

## **Frontier Justice: Examining Representations of Modern Rural Policing on Television**

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### **Abstract:**

For much of the twentieth century, crime in rural areas was considered to be similar to urban crime; in turn, police operations in rural jurisdictions followed urban policing policy. In recent years, contemporary rural crime and policing have received more attention in the empirical literature, with broad conclusions leaning toward differentiation of social problems and crime among rural communities, and the social entrenchment of officers into the rural communities they serve. While general knowledge of rural crime and policing has increased, a broader understanding is necessary in light of the relatively informal and isolated nature of rural policing. Thus, not surprisingly, much of the public's knowledge of rural policing comes from the media. Rural crime policy initiatives and the resultant issues/problems that impact the policing of rural crime have received increased attention in television show productions in recent years. The present paper presents an exploratory content analysis of contemporary "cop-dramas" set in rural locations. The conclusion is that these productions do not adequately represent the reality of contemporary rural policing; in turn, officers working in rural areas can be apprised of why the public may have misconceptions about rural crime and rural crime policy, and thus be better equipped to perform their job duties.

### **Introduction**

Recent efforts have sought to raise awareness of the understanding of rural crime and the respective rural law enforcement practices employed to counter rural crime. Many contemporary issues pertinent to the rural population in the United States have created new, unique

challenges for rural policing initiatives. Examples include rapid immigration to border areas, relocation of political refugees to rural locales, crime on tribal lands, the production, use, and trafficking of methamphetamines, economic disparity among rural residents, depleted resources/funding for rural crime initiatives, and inadequate/outdated technologies available to counter rural crime (Linnemann & Kurtz, 2014; Rhodes & Johnson, 2008; Weisheit et al., 1994). Similar to other crime-related topics that have come to touch the consciousness of the general public (i.e., the use of punitive controls such as the death penalty), rural crime policy initiatives and the resultant issues/problems that impact the policing of rural crime have received increased attention in television show productions in recent years.

Examining the representation of rural crime and rural policing in these television dramas can provide an understanding for what a viewer of these productions may glean about the social disorder and crime that rural communities experience and the policing of rural areas. Surette (2011) describes the importance of the media in the social construction of reality, which posits that a person's knowledge of a subject is socially created by a person's personal experiences, the experiences of a person's intimate social relations, other social groups and institutions that the person may have exposure to, and the media. Thus, many urban and suburban residents' sole exposure to rural crime and rural policing could very well be limited to their viewing of "cop-dramas" and other stories set in rural locations. Stories are trusted sources and powerful agents of socialization and normative values; simultaneously, stories are also things to be mistrusted as vehicles of indoctrination at worst and entertaining but trivial at best (Cazden & Hymes, 1978; Polletta & Lee, 2006). This idea of socialization is particularly important regarding the "cop-drama" as we "hear stories in line, not with contemporary ideological beliefs, but with the expectations that are intrinsic to the genre" (Polletta, Trigoso, Adams, & Ebner, 2013: 292). Thus we could potentially conclude that many viewers outside of rural locations watch "cop-dramas" set in rural locales expecting them to be the

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same, or similar, to the overwhelming amount of television shows and films set in urban locations. Further, if Polletta et al. (2013) are correct, even residents of rural locations would *also* perhaps expect the kind of genre expectations that are included with urban-based “cop-dramas,” despite the differences in their lived experiences. There has been other research done specifically on the representation of “rural” in media, such as DeKeseredy, Muzzatti, and Donnermeyer’s (2014) look at the “horrification” of rural areas in the slasher film and the “pornification” of rural women, where they point out the false image of rural life and rural residents designed to frighten or excuse sexual exploitation. However, the literature looking at cultural representations of “place” are still overwhelmingly urban; the literature looking at cultural criminology and criminology in the media is also almost exclusively urban.

Despite the different focus on the situation of “place” within the literature looking at media, crime, and policing, we do know from the urban-centric literature that representations of crime and criminal justice in the media does have an impact on both shaping citizen perceptions and contributing to broader images and ideologies about the nature of the society producing those stories. For example, Dowler and Zawilski (2007) note that over 40 percent of U.S. citizens believe that crime shows are accurate. Through interviews with writers and producers, Colbran (2014) gives evidence that this perception is deliberately curated by creators who see themselves as educating the public. Rafter notes the connections between representations of crime and policing in film reflect the myths of American culture (Rafter, 2007). However, all of these studies focused specifically on representations in urban locations. The existing literature connecting the media to “real life” crime and policing may not apply for citizens living in rural areas.

Our exploratory study seeks to investigate representations of rural policing. What myths are being perpetuated in rural-centric “cop-dramas”? Do they mostly mirror the same sort of stories told about urban crime and policing? Or is there a specifically rural “character” present in these television shows absent from urban-centric dramas?

