is the longest-running drama series in the history of television and in 2006 entered its 16th season on NBC. The winner of the 1997 Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series and the record holder for most consecutive nominations for a drama series, the *Law & Order* franchise is embraced by fans and critics alike.¹ The successful franchise – composed of the original *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* and the short-lived *Law & Order: Trial by Jury* – include a total of 647 episodes by the summer of 2006.²

It is no wonder that the depiction of any group in this franchise has a lasting effect on the public consciousness – people can't get enough of the show. Creator Dick Wolf and his writers inspect crime from the investigative and legal sides of justice, and the media figure prominently.

¹ TV.com, "Law & Order: Series Summary," <http://www.tv.com/law-andorder/show/180/summary.html>, 2006, 1.

² TV.com, "Law & Order: Series Summary," 1.

The current incarnation of *Law & Order* looks at the details of a specific crime and then switches to the dramatic side of imposing justice.³ *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* is the franchise's emotional cousin with details of sexually based offenses or crimes that involve children.⁴ In *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* the detectives wrap their minds around complicated investigative crimes in New York City.⁵ The franchise's newest version, which is now off the air, is *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*, which focused on the trial of the crime.⁶

Journalists in the *Law & Order* franchise play a key and prominent part in most episodes and often interact directly with main characters.⁷ These journalists

³ Detective Joe Fontana (Dennis Farina) and his partner, Edward Green (Jesse L. Martin) work with boss Anita Van Buren (S. Epatha Merkerson) to catch the bad guys. Then Executive Assistant District Attorney Jack McCoy (Sam Waterston) and District Attorney Arthur Branch (Fred Dalton Thompson) work to prosecute them. Other stars have been on the show in the past, including Jerry Orbach, who played Detective Lennie Briscoe. He died in 2004.

⁴ The show focuses on Elliot Stabler (Christopher Meloni) and his partner Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay), who work with child and sexual assault victims. John Munch (Richard Belzer) is the comic relief, his partner Odafun Tutuola (Ice-T) is a serious transfer from the narcotics unit and Capt. Donald Cragen (Dann Florek) is the boss.

⁵ Robert Green (Vincent D'Onofrio) and his partner Alexandra Eames (Kathryn Erbe) are the two main characters. D'Onofrio has a diminished role in the current incarnation of the series because of some personal health issues.

⁶ Tracey Kibre (Bebe Neuwirth) and Kelly Gaffney (Amy Carlson) work in the courtroom to put offenders away for the time they seem to deserve.

⁷ *Law & Order: SVU* character Stabler once remarks, "we spend more time with these idiots than with our own families," referring to the journalists that question them about investigations.

often act as a source of chaos, confusion, pressure and sensationalism. Investigators often express their fear that the media “will get hold of the story.”⁸

Journalism is already in trouble with the public – 45 percent of Americans in a 2004 Pew Research survey said that their daily newspaper was untrustworthy – so these images of the journalist in *Law & Order* take on a lot of importance.⁹ If the public only viewed this image of the journalist and knew nothing else of the profession, many would see reporters and editors as unscrupulous scoundrels who only write stories for financial means or personal gain. In many episodes, the journalists turn into the bad guys, the opposing force of the cops and justice.

Dick Wolf is straightforward about his intentions with the *Law & Order* dramas. In an interview with *New York Times Magazine*, Wolf boasted that his two lead cops in *Law & Order* didn’t fire their weapons once in the first 10 years of the series. Wolf said he isn’t out to portray violence, just a positive view of the cops. “The only thing that has ever traumatized my children in watching television was the day that the Marines were killed in Mogadishu, and they were dragged naked through the streets. CNN was running that every 10 minutes.”¹⁰ Wolf makes it quite clear that his representation of journalism in *Law & Order* isn’t going to be

⁸⁸ Both cops and suspects are especially worried about the media in *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Lowdown”. High profile citizens in New York City worry that their gay lifestyle will be revealed if the cops talk to the media. The detectives wrestle with the ethics involved in revealing these events to the broadcast journalists that are interested in it.

⁹ Loren Ghiglione, “The American Journalist: Fiction Versus Fact,” American Antiquarian Society, 1991, 21.

¹⁰ Hugo Lindgren, “Questions for Dick Wolf: Cop show and tell,” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 September 1999, 31.

excessively positive. “We’re going to show cops and lawyers and journalists and criminals in a way that no one has shown them,” Wolf said. “If that’s not glowing, then so be it.”¹¹ Wolf once told the New York Times that while he had seen many police officers working and on-duty, he had never seen a journalist work, other than the few interviews he’d given after his show became popular. With such little grasp on the profession, Wolf and his writers may be shooting blind in their representations of journalists in these series.

With only a few instances of being watchdog reporters and more often running in packs, many of these journalists aren’t very likable. In a television world where the plot is black and white, these journalists can readily turn into the bad guys while the cops are just trying to do their jobs.

¹¹ Lindgren, “Questions for Dick Wolf,” 31.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to examine the general attitude of the *Law & Order* franchise towards journalists and the press. Using digital video recording equipment and TiVo brand equipment, most episodes were taped as reruns or when they first aired on television as new episodes. Some episodes also were captured by Prof. Joe Saltzman for his work on the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture database through the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Communication. In addition, a box set of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* was used to view more episodes.

Most episodes viewed for this project aired between 2000-2006, although some older episodes were selected because of their journalist protagonists. The IJPJ database was used in this selection procedure because it had already recorded some older episodes that were helpful in this analysis. Because this research is focused mostly on the contemporary image of the journalist in the *Law & Order* shows as reflected in the current state of real journalism, the newer the image, the most applicable it became to the modern day industry and life of reporters and media personnel.

The time period of the episodes analyzed for this research ranged from 1991 through 2006. A total of 674 episodes of all *Law & Order* franchise shows have aired as of May 2006, the date of this project. Researchers viewed 125 episodes, although every plot synopsis of episodes that were not directly viewed were read to identify any plots that may involve a journalist protagonist. Episodes with

recognizable journalists as protagonists numbered 44, while another 30 other episodes had instances of pack journalism or some reference to the media. All of those episodes are listed in the Selected Episode Glossary.

From the primary sources – digital video recorder, DVD set, video cassettes from IJPC and episode summaries from www.tv.com and the Law & Order Websites – data was input into Excel worksheets that identified each appearance of a journalist and the frequency that journalists that appeared in each episode and scene. The data was organized in the style of the IJPC database, using the episode name and some summary from www.tv.com. The data was then analyzed after it appeared that every possible episode had been gathered.

CHAPTER 3: THE MANIPULATIVE JOURNALIST

Surveys show that most Americans want a free press, but that many Americans have deep suspicions about the perceived power, negativism and arrogance of journalists.¹² Nearly three out of every four Americans said they had a great deal or some confidence in the press in 1990, but in 2000 that fell to 58 percent.¹³ Those statistics are reflected in the image of the media projected in episodes of *Law & Order*. And perhaps these episodes have influenced those statistics in turn.