What is the nature of rural policing in media; that is, what sort of crimes are being presented, what methods are used to investigate, what resources are being shown employed by rural police?

Understanding and identifying the representation present in rural-centric “cop-dramas” allows us to see the different ways these representations feed into the cultural imagination about “cops and robbers” and the visual impact of place on both the images of rurality and rural policing.

### **Overview of Rural Crime and Rural Policing**

As the field of criminology and its empirical inquiry have been largely driven by an urban-centric approach for much of the field’s history, a criminology of the rural has remained vastly underdeveloped. Until recently, the myth perpetuated by politicians, social commentators, and even criminologists that scientifically study the nature of crime was that of idyllic rural areas, largely free of social disorder and crime. Objectively, when considering existent rural crime data as well as criminal justice policy initiatives in the majority of rural areas in the United States, one can conclude that rural communities experience crime differently from communities that are urban and suburban in nature. Police departments and sheriff’s offices serving rural areas experience fewer calls for service, and of those calls, many involve male-on-male violence that is often drug or alcohol influenced. Domestic violence and similar victimizations of females go largely unreported. Unlike the egregious violent crime in urban and suburban communities that is reported in the news media, many violent crimes often involve acquaintances instead of stranger violence. In recent years, with the manufacture, use, and distribution of synthetic drugs (e.g., methamphetamine and K2) and the problems rural areas impacted by these drugs have experienced, criminologists examining rural crime have offered the explanation that many of the issues entrenched historically in urban communities have taken seed in rural communities; however, to rest with this assertion about rural crime as comprehensively explanatory and conclusive is simplistic and erroneous (Linnemann & Kurtz, 2014; Rhodes & Johnson, 2008; Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells, 1994).

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As Donnermeyer (2007) has noted, the nature of crime in rural areas varies more than previously conceptualized.

Crime in urban areas is considered differential, and often vastly so, between communities, and this conclusion has been accepted since the development of criminology as a subfield of sociology in the early twentieth century. The understanding of crime in rural American communities as similarly divergent is a recent development in the literature. It has long been understood that while one urban neighbourhood may have a severe drug trafficking problem, another may find the key issues residents face are unemployment and abject poverty (Rhodes & Johnson, 2008). The current understanding of rural communities is that they too differ from one another for many of the same reasons (i.e., job availability, population changes, and proximity of resources). To further contextualize the contemporary understanding of rural crime, while similar issues do in fact differentially impact rural communities, these locations may have different pressing problems depending on the current social context. This often leads to a criminological understanding of rural crime that differs from the interpretation of urban and suburban crime. For example, it has been posited that while urban neighbourhoods are socially disorganized, rural communities are not, and while social problems may proliferate and cause challenges for rural police and other criminal justice system officials in rural areas, these communities are marked by a collective efficacy among residents that greatly impacts how social disorder and crime should be handled by the police (Linnemann & Kurtz, 2014).

Within this contemporary turn by criminologists to study rural crime, those examining the policing of rural areas have given a greater understanding of the rural policing enterprise. Similar to the broad understanding of crime, what is known about police science has largely been drawn from studies of urban law enforcement initiatives. Not surprisingly, rural policing has largely been neglected empirically (Rhodes & Johnson, 2008). The understanding criminologists historically have held about rural crime has been fractured at best, and, until recently, much of what was noted about

rural policing has come from anecdotal accounts and/or limited data collection. For example, it is commonly held, even within the broader criminological community of scholars, that county sheriff's offices are the only law enforcement entities that handle social disorder and crime in rural areas; however, many in the law enforcement field encounter rural crime, including but not limited to officers in small and/or remote municipal police departments, tribal law enforcement, wildlife/conservation agencies, and federal agents (Weisheit et al., 1994).

While the number of officers that serve rural communities in the United States is notably small compared to the number of personnel that serve denser urban areas, the work officers do in rural communities is no less important, as they are quite visible to the residents. Relationships – both positive and negative – are formed, often entrenched, and an officer may or may not be viewed as someone community members can trust and rely on. All law enforcement operating budgets have been reduced in recent years, and rural budgets have become even more so constrained. Because of limited staffing, rural officers typically serve as generalists and do not specialize in a particular type of crime or serve on task forces, as officers will handle a wide range of issues facing today's rural communities. Thus, the officers are often socially aware of their role in protecting and serving rural residents in everything that they do (Weisheit et al., 1994). Because of this conceptualization, rural policing has incorporated elements of the twentieth-century "Professional Model," which can at times be reactionary and formal, and Community Oriented Policing (COP), a contemporary model of police operations that stresses officer relationships with community residents and proactive initiatives. *The Andy Griffith Show*, a popular situation-comedy from the 1960s, is often used as an example of this blended model of policing the rural, which in turn has been labelled the Mayberry Model in the recent literature. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, rural communities, as well as their extant problems, have changed drastically in the past fifty years (Dobrin, 2006). Contemporary television dramas that focus on rural policing, while

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understandably outpaced by urban-centred “cop-dramas,” are increasing in the current media landscape. While the broad criminological knowledge of rural policing initiatives has increased in recent years, it is understandable that the consumers of these television productions will rely on the content of the shows for knowledge of rural policing, especially when knowledge impacting political discourse and policy, as well as personal experiences with rural crime and policing, are still relatively limited for the majority of the population. The present paper is an exploratory content analysis of select television shows that incorporate a focus on rural policing; specifically, the analysis seeks to delineate themes presented in contemporary police dramas set in rural locations, and the discussion centres around the representations of system reactions to rural crime and its representative issues presented in this genre of media. Most importantly, the paper considers whether or not the knowledge generated from the growing criminological discourse on rural policing is adequately represented.

## **Methods**

For the purposes of this paper, we used a very loose definition of the term “rural.” Within the literature, there is still debate on exactly how rural should be defined though there seems to be consensus on the following characteristics: small population sizes and areas in which citizens are more likely to be connected and come into contact with each other (e.g., W. S. DeKeseredy, 2015; Websdale, 1997; Wendt, 2009). Given the small number of television shows set in “rural” areas, we originally began with a sampling frame of “live-action television shows not located in a megalopolis (e.g., Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York City, etc.) or a state capital produced within the last six years.” This yielded a total of twenty-three television programs, most of which were not specifically dealing with policing or criminal justice within that location. We wanted to focus specifically on television shows that featured contemporary policing and criminal justice; this ruled out a large number of rurally located shows in the historical Western genre (e.g., *The Magnificent Seven*, *Deadwood*). Once those were eliminated, we decided to sample only

shows produced recently, and we excluded any reality TV programs. Finally, we excluded shows in which the narrative primarily focuses on criminals or criminal activities in rural areas (e.g., *Breaking Bad*, *Sons of Anarchy*) as opposed to the narrative centring on policing or police officers in rural areas. This left us with a smaller sample of seven television shows. This was further narrowed to five shows to provide a broader sample of different network programming; that is, the two television shows excluded were on networks that already had an earlier premiered television show within the sample. These are the television shows we analyzed:

*Justified* (FX, 2010-2015), set in the Appalachian Mountains in rural eastern Kentucky. *Justified* tells the story of U.S. Marshal Raylan Givens and is based on the Elmore Leonard short story “Fire in the Hole.” Givens begins the series working in Miami, Florida, and confronts a criminal in a restaurant; this confrontation results in Givens shooting and killing the criminal. After the bad publicity from this shooting, Givens’ boss transfers him out of Florida to Lexington, Kentucky, under the supervision of Deputy Art Mullen, an old friend of Givens’ from the academy. Givens then struggles to balance the fallout from the shooting and suspicion that his actions were not “justified” (including an inquiry from the U.S. Attorney), his cases in Lexington, working in the same building as his ex-wife Winona and her new husband, and being in close proximity to his small hometown of Harlan and the complications that provides. Harlan proves to be home to Givens’ father, Arlo, who was abusive when Givens was a child, and a backwoods crime family named the Crowders. Givens spends his time struggling to protect Ava Crowder from the rest of the Crowder family, particularly the patriarch, Bo, after she shoots her abusive husband (Bo’s son), Bowman. Givens’ efforts with Ava are further complicated by their growing sexual and romantic relationship. While the story is primarily centred on Givens, he is provided with a foil in the form of Boyd Crowder, a former friend of Givens’ while they were working in the mines prior to Givens’ law enforcement career. During the pilot, Givens shoots Boyd in the chest to protect Ava, and Boyd attributes his recovery to

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God and attempts to clean up his act. When he is released from prison, Boyd collects disenfranchised men, begins camping in the woods, and starts using violence to attempt to oppose and stop his father's efforts to restart the Crowder drug trade. Bo eventually kills all of Boyd's men, and Boyd turns to Raylan for help. The first season ends with Bo kidnapping Ava, and Boyd and Raylan teaming up to save her.

*Longmire* (A&E; Netflix, 2012-present), set in Wyoming. *Longmire* tells the story of fictional Absaroka County's Sheriff, Walt Longmire, and is based on the "Walt Longmire Mysteries" series by Craig Johnson. Longmire has recently lost his wife, and his adult daughter, Cady, is worried that he is refusing to move on. During the months previous to the start of the series, Longmire had predominantly delegated the policing work for the county to his deputies, Branch Connally and "The Ferg," as well as Victoria "Vic" Moretti, who moved to Absaroka six months prior to the beginning of the series after working homicide in Philadelphia. The series begins with Longmire slowly taking back the duties of sheriff, often urged along by Moretti, and trying to solve major cases taking place in Absaroka County. Longmire navigates his turbulent relationship with the local Native American reservation's police force after he arrests their former chief for corruption. He is assisted by his deputies and long-time friend, Henry Standing Bear, who is a local bar owner and serves as a guide, tracker, counselor, and connection to the local reservation. Alongside with solving local crime, Longmire is campaigning to be re-elected as local sheriff against his deputy, Connally.