One of the most powerful images in *Law & Order* is of the manipulative journalist. This person constantly lies and cheats his or her way through the episode, only to be revealed to the viewer as a scoundrel in the end. Many of the officers feel helpless in prosecuting or revealing a bad journalist to the public. While some reporters are vigilant in revealing the mistakes and problems inherent in the justice system, few of the officers in the *Law & Order* series have the time or means to reveal a bad journalist to the public. Few journalists recant their mistakes. Not one episode of any *Law & Order* series showed a journalist running or contemplating a correction. The power seems to lie with the reporter in many cases.

In *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Pravda,” originally aired on Oct. 26, 2003, a star reporter named Carl Hines (Anthony Mackie) is on the edge of a great

¹² Loren Ghiglione and Joe Saltzman, “Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News,” *www.ijpc.org*, 2002, 7, 21.

¹³ Carroll Doherty, “The Public Isn’t Buying Press Credibility,” *Nieman Reports*, Cambridge, 2005, 47.

story when his girlfriend is murdered. When detectives investigate and find his alibi shaky, they also uncover a long history of plagiarism going back to his high school paper.¹⁴ While he denies any wrongdoing, and his high-powered editor tries to cover for him, the articles that detectives uncover tell the real story. “What’s the big deal about plagiarism?” Hines asks detectives. “You plagiarize and you can become a senator. I plagiarize and I get a book deal.”

This episode also outlines an interesting dynamic between an editor and reporter. Editors in early cinema were basically good guys who were just trying to put out the best paper they could with drunken reporters and money-crazed publishers.¹⁵ While the reporters haven’t gotten much better, the image of the editor seems to have melded together with that of the publisher in the *Law & Order* series. Editors in the series are largely interested in money and deadlines and most are manipulative with their reporters. Most of them are circulation-hungry and few are loyal or protective of their reporters. These were, historically, the images of a publisher, but the portrayal seems to have shifted over time.

Journalists in the *Law & Order* franchise make a handy bad guy, an adversary for the cops in the legal system. While Jayson Blair may figure

¹⁴ When the *New York Times* exposed the plagiarism and fake reporting of staff writer Jayson Blair, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* was the first show to produce a fictionalized portrayal for television. Further investigation into Blair’s stories led to the resignation of editor Howell Raines and managing editor Gerald Boyd in March of 2004. While *Law & Order’s* take on the story captured the impact of plagiarism, the television version led to a murder and little public outcry. It captures a misleading view of the ethical problems of plagiarism. From Allison Romano, “Crime pays, again and again,” *Broadcasting & Cable*, 2005, 18.

¹⁵ Saltzman, “Analyzing the Images of the Journalist in Popular Culture,” 84.

prominently in the public's memory, most journalists who work at newspapers and broadcast stations are honest and receive ethical and moral guidance from editors.¹⁶ Neither Wolf's writers, nor the public, seem to understand this dichotomy. This is reflected in one study that said 58 percent of Americans in 2003 believed that news organizations make up news at least occasionally.¹⁷ Of all the representations of journalism in *Law & Order*, manipulative journalists figure most prominently in number and in storyline. Some are even murderers.

In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: "Scavenger," originally aired on Oct. 19, 2004, a lonely newspaper morgue worker¹⁸ named Humphrey Becker (Doug Hutchison) starts out as a polite representative of the paper. He visits former victims of a famous serial killer when a copycat seems to arise. Becker appears to be trustworthy when he works a story on spec. He turns out to be a copycat killer. Lying in wait outside a showroom to catch his next victim, he poses as a reporter on a story. And as detectives search his home they find rejection letters from publishers on his walls. Detectives soon find out that he began a new crime spree to get a book deal on the original killer.

War correspondent Frank Elliott (Nick Chinlund), a character in *Law & Order*: "Embedded," originally aired on Nov. 19, 2003, demonstrates the most despicable actions in wartime America. While embedded with an infantry unit in the

¹⁶ Doherty, "The Public Isn't Buying Press Credibility," 47.

¹⁷ Doherty, "The Public Isn't Buying Press Credibility," 47.

¹⁸ A newspaper morgue is a room containing reference files of older material or a place where older copies of the newspaper are kept.

Gulf during a war maneuver, he draws a map of their movements on camera and broadcasts it across the world. When he gets shot, a soldier says he did it. “People are dying and these reporters only care about their ratings,” the soldier says. And the audience sees the soldier as the good guy.

Based on the actions of reporter Geraldo Rivera, who broadcast troop movements from Iraq, the plot takes on special significance. Rivera’s transgression is still fresh in the public’s mind. There is no question that the public were appalled and dismayed by his actions, easily dismissing him as a “tabloid reactionary” in calls to Larry King after the incident. The *Law & Order* episode puts a new spin on it.

Elliott, who gets threats every day from “people whose lives he’s ruined,” causes a media frenzy when he goes to court. The judge even tells him to knock off the media antics. When the prosecutor and detectives question his motives – they eventually find out that he shot himself for the media attention – he reaffirms his manipulating character for the viewer.

“What do they say?” Elliott asks. “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story? I don’t.”

In the early generation of film, the war correspondent was an undisputed hero.¹⁹ Popular actors used to play the coveted roles of these “crime stoppers.” Chinlund is certainly not a big-name actor and his part is neither flattering nor patriotic. Elliott’s character is a deviation from the old stereotype of newspaper

¹⁹ Joe Saltzman, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2002), 77.

films,²⁰ but consistent with the image of the journalist in *Law & Order* as a manipulator.

While these print reporters are pretty despicable, broadcast reporters are the worst of the bunch. When an Iowa teen disappears in *Law & Order: Criminal Intent: "In the Wee Small Hours,"* originally aired on Nov. 6, 2005, a feisty broadcast reporter in her late 20s wears an expensive wardrobe, cakes on her makeup and does her best to stir up trouble. In her first scene on camera, the reporter launches into an opinionated diatribe about the status of the case – the viewer sees no evidence that this is an editorial, a definite breach of ethical conduct for a real-life journalist.²¹

When the reporter shows up at one grieving mother's door, the woman stops her. "I know how it is with you people. If she's white, put her in the spotlight, if she's black, put her in the back," the mother says. "I'll take your interest now any way it comes but do not confuse my desperation with gratitude." The reporter walks in and sets up shop. This situation is common in real national broadcasts where minorities often receive less coverage.²²

When police identify an area to search for the victim's body, the reporter is on the scene, waiting in a limo for something to happen. While cameras and reporters line up next to the scene as cops search for the body, her assistant stands on

²⁰ Alex Barris, *Stop the Presses! The Newspaperman in American Films* (A.S. Barnes & Co., South Brunswick and New York, 1976), 15.

²¹ Kathryn Smoot Egan, "Applying Paul Ricoeur's Spiral of Mimesis for Authenticity as a Moral Standard," *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, 2004, 158.

²² Danielle M. Soulliere, "Prime-Time Crime: Presentations of crime and its participants on popular television justice programs," *Journal of Crime & Justice*, 2003, 47.

top of her limo and shouts updates while the reporter does her nails. The grieving mother sits next to her, clutching her daughter's old sweater. When the assistant finally yells down, "they found her" the reporter bolts from the limo and scrambles to put on her makeup while the mother sits crying in the parked limo.

While some journalists in *Law & Order* start out as honest, enterprising reporters, they often revert to the audience's expectations at the end of the episode: they betray someone's trust or disappoint other characters. In *Law & Order: "Deep Vote,"* originally aired on May 23, 2001, the district attorney can't break through a case. He goes to an investigative reporter to try to get her to reveal her source. She argues her ethical standpoint, sure, but eventually reveals her source (a high-powered political assistant) and forces him onto the stand. There is no evidence that she would go to jail for this source or follow her obligations further than some quiet tears.

A common thread running through the *Law & Order* shows is a "buddy" journalist. He or she gets close to the cops and either becomes a romantic interest or a trusted and close friend. But in the end he or she turns into an enemy, reverting back to viewer expectations.

The "buddy" journalists usually end up as manipulative as their more outwardly mean counterparts. These journalists are usually male, in their 30s, with messy home lives – divorce, awful parents, mean siblings, alcoholism and wrecked romantic relationships – that lead them to the precinct as they seek a pseudo family. (In early cinema, these journalists would make their dysfunctional pseudo families in the newsroom.) At the beginning of the episode, however, they seem like good

enough folks – the kind you would have a cup of coffee with. Over the course of the episode the journalist character evolves into a sneaky controller who isn't interested in anyone's well being – he just wants the story.

In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Contact,” originally aired on April 28, 2000, Benson is on a subway rape case when reporter Nick Ganzner (Tom McCarthy) from the *New York Post* walks into the story. An affable fellow, Ganzner arrives at the scene of the crime when the detectives walk by and ask, “Who are you?” he shoots them a friendly wave that softens his unshaven, tired look. “Nick Ganzner,” he says, “we’re all working together to get this guy.” Munch replies: “Yeah sure” and continues talking to the other officers.

When Benson returns to the station after a second attack, Ganzner is waiting there for her. He doesn't even wait for her to look up before asking her about this new crime. “Missed you, too,” says Benson. When she says it's already on the record, he asks for “deep background.” Benson says that the arrest looks promising and seems to trust him. Two minutes later, she boldly asks him out on a date.

Their date is going well until the reporter suddenly says, “So this subway rapist.” She stops him to say, “Whoa Nick are we flirting or are we working?” “We’re always working,” he says. He doesn't give up on the question though and continues to press her about the story. They end up back at her apartment and are

kissing when he suddenly vocalizes his fantasy of being the rapist on the subway.²³ She pushes him away and tells him to leave before she flees the room in fear and disgust. Using the opportunity to pry through her things, he finds the subway rapist case files and steals them. When Benson gets back to the squad room, her captain chides her: “Never turn your back on a reporter!” Not only does the viewer feel betrayed by the journalists actions, they are led to believe that he is the rapist.

²³ This is one of many references in all the *Law & Order* episodes to journalists who have criminal or deviant tendencies. Ganzner’s rape fantasy is only slightly more benign than the journalists who murder and steal for their stories.

CHAPTER 4: THE ANONYMOUS JOURNALIST

Anonymous pack reporters provide the most numerous examples of journalism in the Law & Order series. More brazen and bold when they are anonymous, these journalists provide chaos, confusion and pressure in the plot. Writers use this roving pack of cameras and microphones (with nameless reporters roaming behind them) as a plot tool. Cops in the show often express their fear that “the media will get hold of the story,” and they’re referring to anonymous journalists.

While it would be nearly impossible to outline every single appearance or reference to anonymous or pack journalists – there are literally thousands – some examples provide context for the perception of the profession. While journalists were often starring characters doing a noble profession in the early films of the '40s and '50s, contemporary images are usually anonymous representations.²⁴ In the last two decades of the 20th century, the journalists most people remember are the anonymous ones, played by unnamed actors, who chase the story and invade everyone’s privacy in the process.²⁵ These are usually broadcast journalists, whom the public has more contact with during a lifetime than print reporters. Broadcast reporters are the easiest to spot on the scene of any newsworthy event, and therefore they are the ones that the public feels most familiar with. The celebrity tabloids with hordes of paparazzi photos are also selling more copies than ever. The public is becoming familiar with

²⁴ Matthew Ehrlich, *Journalism in the Movies* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1998), 13.

²⁵ Saltzman, “Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist,” 40.

the roving packs of photographers that take these pictures. Now the journalists in *Law & Order* are taking on similar, anonymous, and not-so-heroic characteristics.

In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Obscene,” originally aired on Oct. 12, 2004, the detectives are investigating the rape of a television star named Jessie Dawning (Maggie Grace). Someone took near-naked pictures of her, unconscious after a sexual assault. At Dawning’s house the cops ask if she knows who took the photos. “Probably the losers who are camping outside our house right now,” she says, indicating the paparazzi outside the front door. The star shows the officers the tabloids with headlines, “Bloody Dawning” and “Girl Undercover: A Real Life Drama.”

Viewers find out exactly how anonymous and vindictive these journalists are when the cops ask if she knows any of these photographers’ names. “There’s like a million of them, I can’t sneeze without it ending up in the tabloids,” she says. “Jessie walks her dog. Jessie buys a tampon.” She tells the cops that a couple of weeks ago she picked up her car from the valet and one of the photographers jumped into her car. She says she thought he was a carjacker but he took her picture instead and jumped out of the car. The star expresses disgust that she can’t press charges for it. What viewer wouldn’t sympathize when they see these exact same situations happen in the real Hollywood, to real stars, with real paparazzi?

A police officer expresses revulsion with pack journalists in *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “In the Wee Small Hours.” He watches a broadcast report and flicks

off the TV angrily. “Smell rotting meat in the air?” he says. “That’s the vultures gathering.”

Anonymous journalists who wave cameras, pencils and notepads often chase characters through the streets or through the halls of the courthouse. They yell incoherent things and confuse the “good guy” while making the case easier for the “bad guy.” One such example is the press in *Law & Order: “Paradigm,”* originally aired on Sept. 22, 2004. In one scene, when the case is moving out of the courthouse, the press is waiting for the verdict. Most of the reporters are young – between 20 and 35 – and most are broadcast reporters that either have a cameraperson in tow or are holding a camera themselves. They rush up the steps when the attorneys come out of the courthouse. They scream questions at the district attorney as he tries to make his way through. At one point, the attorney can’t move any farther down the steps.