*Banshee* (Cinemax, 2013-2016), set in Pennsylvanian Amish country. *Banshee* begins with an unnamed man being released from prison. He seeks out an old friend, Job, a transvestite computer hacker who works buying and selling information in New York City. From Job, the man requests the location of his former accomplice and lover, Anastasia "Ana" Rabinov, with whom he had stolen \$15 million worth of diamonds on behalf of their employer, the Ukrainian mob

boss Rabbit, who also happens to be Ana's father. Job's information leads the man to Banshee, Pennsylvania, where Ana had transformed herself into Carrie Hopewell, a real estate agent married to the local prosecutor, Gordon. They have two children, Deva and Max, and all three members of her family are unaware of her past. While in Banshee, the man stops at a bar run by Sugar Bates, the bar owner, former boxer, and ex-con. Also in the bar is the newly arrived Sheriff of Banshee, Lucas Hood. The real Hood is killed during a fight between local criminals and Sugar. The thief then assumes Hood's identity and uses his time in Banshee as "Sheriff Hood" to try and win Carrie back, connect with Carrie's daughter, Deva (whom he discovers is actually his biological daughter), and attempt to fulfill his mandate as sheriff. This includes fighting against local businessman and crime kingpin Kai Proctor, who was originally a part of the local Amish community. Proctor spends most of the season working out deals to try and build a new casino alongside the local Native American tribe, the Kinaho, and this eventually ends with the death of the young Mayor Dan Kendall, who had originally hired Hood specifically to find evidence and arrest Proctor. The first season ends with Rabbit discovering both "Hood" and Ana/Carrie's location; after "Hood" asks Proctor for help, there is a violent shoot-out involving Rabbit's men, the Banshee police force, Sugar, and Proctor's men.

*The Red Road* (Sundance, 2014-2015), set in the Ramapo Mountains in New Jersey. *The Red Road* is split between two basic narratives, one following police officer Harold Jensen and his family and the other narrative following Philip Kopus, a member of the local Ramapough Lenape Mountain people. In Jensen's story, he is attempting to keep his family together while his wife, Jean, an undiagnosed schizophrenic who self-medicates with alcohol, spirals down. Due to her mental illness and alcoholism, she is abnormally fixated on the relationship that her daughter, Rachel, has with a local Lenape boy, Junior Van Der Veen; Jean consistently tries to break the pair up, angering Rachel. One night, after an argument, Jean goes out to look for Rachel while drunk. She hits a Lenape boy with her car,

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and Harold works to cover up the hit-and-run. During this process, he meets Philip Kopus. Kopus is recently released from prison and trying to reconnect with his estranged mother, Marie Van Der Veen, and his half-brother, Junior, while attempting to set up a prescription drug operation. Kopus finds out about Jean's part in the hit-and-run and blackmails Harold after helping him with the cover-up. The more Junior works with Kopus and helps him to set up his drug ring, the less Rachel wants to be in a relationship with him. This adds further strain on Rachel's relationship with Jean, especially as Kopus' plans for the drug ring fall through. By the end of the first season, the audience discovers that Kopus and Jean were romantically involved while in high school. At the time, Jean's twin brother committed suicide; however, Kopus was widely blamed for killing Jean's brother, leading to the dissolution of their relationship and Jean's own insecurities about Rachel and Junior's connection. The season ends with a violent confrontation between Kopus, Harold, and the Albanians that backed Kopus's initial attempt to set up a drug ring.

*True Detective* (HBO, 2014-present), set in Louisiana. *True Detective* is a non-linear narrative set over a seventeen-year period as Louisiana State Police homicide detectives Rustin "Rust" Cohle and Martin "Marty" Hart attempt to solve the murder of prostitute Dora Lange and several other murders connected to Lange. The non-linear narrative takes place in three different time frames: 1995, when Cohle and Hart are originally attempting to find Lange's killer; 2002, when a prisoner asks for a plea bargain in exchange for information about Lange's killer, which sparks Cohle's curiosity about their original confrontation with the "killer" in 1995; and 2012, when Cohle and Hart are interviewed separately about the Lange investigation, indicating they may have been wrong in their original 1995 claim of apprehending the killer. By the end of the season, Cohle and Hart have discovered a multi-generational murder cult in which several prominent men in Louisiana have taken part. Amidst the murder mystery, the series also features Cohle and Hart's evolving relationship; they begin as new partners in 1995, end their partnership in 2002 with a physical fight, and team back up reluctantly in 2012.