In another scene, the district attorney holds a press conference with hundreds of people. Cameras make noisy clicks and flashbulbs go off constantly. What is particularly notable about this scene is that the reporters are not taking notes. Many of them nod repeatedly, taking in the district attorney’s comments with quick acceptance. When the conference ends, these reporters ask leading questions. “Are you doing God’s work here?” one reporter asks. After his answer, he’s mobbed with

cameras and the chaos makes it difficult for him to get off stage.²⁶ Not one reporter is mentioned by name or identified later in the story.

This negative portrayal of anonymous journalists raises important ethical questions about the press and its role in reporting crime.²⁷ Many scholars argue that these fictional and aggressive portrayals foster myths about journalism that distort public understanding.²⁸ With so many negative portrayals of these reporters, it would be difficult for the public not to think negatively about the nomadic packs of cameras and nameless notepads. With 10 to 20 percent drops in print readership at The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times and The New York Times in the last decade, television images of the media may be seeping through more than the industry realizes. With more cuts in newsrooms across the country, the pressure on the remaining editorial staff is increasing. With less money to do the same amount of editorial, the quality of the reporting is bound to decline, leaving the public with the same negative images they see on television. Declining journalistic quality may be a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it chases away readers, subsequently chases away the advertising and subscription dollars, thus leaving fewer reporters with less time to cover the same amount of stories.

²⁶ This is one of the few decipherable questions that an anonymous reporter asks in any *Law & Order* episode over 16 years. The questions are usually shouted, muffled by camera clicks or just drowned out by other anonymous journalists.

²⁷ Brooks Robards, "Newshounds and Sob Sisters," *Beyond the Stars: Stock Characters in American Popular Film* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio, 1990), 20.

²⁸ Loren Ghiglione, "The American Journalist: Paradox of the Press," (Library of Congress, Washington D.C.1990), 10.

The reporters' questions – type, tone and frequency – are also particularly notable in the series. In *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: “Vigilante,” originally aired on March 11, 2005, the questions aren't softballs. These anonymous journalists, who figure prominently but never reveal their names, are intimidating and ready to convict the defendant upon his arrest. After his lawyer warns him not to comment to the throng outside, the accused man is led out to a screaming bank of reporters and cameras. The reporters intermingle with citizens who believe he is guilty, so we get the effect of a lynch mob. One reporter with greasy, slicked-back hair, whose microphone says he is from Channel 1, asks the man, “You killed Lyle Joins, right?” with a stern tone. Even after the accused man is safely secured in the back of a police car, the reporters continue to bother him through the car windows.

Another problem with anonymous journalists in *Law & Order* is that they never seem particularly interested in what officials have to say. In *Law & Order*, when the officials are the “good guys,” viewers see journalists as their nemesis. In *Law & Order: Trial By Jury*: “41 Shots,” originally aired on March 4, 2005, the viewer never sees the family of a dead police officer speak to the press. The only comments made are in front of the camera by a publicity-happy defendant who shot a cop.

These anonymous representations of the journalist are the public's rejection of the reporter as a hero,²⁹ according to Joe Saltzman, the director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture and professor of journalism at the Annenberg School

²⁹ Saltzman, “Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist,” 78.

for Communication at the University of Southern California. In the new image, these formerly witty characters are the ones chasing the popular actors – the ones viewers always cheer for. The public concludes that laws should be passed to stop reporters from harassing the innocent person played by their favorite movie star.³⁰ Anonymous journalists hardly ever induce feelings of trust or ethical conduct. The question is whether the art is reflecting life or whether life is reflecting art. Evidence of both is presented in various industry and academic appraisals, so neither is as clearly cut as the industry, or the public, would probably prefer.³¹

³⁰ Saltzman, “Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist,” 15.

³¹ Doherty, “Public Isn’t Buying Press Credibility,” 47.

CHAPTER 5: THE MEDIA PERFORMANCE

It is easy to identify the origin of anonymous journalists and manipulative journalists – the real-life examples of celebrity journalism, paparazzi and scandals from the likes of Jayson Blair are enough. But journalists in *Law & Order* are also easily manipulated. Lawyers and defendants in the franchise use the media to orchestrate their elaborate publicity schemes and manipulate the media into a circus for their own benefit. The media are particularly easy to manipulate in *Law & Order* because they are portrayed as dumber and less savvy than other characters.

In *Law & Order*: “Suicide Box,” originally aired on March 26, 2003, one lawyer chides the district attorney for grandstanding inside the courthouse. “No cameras here, Carl,” says one prosecutor, “no need to waste the sound bite.” The sound bite and the media circus both figure prominently in many episodes: the journalist is manipulated by other characters into providing free publicity.

Earlier images of the journalist portrayed him or her as a suspicious, investigative sneak. In the early days of film, the reporter smoke and drank at his desk, womanized and outsmarted the cops.³² In the last 20 years, the journalist has been duped. He or she follows the pack and reports on whatever the criminal tells them. (Usually in bold tabloid headlines.) Journalists are nearly treated as publicists – the kind of person that will put out any story that is fed to them.

³² Richard R. Ness, *From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography* (The Scarecrow Press, New Jersey and London, 1997), 39.

In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Obscene,” a radio shock jock named B.J. Cameron (Lewis Black) lands in the hot seat for the obscene content that he broadcasts. The young son of an activist rapes a movie star after he hears Cameron encourage it on the radio. The court finds the boy guilty and Cameron not liable. When Cameron goes outside the courthouse after the verdict to express his pleasure with the results, cameras swarm him but leave the cops alone. “He wants a sound bite on the 6 o’clock news,” Stabler says. “His ratings go up and the idiot’s loving life.” As every *Law & Order* series and episode is essentially about the police officers and detectives, the episodes are especially focused on the media performances that affect their case. When Cameron makes his statement, he leaves the cops without a voice, and looking out of the loop.

When a character is able to stir up the media undeservedly, the show portrays it as an obstacle to justice.³³ *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “In the Wee Small Hours” showcases the press chaos surrounding a missing white teen.³⁴ But another mother, whose daughter Tiana went missing in similar circumstances, expresses her disgust that she couldn’t stir up a similar media frenzy. “Of course you’re looking for the white girl,” the black mother tells a broadcast reporter at her door. “I called the newspaper, radio and TV when Tiana went missing. They wouldn’t give me one minute for her.”

³³ Soulliere, “Prime-Time Crime,” 47.

³⁴ Kinney Littlefield, “Behind the scenes of *Law & Order*,” *The Writer* (Boston, 2005), 18.

Sometimes the viewer can be frustrated by the media's inability to see through obvious publicity stunts.³⁵ One of the most despicable cases is that of an out-of-work actor who plays the media in order to advance his career after his girlfriend is shot. In one scene, the actor sits by a street-side tribute to his girlfriend. While the cameramen sit silently, some with tears in their eyes, the actor reads poems to the broadcast cameras. Then we switch the cops' perspective as they turn on a live news broadcast of this poem reading. They can see the actor's best friend directing him from behind the row of cameramen, telling him to center himself in front of the flowers to get the best shot. In the end, the viewer finds out that this boyfriend was actually responsible for the woman's death.³⁶

One of the best examples of an individual able to manipulate the press is showcased in *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: "Abominable Showman," originally aired on March 3, 2005. On his way to court to face charges of murder, the high-profile defendant rides with his lawyer. When they approach the courthouse, reporters and cameras swarm the car. "That bitch, we agreed absolutely no press," the lawyer says. But the defendant is nonchalant. "She didn't call them," the defendant says. "I did." The defendant strides confidently up to the dozens of cameras and microphones and

³⁵ Soulliere, "Prime-time crime," 47.

³⁶ Journalism has deviated sharply from its very first beginnings, which contradicted this involved view of the reporter. From 370 BC to 285 BC, Theophrastus provided an uninvolved, contextual image of the reporter. "He listened and watched, and copied down words and deeds without trying to analyze them or put them into a larger context," Saltzman writes. Of course this image of the reporter has changed drastically, but the uninvolved observer is rarely depicted in these chaotic anonymous *Law & Order* portrayals of the media.

gives them a peace sign. They broadcast this image with no comment from officials or experts on the case.

The defendant doesn't stop there. He tells his lawyer to call *Vanity Fair* to arrange a flattering article about him. The lawyer objects and says that maybe, since he is guilty, they should be keeping a low profile. "Shut up," the defendant says. "It's called news management. You call Dominick Dunne³⁷ and invite him to dinner at Alain Ducasse.³⁸ I know how to control the press." Then he fires his lawyer.

³⁷ Dominick Dunne is a columnist for *Vanity Fair* and known for his hobnobbing with the rich and famous. He often writes about high society and Hollywood.

³⁸ Alain Ducasse is a posh French restaurant located at the Essex House Hotel in New York City's Central Park.

CHAPTER 6: THE SCREAMING HEADLINES

As in the early years of film, newspaper headlines often serve as informative plot builders in *Law & Order*. They keep the viewer up-to-date on the storyline and serve as a primary source of information for the characters and the viewers alike.³⁹ But these headlines are also screaming exclamations. They can emphasize the reactionary elements of the press, spelling out only the most gory, bleeding leads. In *Law & Order*'s New York City, if it bleeds, it definitely leads.

In *Law & Order: "Sanctuary,"* originally aired on April 13, 1994, the DA is always reading the newspaper. The viewer rarely sees him talking to any of his constituents, but he constantly reads the headlines to gauge the public's perception of a particular case. After a deadly riot, he holds a paper that screams: "This City Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet."

Usually these screaming headlines are negative. In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit: "Obscene,"* Tutuola holds out a newspaper. The victim's boyfriend grimaces and says that they'll print anything with a short skirt. At the end of the episode, a huge, bold-faced headline in all caps says, "PAYBACK!"

In *Law & Order: Criminal Intent: "Maledictus,"* originally aired on April 21, 2002, the chief asks Goran and Eames if they've read today's *Ledger*. "Since when do we pay attention to bad press?" Goran shoots back. The viewer can't see the headline but it is large. An unnamed source is quoted in the story and the detectives express their disgust at this source's manipulation of the press.

³⁹ Saltzman, "Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist," 82.

Screaming headlines are at the center of the storyline in *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: “41 Shots.” When the defense attorney walks into the hospital to see his client, he waves a stack of tabloids with big headlines. “Your press!” he exclaims to the defendant. “It’s all good.” The *New York Ledger* headline is “BACK FROM THE BRINK” with a picture of the beaten defendant being wheeled out of an ambulance. The lawyer says the headlines might be “enough to save your ass.” In a move to manipulate his image, the defendant also gets married while still in the hospital. “Indicted Bliss,” reads the headline in the papers the next day.

Another *New York Ledger* makes a bold statement with the headline “Pedophile Executed on Playground” after a convicted child molester is murdered. The DA waves the paper around, trying to emphasize that the papers “want street justice” with their headlines and coverage. “They’ve canonized the man that murdered him,” he says.

The press is perceived as the primary source of information, however reactionary its headlines are. “We all know this guy is a sociopath,” one attorney says to a crowded courtroom in *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: “Abominable Showman.” “I mean, come on, we all saw that article in *Vanity Fair*.” Even with all the negative headlines, the cops in *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “The Pilgrim,” originally aired on Nov. 17, 2002, trust the media to help them capture a suspected terrorist when they release the story. “If we release the pictures,” says the chief, “we are guaranteed to catch these guys.”

The perception is that the press, and its headlines, is extremely powerful. But the power of the press is often manipulated for the sake of despicable people.

One of the biggest issues with representations of any group in the Law & Order series is that Wolf designed the franchise with the tagline, “Ripped from the headlines!” Many of the series’ most moving and popular episodes are offshoots of actual events, fictionalized just enough to prevent a lawsuit but familiar enough to the viewer to be interesting. This truth as television approach was one of the main reasons Law & Order became a popular primetime draw. When the episodes are styled to feel like true stories, the public undoubtedly perceives (consciously or subconsciously) that the story is more true to form than if a show is presented as pure fiction.

But what is “ripped from the headlines” for the series, is not entirely true in the real world. In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* “Goliath”, originally aired on May 24, 2005, the wife of a police officer claims that her husband raped her. When another officer murders his wife and attempts suicide the same day, the detectives begin to suspect that a drug called Quinium that each officer was given on their recent tour of duty in Afghanistan may have effected them physically. With the help of a reporter named Sherm Hempell, the officers investigate the drug, the company that made it and the implications on the armed forces.

Mark Benjamin saw the same story on television the night it aired on May 24. He recognized it well because he had done the three years of reporting and investigation to unveil it when it happened in real life to soldiers who took anti-

malaria drug Lariam. Benjamin quickly wrote a feature on Salon about the show saying that he was incensed by the episode.

Benjamin said that he was initially angry about the episode not because he received no monetary compensation for a portrayal of years of his hard investigation, but because the story played loose with the facts. In reality, three Fort Bragg soldiers who came back from Afghanistan in 2002 murdered their wives and killed themselves. Benjamin and his partner at UPI, Dan Olmsted, obtained 1,500 pages of internal drug company documents that suggested that the drugs these soldiers were taking to prevent malaria may be causing this madness. In the *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* episode, the soldier who threatens suicide on his front lawn is eerily similar to the real standoff of one Special Forces soldier on his front lawn in Colorado Springs. The television officer lives. The real-life officer succeeded in killing himself. The episode cited studies that said one in 10,000 people had problems on the drug. Benjamin said that real figure from a British study put that number at one in 140. None of the real officers ever raped anyone, but the episode made that a center point of the story.