A large part of the friction between the two men comes from Cohle's more intellectual and disaffected attitude following the death of his child, the dissolution of his marriage, his depression, and recovering alcoholism. In contrast, Hart is married to his wife, Maggie, and espouses moral and upstanding choices, even while cheating on his wife several times throughout the first season.

This sample provides a diverse look at rural locations throughout the U.S., differing opportunities for representation in terms of format and length (e.g., ad-supported cable shows vs. commercial-less premium cable) as well as a varied representation in terms of the channels on which the TV shows premiered and the types of content the differing networks would allow (e.g., basic cable vs. premium cable). While each of the five shows offered multiple seasons, we sampled only the first season of each. This gave us thirteen episodes of *Justified*, ten episodes of *Longmire*, ten episodes of *Banshee*, six episodes of *The Red Road*, and eight episodes of *True Detective*, for a total of forty-seven episodes coded.

Once our sample was obtained, we used the following themes we noted as sites of concern or commonalities in prior literature on rural policing to complete an a priori analysis of the data: (a) *networks*, (b) *resource allocation*, (c) *visible vs. non-visible*, and (d) *frontier masculinity*. Neither author had any prior knowledge of the five television shows before coding began. We used ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1987) and used the themes we had identified from previous literature to guide and organize our observations regarding how the television representations mirror these themes and add to or transform existing cultural narratives regarding rurality, rural life, and, more specifically, rural policing. Networks refers to the formal and informal relationships that provide insulation for criminals within small communities. These networks are specifically masculine networks and provide information and “tips” between men to help hide their abuse or behaviour toward women in their lives. The concept of “networks” also covers instances of the “good ol’ boys” networks that work to protect men and villainize women (e.g., DeKeseredy, 2015; Donnermeyer, 2007). Resource allocation refers

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to the representations of how and where money and resources are spent within the rural community. Resources within rural locations are slim for all sorts of service, policing and victim services especially, and many rural locations have to be careful in the ways in which those resources are expended. Rural police, for example, are much more likely to interact with the service side of the job than their urban counterparts due to this lack of resources (Ball, 2001). Visible vs. non-visible crimes refers to the discrepancy between the perception and the actuality of the types of crimes occurring in rural areas. Ball (2001) found that rural citizens rated “public,” or more “visible,” crimes such as theft or destruction of property as more important for policing priorities. In contrast, rural police officers were more concerned about “hidden,” or “non-visible,” crimes more likely to take place behind closed doors, such as domestic violence or child abuse. In terms of our sample, this means uncovering which types of crimes are highlighted or featured within the narrative and what is constructed as “problem” within the communities in which the television shows are set. Finally, the code of frontier masculinity (Carrington, McIntosh, & Scott, 2010; Carrington & Scott, 2008) refers specifically to the media representation of rural areas, referencing “older” times (e.g., Westerns, Crocodile Dundee) that reinforce traditional gender roles and uplift hegemonic (lower-class) masculinity (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Within rural areas, for most men material or economic success is out of reach, so their sense of masculinity is predicated on dominance both over other men (and women) but also over nature and harsh landscapes through physical skills, strength, and violence.

In the next section, we will briefly discuss our findings within the five television series and how they portray crime, criminal justice, and policing more generally within rural communities. We will begin with a more general summary of themes in common between all five programs before moving onto the specific codes of networks, resource allocation, visible vs. non-visible crimes, and frontier masculinity.

## Findings

All five television shows have one major commonality: these are all narratives centred specifically on masculinity, and the audiences continually are framed into a male character's point-of-view. While all the shows except for *Justified* offer female deuteragonists that carry parts of the story and compliment the male protagonists, all five shows are firmly centred on male stories. What differentiates between the shows, despite this commonality, is the way those stories are portrayed and laid out, especially in connection to the "doing" of masculinity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). We will discuss this further when we analyze representations of frontier masculinity. In terms of representations of femininity, similar to the rather restricted performances of masculinity, there were only two basic types of femininity displayed within the sample. The first is "traditional femininity," which was displayed through women whose stories primarily involve their attractiveness/desirability and their relationships to the men and/or children within their lives. Characters such as *The Red Road's* Jean Jensen, whose entire life is defined specifically in relationship to Philip Kopus, her husband Harold, and her teenage daughter, are examples of this portrayal. The second type of femininity is portrayed through characters like *Longmire's* Vic Moretti or *Banshee's* Siobhan Kelly, both of whom are deputies on their respective series and are consistently portrayed as "law enforcement officers" rather than or despite being women; essentially, they are treated as "one of the guys." The one "exception" in this fairly uniform portrayal is Ana/Carrie in *Banshee*. Her narrative focuses around her struggle to balance "traditional femininity" as she hides within the roles of wife and mother as "Carrie." She also recognizes the necessity of keeping up the criminal skills she learned from her father as "Ana," following Hood's unwanted re-entry into her life. However, this is less an "exception" and more of a hybrid blending of the femininities prevalent within all five series.