But Benjamin said he could get past these manipulations of the facts since they were trying to tell a general story. What he couldn't get past? The reporter in the episode was portrayed as a "bottom-dwelling catfish, at best." The episode comes across Hempell as he's picking through the trash and he cares little about helping the cops. He's after his scoop. At one point, when the reporter won't cooperate, Stabler yells "Call me when you get a conscience!"

“Do you know how many times I tried to get cops interested in this stuff?” Benjamin wrote on Salon. “Can you possibly imagine how much a reporter would like to cooperate with a district attorney who wants to go through the Army’s underwear drawers?”

At least the reporter eventually has a slight change of heart. He decides to cooperate and the episode shows that he’s way ahead of the game. But where Law & Order failed in their portrayal of this journalist is that they have him handing over all his files to the cops. A reporter would never do that, Benjamin says.

“The reporter’s comment when he does [hand the files over] gave me the chills: ‘Now go see how far the rabbit hole goes, as they say,’” Benjamin wrote. “Every investigative reporter wonders that about his story, every story – if there’s an end, and how far it can lead. In that fleeting moment, even the wretch seemed realistic.” How’s that for “ripped from the headlines”?

CHAPTER 7: THE JOURNALIST AS CELEBRITY

An interesting image in *Law & Order* is that of the journalist as celebrity. Some reporters are revered by their own industry or have such diva-like demands that they end up being perceived more as actors than as professional journalists. Some of the journalists in the series are regular members of high society.

A publisher character in *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Sex Club,” originally aired on Feb. 2, 2005, is a Hugh Hefner figure.⁴⁰ His magazine comes second to the “honeys” constantly on his arm. He talks about the “good ol’ days” when he made great money and had sex all the time. During an auction of memorabilia, he sells his private diaries to finance his Hollywood-style life. “The ’80s are all a fantastic blur to me,” he says as he motions to his girlfriends. “Come on honeys. P. Diddy⁴¹ can’t start his party without us.”

In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Scavenger,” the reporter is a focal point of the plot. He is snide and carries lots of baggage with family problems and a mother who mentally abused him. “Think you’re smart enough to get it out of me?” he asks the interrogating detective. “It’s not about the money. It’s about proving them wrong and becoming famous.” His mother (Anne Meara) even named him Humphrey, after the legendary Bogart. This reporter expects his journalism to make

⁴⁰ Hugh Hefner is the outspoken founder and editor-in-chief of *Playboy* magazine. He was a spokesman for the sexual revolution in the 1970s and is still open about his sexual practices with many women.

⁴¹ P. Diddy is a hip-hop musician known for his parties and late-night activities in Hollywood and New York.

him famous. “He was going to be a reporter just like Bogey in his final film *The Harder They Fall*,” Humphrey’s mother says.

A retired reporter named Morty Graf (Madison Arnold) in the same episode revels in the wealth of his journalistic celebrity. He relishes cigars, fine alcohol, perfect surroundings and women at the Coronado Cigar Club & Lounge when the cops meet with him. The smoke-filled club exudes opulence and all-white members wearing sports jackets. He says it’s “always been his club.”

CHAPTER 8: DEFINING JOURNALISTIC ETHICS & TRADITIONS

While there is so much negativity toward journalism in *Law & Order*, there is also a bright side to the image of the journalist. Sometimes these journalists uphold, or question, the traditions and ethics of the journalism profession. This seems to be a healthy discussion, one that helps the viewer decipher the rules of journalism and the pitfalls that some journalists encounter.

Kate Pierce (Kate Jennings Grant) is a young, attractive investigative reporter with the *Manhattan Weekly* in *Law & Order*: “Deep Vote.” She works in an office on the outskirts of a busy newsroom murmur with a mess of papers on her desk and her best clips on the walls. When the detectives ask if “she has pissed anyone off lately,” she replies, “If I’m doing my job right, yeah.” She explains the overarching principles of her story to detectives but can’t add some details about her source because she promised him anonymity. Viewers are able to understand the ethical framework of journalism through her good example. “I’m not a hero,” she explains to the prosecuting attorney. “When you take a job like this it comes with certain risks. Things a journalist has to put above her own safety. If I told you what you wanted to know I would be revealing information I have no right to reveal. I can’t do that.” The judge affirms the reporter’s responsibilities when the attorney asks for the source’s name. “You’re asking me to force a reporter to reveal a source?” the judge

scoffs. The reporter seems to understand the attorney's needs but reiterates, "I talked to this person and they don't want their name revealed and I won't betray that."

The most in-depth discussion of journalistic ethics and traditions happens in *Law & Order: "Embedded."* War correspondent Frank Elliott (Nick Chinlund) is accused of endangering U.S. troops in Iraq by reporting on their movements. Three soldiers were killed when Elliott broadcast their location. He is shot in the back when he returns home and investigators believe a soldier did it. Elliott fights for his rights to report on whatever he chooses but he is unlikable and obnoxious both in and out of court.

Elliott's editor says that he is a "good reporter, just controversial," but no one seems to like him. Still, he seems to have very honorable journalistic intentions. "The military doesn't make the rules for the press in war," Elliott says. "The press should not be subject to prior restraint." He expresses some remorse for the dead soldiers but is adamant that his reporting will reveal a "fictitious war."

Elliott says he would do the same thing again because "it's not only my job, it's the right thing to do." He's not likeable when he's bucking journalistic ethics in cases like this, but he continues to spout his own version of the ethical standards for the industry: "If the reporter isn't honest and open then what purpose does the media serve?" This could have two effects. It could either inform the viewer about the guidelines that journalists work with, or it could make the viewer despise the message because of the reporter spouts it.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

While many other television shows and films bring journalists to the screen, the power of Dick Wolf's franchise lies in its immense popularity. Only *The Simpsons* attracts more prime-time viewers than *Law & Order*.⁴² Few television shows rip stories from the headlines as well as this franchise does – and *Law & Order* even brags about it in teasers and commercials.

The image of the journalist in all *Law & Order* shows is overwhelmingly negative. Manipulative journalists abuse the power of the press and rarely repent their sins. Anonymous journalists take over any scene with hordes of cameras, microphones and chaos. The easy manipulation of media – tricking the press into reporting untruths or falling for publicity stunts – is common in these episodes. Sometimes the journalist even shows up as an egotistical celebrity with lots of money and few qualms about his past. And *Law & Order* portrays standards of ethical journalism in some episodes.

These images seem to struggle with depicting the real life of a journalist – the long hours of research and phone calls, the dull writing process, the analyzing of complicated stories and the always impending deadline.⁴³ The viewer often doesn't get a true view of the tedious part of the job. And this may be the most important image to project for the industry – if the public knew the work that went into a story they might be more interested in the process of the story rather than the mistakes

⁴² TV.com, "Law & Order," 1.

⁴³ Saltzman, "Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist," 46.

reported. But the television industry has little motivation or even ethical guidelines to change the way it portrays journalists.⁴⁴ These images merely reaffirm the public's perceptions.

The public doesn't care whether these images of the journalist are factual or fictional representations because the power of television is much stronger than the real experiences of practicing journalists. And when these images are "ripped from the headlines" and placed on the screen, there is little effort to decipher their truth.

⁴⁴ Mary Ann Watson, "Ethics in Entertainment Television," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* (Washington, 2004), 146.

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APPENDIX: SELECTED EPISODE GLOSSARY

Law & Order

Feb. 5, 1991, *Law & Order*: “Violence of Summer,” (Season 1, Episode 14)
A TV Reporter, young and prominent, is gang-raped, but Stone and Robinette are backed up against the wall when there’s not enough evidence to prosecute.

Sept. 15, 1993, *Law & Order*: “Sweeps,” (Season 4, Episode 1)
Talk show host’s guest is murdered on-air on a controversial show. Police and district attorney attempt to prosecute the show’s abrasive host Rick Mason (Robert Klein).

April 13, 1994, *Law & Order*: “Sanctuary,” (Season 4, Episode 19)
News media cover racial riots resulting from a Jewish motorist accidentally running down a black youth.

Feb. 15, 1995, *Law & Order*: “Seed,” (Season 5, Episode 15)
Tabloids investigate a fertility doctor guilty of unethical practices.

Nov. 1, 1995, *Law & Order*: “Jeopardy,” (Season 6, Episode 4)
Magazine editor feuds with brother. Three murders at the offices of a small magazine uncover bitter feud between brothers, whose mother is determined to protect her remaining son and the family business.

May 1, 1996, *Law & Order*: “Girlfriends,” (Season 6, Episode 20)
When a college coed’s body is found the detectives have to deal with intense media interest and anonymous journalists crowding them outside the courtroom.

Oct. 2, 1996, *Law & Order*: “Good Girl,” (Season 7, Episode 3)
Headlines flash as the detectives try to uncover the murderer of a young black man.

May 7, 1997, *Law & Order*: “Passion,” (Season 7, Episode 21)
Editor’s death points to a scorned girlfriend but might be a cover-up. McCoy and Ross sort it out.

Jan. 28, 1998, *Law & Order*: “Castoff,” (Season 8, Episode 13)
TV sportscaster killed. Killer uses exposure to TV violence as a defense.

May 12, 1998, *Law & Order*: “Tabloid,” (Season 8, Episode 23)
Gossip columnist Arlen Levitt (John Slattery) is blamed for his wife’s death by a prominent man. Tabloid journalism comes under scrutiny during a murder case.

April 14, 1999, *Law & Order*: “Juvenile,” (Season 9, Episode 18)
Investigation into the shooting of a newspaper columnist leads to a murder case from two decades earlier. Reporter #1 (Mari-Esther Magaloni). Reporter #2 (Adam C. Vignola).

May 16, 2001, *Law & Order*: “School Daze,” (Season 11, Episode 22)
News media swarms around a school shooting.

May 23, 2001, *Law & Order*: “Deep Vote,” (Season 11, Episode 24)
Investigative reporter (Kate Jennings Grant) has dug up evidence that the election of a state senator has been fixed, but she refuses to reveal her sources. Outcome hinges upon a possible mob connection and a cache of 2,000 stolen ballots. Woman is killed leading police to discover actual target was the reporter who did story about improprieties in recent election for state senator. Reporter won't reveal her sources for story that contains allegations that the vote was fixed and ballots tampered with, even though the reporter's life is at risk. Without the source, the prosecutors have difficult time making a case against the senator. Prosecutors believe senator has ties to the mob and ordered the hit on the reporter. Case hinges on 2,000 missing ballots from the vote stolen by the mob. Once ballots are found, big court battle about whether they should be counted. Prosecutors eventually convince the reporter to reveal her source and have the source testify against the senator.

Dec. 12, 2001, *Law & Order*: “Prejudice,” (Season 12, Episode 10)
African-American magazine publisher is murdered. Detectives try to reconstruct argument he had with a man over a taxi.

Oct. 16, 2002, *Law & Order*: “True Crime,” (Season 13, Episode 3)
Reporters and media are interested in the overdose of a rock star and her possible murder.

Nov. 27, 2002, *Law & Order*: “Asterisk,” (Season 13, Episode 8)
A star baseball player becomes the prime suspect in the murder of his limousine driver. Press conferences and press clippings throughout the episode.

March 26, 2003, *Law & Order*: “Suicide Box,” (Season 13, Episode 16)
A media-savvy attorney defends a black teenager accused of shooting an off-duty police officer.

Oct. 1, 2003, *Law & Order*: “Bounty,” (Season 14, Episode 2)

African-American reporter Brian Kellogg (Reuben Jackson) recently interviewed fugitive and won't reveal his source. Turns out he faked original story and killed the man himself blaming it on a bounty hunter. Defense based on affirmative-action pressures.

Oct. 29, 2003, *Law & Order*: “Blaze,” (Season 14, Episode 5)

During a rock concert, a fire kills 23 people. Detectives search for reasons for accident.

Nov. 19, 2003, *Law & Order*: “Embedded,” (Season 14, Episode 8)

War correspondent Frank Elliott (Nick Chinlund) who reportedly endangered U.S. troops in Iraq gets shot in the back with a military-issue handgun. Obnoxious reporter in and out of court. Reporter accused of causing the deaths of soldiers with whom he was embedded in Iraq by reporting on their troop movements is shot and wounded on the eve of his return to the front. Ballistics report indicates gun belonged to one of the dead soldiers.

Sept. 22, 2004, *Law & Order*: “Paradigm,” (Season 15, Episode 1)

Terms of the Geneva Convention come into play when the sister of a former inmate at Abu Ghraib prison is suspected of murdering a female guard in the Iraq War.

Oct. 27, 2004, *Law & Order*: “Cut,” (Season 15, Episode 6)

Press reports on several instances of malpractice by a conniving plastic surgeon.

Nov. 17, 2004, *Law & Order*: “Cry Wolf,” (Season 15, Episode 8)

News media. Publicity. Radio personality who knows how to fake muggings for publicity, claims to have been shot and almost killed.

Dec. 8, 2004, *Law & Order*: “Fixed,” (Season 15, Episode 11)

Along with the detectives, press uncovers an experimental prison therapy program.

Feb. 9, 2005, *Law & Order*: “Obsession,” (Season 15, Episode 15)

A conservative talk show host is murdered after a sexual harassment scandal.

Feb. 23, 2005, *Law & Order*: “License to Kill,” (Season 15, Episode 17)

Cameras and reporters swarm forest scene of a murder and speculate on the cause as vigilante justice.

April 20, 2004, *Law & Order*: “Publish & Perish,” (Season 15, Episode 21)
Threats of media exposure mentioned several times during the program. The police investigators must tread lightly when they discover links between a powerful police commissioner and the murders of an infamous porn actress and a maverick publisher.