The "rurality" of each television show differed as well. For *Justified*, approximately half the action takes place in and around the larger city

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of Lexington while the other half takes place within the woods of the Appalachian Mountains. *Longmire* takes place throughout Absaroka County and includes many shots of open space. *Longmire* also features several examples of differing terrain such as the small town where the sheriff's station is located, a mountain, several large ranches, as well as close proximity to a Cheyenne reservation. *Banshee* provides a small town "atmosphere" in the sense of emphasizing community connections and some notes about the lack of community resources (e.g., the police station burned down and the city simply moved it to an old Cadillac dealership, now called "The Caddy" by everyone in town) but this is often mixed in with displays of both great wealth and settings with large numbers of people. *Banshee*, unlike the other shows, could have easily been transported to an urban location without interrupting the narrative; the only markers in the narrative of "rural" that would be changed would be the dual presences of Native Americans and Dutch Amish within the county patrolled by the Banshee Sheriff. *The Red Road* shows a stark divide between the wealthy town of Walpole and the much poorer Ramapough Lenape tribe, who are often shown as living on the very outskirts of Walpole or fully within the woods nearby. Finally, *True Detective* is the show that is the least settled; in effect, *True Detective*'s narrative is that of a "road story" and the only scenes that do not show movement or different environments are the scenes within the Louisiana State Police offices and Cohle and Hart's homes. Out of all five programs, *True Detective* is also the show with the most visible elements of poverty, frequently using locations with inadequate housing (e.g., broken windows, peeling paint, trailer parks, etc.) or showing buildings, such as schools, that have been shut down. The only show that comes close to this frequent and consistent representation of rural poverty is *Longmire* and its presentation of the poverty and conditions on the Cheyenne reservation.

One final note to address about all five shows is the concept of representation, or the portrayal of something or someone in a certain way. In terms of media, minority representation has become increasingly important and increasingly controversial, especially as

many reports have shown that American movies and television are extremely skewed toward the representation of white men (Kidd, 2014). Understanding the stories told within society gives us a greater understanding of the ideologies that society holds regarding people, places, objects, processes, and larger cultural values (Crane, 1992; Loseke, 2007; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, & Motes, 2011; Spillman, 2002), so understanding and critiquing the presentations of identities such as race, class, gender, ability, or sexuality provides important insights into the cultural values carried by people regarding those identities. Four of the five shows made an effort to show diversity (e.g., non-white, female, etc.) through named characters that appeared in multiple episodes in their rural settings. *Justified*, the lone exception, only offered representation in the form of Rachel Brooks, a black female Deputy Marshal, who only appears in the first four episodes of the season. In contrast to providing characters of colour, *Justified* focused much more on neo-Nazi and white supremacist networks in addition to their primarily white cast. Arguably, *Banshee* provides the most diverse representation, offering characters that are black (Sugar Bates, Deputy Emmett Yawners), an Asian crossdresser (Job), and multiple Native characters (e.g., Benjamin and Alex Longshadow). However, aside from Sugar, few of these characters are offered narrative depth or time for their own stories to develop during the season we sampled. In contrast, *Longmire* and *The Red Road* only provide representation that is primarily white or Native but offer the most narrative “space” to those Native characters, whose stories are given weight and development alongside the white protagonists.

### *Networks*

One element that all five of the television shows provided were networks within the communities. Typically, within the literature the idea of “networks” revolves around protection for individuals, generally men, to commit and hide criminal acts such as domestic violence. While criminal networks were portrayed within all five shows, these networks were less about keeping the non-visible crimes of rural life private and more to do with protecting criminal

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enterprises. In *True Detective*, we see a similar type of network evolve through the generational crimes and the cover-up that is aided by family members in prestigious positions (e.g., county sheriff, senator, preacher, etc.). *Justified*'s Ava, a domestic abuse survivor, is confronted by her desire to obtain a gun for protection later in the series, and comments about her abuse: "It's too bad no one did anything about that 'fore it got to that point." This comment (and conversation) is the closest any of the five shows get to the original concept of "networks" (Ball, 2001; Donnermeyer, 2007).