April 20, 2004, *Law & Order*: “Life Line,” (Season 16, Episode 5)
Reporter Teresa Richter is a graduate from Yale and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, a New Yorker fact checker and an aspiring investigative journalist who goes undercover for the Village Weekly to expose a Latino gang. She is murdered while writing a story on spec for the Village Weekly editor on the Latino gang sex trafficking. The editor who sent her to do the story is shocked and chastised by the two detectives investigating the case. The aspiring journalist was murdered while undercover as a prostitute trying to expose the brutal gang practices.

Law & Order: Special Victims Unit

April 28, 2000, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Contact,” (Season 1, Episode 19)
Crime Reporter dates Benson. Detectives investigate a series of sexual attacks happening on subways.

May 5, 2000, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Remorse,” (Season 1, Episode 20)
TV Reporter Sarah Logan (Jennifer Esposito) sexually assaulted by two men months earlier bonds with Munch.

Oct. 4, 2002, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Deception,” (Season 4, Episode 2)
Family portrait painted by kindergartner leads detectives to investigate her mother for child abuse of her teenage stepson. When boy’s father is found murdered, focus of investigation shifts to the boy – and his stepmother goes to great lengths to protect him and prevent detectives from learning the truth.

April 6, 2004, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: “Lowdown,” (Season 5, Episode 20)
Fear of media expose’ plays part in episode.

October 12, 2004, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: "Obscene," (Season 6, Episode 3)

Media. Newspapers. Paparazzi. "I can't sneeze without it ending up in the tabloids," says star of a controversial TV teen show. Son of an outspoken critic becomes the prime suspect when she is raped in her trailer on the set. New York Ledger headline: "Payback" when mother shoots B.J. Cameron, a radio shock jock she blames for her son's rape of the teen show star. Other newspaper and magazine headlines. Turns out mother planned shooting as a publicity stunt for her crusade against Cameron. Jury undecided, mistrial

October 19, 2004, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: "Scavenger," (Season 6, Episode 4)

Newspaper morgue. Serial killer masquerades as reporter at a newspaper. Faced with rejection from his mother and publishers, a homicidal maniac decides to imitate a famous serial killer "RDK." Along with his abductions, he also decides to play a game with detectives leading them on a wild goose chase. When the detectives learn of the imitator's identity, he skips a victim, and abducts the sole survivor of the real RDK's victims. Now the detectives must race against the clock to save her.

March 8, 2005, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: "Pure," (Season 6, Episode 18)

When a teenage girl disappears, a psychic offers his services to the police. Media referred to as "pain in the ass press," by police.

May 24, 2005, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*: "Goliath," (Season 6, Episode 23)

Police officers carry out much-publicized crimes.

Law & Order: Criminal Intent

Sept. 30, 2001, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: "One," (Season 1, Episode 1)
Press covers jewelry heist that leaves behind three bodies.

Nov. 18. 2001, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: "The Pardoner's Tale," (Season 1, Episode 8)

Reporter and his fiancée are murdered in a cold-blooded street killing and this leads to investigation about political bribery.

April 21, 2002, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Maledictus,” (Season 1, Episode 19)

Decapitation of author who is the daughter of a jailed Russian mobster.

Nov. 17, 2002, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “The Pilgrim,” (Season 2, Episode 8)

During search for missing woman, a cell of terrorist suicide bombers is uncovered.

May 18, 2003, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “A Person of Interest,” (Season 2, Episode 23)

Oct. 5, 2003, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Gemini,” (Season 3, Episode 2)
After a schizophrenic commits murder, Goren and Eames must navigate the press, who cover the case incessantly.

Oct. 12, 2003, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “The Gift,” (Season 3, Episode 3)
Press goes crazy over a new cult sect who commits murder.

Oct. 26, 2003, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Pravda,” (Season 3, Episode 5)
Reporter has history of filing false stories. Detectives investigate a murder and a reporter who cannot produce out-of-town expense accounts. Father newspaperman and now teacher ends up being the murderer. Would rather see son dead than a plagiarist.

Sept. 26, 2004, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Semi-Detached,” (Season 4, Episode 1)

Talk show-disc jockey is found dead. It turns out a female fanatic had replaced the controversial DJ's anti-depressant with a placebo.

Feb. 2, 2005, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Sex Club,” (Season 4, Episode 14)
Magazine publisher-editor George Merritt (Peter Bogdanovich) of Privilege Magazine featuring Privilege Honeys (a take-off on Playboy magazine and publisher-founder Hugh Hefner). Auctions off memorabilia. When the new owner, a former Honey, of an infamous playboy's (Peter Bogdanovich) address book is found murdered, detectives suspect a U.S. senatorial candidate, whose infidelity is documented in the book. Man who murders her tries to blackmail U.S. senatorial candidate and his former wife who showed up at a sex club. Wife turns out to be murderer because she wants to keep her past a secret from her daughter.

March 13, 2005, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: “Death Roe,” (Season 4, Episode 15)

Restaurant Critic is beaten to death and a promising chef disappears. Goran and Eames investigate the dead critic's life searching for a clue that will lead them to his murderer.

April 8, 2005, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: "The Unblinking Eye," (Season 4, Episode 21)

News media. Young actor is wounded and his fiancée killed leading detectives to look into a high-tech treasure hunting game called geochaching. The actor and his friend try to pin the killing on the actor's former girlfriend. The actor and his actor friend are guilty.

Nov. 6, 2005, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: "In the Wee Small Hours Part I," (Season 5, Episode 6)

News media frenzy erupts when an Iowa teen disappears during her school trip, and the prime suspect is the son of a powerful judge.

Nov. 6, 2005, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*: "In the Wee Small Hours Part II," (Season 5, Episode 7)

News media frenzy erupts when an Iowa teen disappears during her school trip, and the prime suspect is the son of a powerful judge.

Law & Order: Trial by Jury

March 3, 2005, *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: "Abominable Showman," (Season 1, Episode 1)

Columnist Dominick Dunne of Vanity Fair. Media throughout the legal drama. Broadway producer tried for the death of an aspiring actress uses the media to win public support. He decides to spin the publicity by inviting the Vanity Fair columnist Dunne to dinner at Alain Ducasse and is then surprised when the article turns out to be unfavorable. His lawyer is not. "You may have forgotten that his daughter was murdered by her boyfriend."

March 4, 2005, *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: "41 Shots," (Season 1, Episode 2)

Media throughout the legal drama. Television news coverage used in court to show proper timeline in the police shooting of a suspect.

March 11, 2005, *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: "Vigilante," (Season 1, Episode 3)

Media. Lawyer for a man who is suspected of killing a pedophile uses the media to make her case. Reporter and lawyer try to work out an agreement.

March 18, 2005, *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: “Truth or Consequences,” (Season 1, Episode 4).

After a woman is raped and murdered, the press covers one of her rich assailants.

March 25, 2005, *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*: “Baby Boom,” (Season 1, Episode 5).

Press recaps past cases of shaken baby syndrome.