Instead of dealing with the enabling of patterns of abuse or battering, four of the five series show the protection of criminal enterprises, the most explicit being *Banshee* and *The Red Road*. In *Banshee*, we see the criminal activities of Hood and his three comrades as Hood simultaneously attempts to drive out crime in Banshee and commit his own crimes (e.g., one episode shows him stealing from a museum). This narrative is counterpointed by the presence of Proctor and his criminal empire, which involves drugs, prostitutes, and murder while maintaining a façade of respectability. Where Hood's network is reduced specifically to three people (Ana/Carrie, Job, and Sugar) and the skills and resources they have available to them, Proctor is shown to employ a vast number of individuals and have connections to communities outside of Banshee or the state of Pennsylvania. In contrast to Proctor, there is *The Red Road*'s Philip Kopus. Kopus is shown to have a very small network as he attempts to re-establish his position as a drug dealer in Walpole. This network relies mostly on family or old friends, including Junior. Within this contrast between Proctor and Kopus we can see a very distinct class divide. Proctor is wealthy, has numerous resources, and is able to use those resources to ensure he is not caught – though he is suspected – for his crimes. Kopus, on the other hand, has to rely on unreliable allies. The class divide is also shown in the types of crimes and the level of involvement; Kopus, for example, is shown as being the ringleader and actively involved (if not the sole perpetrator) in all of his crimes. Proctor, on the other hand, often leaves the work to the people in his employ.

However, networks within the five shows are not *only* criminal networks. There is often ample support shown between colleagues or citizens on the side of the law. In *Longmire*, for example, we see the support provided by Henry Long Bear, Longmire's best friend. Henry, while "officially" a bar owner, is frequently consulted for things such as his experience tracking or his connections to the community, particularly involving the Cheyenne reservation. In *Justified*, we see Art Mullen take action several times to protect Givens from punishment for his actions (e.g., killing a criminal during a shoot-out, starting a relationship with Ava, etc.). In *Banshee*, we see the three sheriff's deputies often advising Hood or attempting to stop or hide his actions such as excessive violence, lack of identification before shooting, mishandling paperwork, and, essentially, as Deputy Brock Lotus notes, "making the rules up as you go along" while Hood is in uniform. As the season progresses, we then see one of the deputies (Yawners) begin to follow Hood's example and use excessive violence on a suspect in a crime. These networks – both positive and negative – are shown within "civilian" environments as well. For example, in *Longmire* there are the support networks shown throughout the Cheyenne community, which often act in direct opposition to white law enforcement or as vigilante justice instead of relying on or trusting white courts or police institutions.

### *Resource Allocation*

All five television shows highlight types of crimes or criminals that are acknowledged as "dramatic," or likely to heighten tension for the audiences. All five shows included instances of murder, assault, robbery, and drug use and distribution (predominantly methamphetamine). The real differences between the shows came in terms of the severity of the crimes, the violence involved, and the amount of the crime or its after-effects were shown to the audience. *Banshee*, for example, showed the most extreme instances of violence of the five shows, including several scenes that highlight a flashback to Hood's time in prison in which he was tortured and narrowly avoided rape. *Justified*, while the violence was not nearly as

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extreme or as explicit as what was shown in *Banshee*, also showed numerous examples of violence enacted by criminals and law enforcement. Givens even frequently claims, “I don’t pull my sidearm except to shoot to kill. That’s its purpose: to kill; so that’s how I use it.” Both within *Banshee* and *Justified*, there are reoccurring themes about using the law to normalize violence and vengeance. In contrast, *Longmire* and *True Detective* provide the least amount of explicitness in terms of violence or crimes. Further, *Longmire* also shows the most variety in types of crimes shown; *True Detective* focuses almost completely on the sacrifice of a young woman and, as Cohle and Hart discover, the long history of abduction and ritual sacrifice in rural Louisiana. While other crimes, notably drug use and prostitution, are shown, the detectives largely ignore those crimes in favour of continuing their investigation into the murders and disappearances.

A particularly striking scene within *True Detective* occurs within the seventh episode, as Cohle shows Hart pictures and a videotape he stole from the home of a renowned preacher (and accomplice in the cover-up). The tape depicts the sacrifice of a young girl whose disappearance they had been investigating. Instead of showing the audience the full sacrifice through the videotape, the audience is only shown images of the girl, dressed in a sacrificial gown, being led by several men in animal masks, before the image cuts away to Hart’s face and his viscerally horrified reaction to the images that are being shown. Part of what makes this scene so striking is the contrast to *Banshee*, *Justified*, and *The Red Road*, which do opt to show the violence perpetuated by criminals and law enforcement alike.

Finally, in terms of resource allocation, of the five series, only *True Detective* seemed to depict police departments that were concerned about resource expenditures; in multiple scenes, Cohle and Hart are reprimanded by their superiors for “wasting” time and resources on the Lange case. While all the police departments were shown to be either small (*Banshee*, *The Red Road*, *Longmire*) or focused on a small number of individuals in a larger organizational context

(*Justified*, *True Detective*), only *Longmire* explicitly shows conversations between the officers regarding rotating days off or being on-call when needed. There are also never any issues regarding equipment needed. However, despite the evidence of considerable resources in terms of staffing and equipment, very little attention is paid in any of the series to either the more “mundane” tasks of rural policing, such as traffic control, or to the service side of rural policing, such as social, medical, and emergency services.

### *Visible vs. Non-visible*

Similar to the unrealistic representation of resource allocation in all five series, there is almost no real conceptualizations of the delineation between visible and non-visible crimes within our sample; in fact, what is shown are almost exclusively visible crimes. Further, the visible crimes that are featured are predominantly ones that are more dramatic but also less likely to happen in rural locations, such as murder, robbery, attempted rape, various drug related crimes (e.g., distribution, use, etc.), and frequent examples of prostitution. The two series that did include some mention of non-visible crimes are *Justified* and *Longmire*, with *Justified* providing a seasonal narrative arc whereas *Longmire* only provides a one-line mention. Despite the prominence of the narrative arc in *Justified*, Ava Crowder’s narrative is less about recovering from the abuse she suffered or the consequences she pays for the death of her husband. She receives no jail sentence, and the only *legal* consequence the audience hears she receives is her inability to leave Kentucky while on parole. Her narrative is much more bound up with Givens’ narrative and how his interactions and eventual sexual/romantic relationship with Ava reflects on his own performance as a marshal. Givens receives more canonical consequences than Ava does. Ava’s narrative, as it is *not* about the domestic violence, is more connected with her fear of reprisal from the Crowder family, particularly Bo Crowder. Further, because it is Givens’ point-of-view perspective within the storytelling, the prior history of abuse is ignored; Ava is often treated more as a nuisance or an obstacle to Givens because of her attempts to create a relationship with him. Unlike *Longmire*, in

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which domestic violence is mentioned and then immediately brushed aside by both characters, *Justified* treats the ongoing subplot regarding Ava simply as one more example of how the Crowders are “bad people.” Essentially, Bowman’s abuse of Ava is treated as – along with violence, bank robbery, racism, money laundering, and drug distribution – yet another reason why Givens is justified in his suspicion and violence toward the rest of the Crowder family. That is, the subplot is not actually about *Ava*; instead, it provides more reasoning for the audience to side with Givens in his quest to stop the Crowders throughout the first season.

This lack of representation in the more non-visible crimes, such as domestic violence, child abuse, or other interpersonal violence and crimes that tend to occur at home, means that all five of the series within our sample led to an interesting gendered representation in terms of victimology within the sample. The victims of these crimes were predominantly men, and as both the victims and the protagonists were men, this kept the narratives within our sample firmly focused on portrayals of masculinity.

### *Frontier Masculinity*

Frontier masculinity (Carrington et al., 2010; Carrington & Scott, 2008), or the presentation of “older” forms of masculinity that reinforce traditional gender roles, is very firmly present within all five series in our sample. *Justified* provides one of the most blatant examples in Raylan Givens, both in his characterization and the staging of his interactions. For example, the first scene in the pilot is deliberately shot in ways to evoke a Western aesthetic, beginning with Raylan’s signature white cowboy hat to the face-off and eventual gunfight in the restaurant, coded to remind the audiences of encounters at “High Noon.” As Connell ([1995] 2005) points out, masculinity is only defined in opposition; traditionally, masculinity is defined by being “not feminine” or “not that type” (i.e., subordinate masculinities such as men of colour, LGBTQIA+ men, working-class and poor men, etc.). Given the small number of women present within the series that carry a role within the narrative over multiple

episodes (n=4), Raylan is consistently judging himself based on the behaviour of the other men on the show, particularly Art Mullens, Tim Gutterson, a fellow Marshal, and finally Boyd Crowder, who is what Lévi-Strauss ([1958] 1963) would describe as Raylan's binary opposition. Lévi-Strauss ([1958] 1963) argues that a binary opposition is a primary element of a myth and that understanding a myth can only be found through the pairing of contrasting materials within the myth, such as "good" and "evil" or "black" and "white." Raylan embodies justice within the constraints of the law, despite his often extreme actions, whereas Boyd embodies vigilante justice or attempts to provide order taken outside the law. Despite this thematic difference, both characters are remarkably similar in their presentations of masculinity. Both are shown as charismatic and controlled characters very willing to draw lines in the sand and punish those that cross those lines, specifically with death. For both men, their masculinity is exemplified within two character traits: (a) their willingness to punish others who have, within their perspective, "done wrong," and (b) their reputations and skills in their chosen professions (e.g., Givens is renowned for his skills at shooting).

In *Banshee*, we see a similar example of masculinity in Hood. Hood's masculinity is shown through his willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve his goals, specifically his goal of winning Ana/Carrie back despite her insistence that she prefers her new life. Throughout the season we see that he is ultimately successful though at great cost to Ana/Carrie (e.g., her marriage, her safety from her father, the love and trust of her children). He also applies this idea of "whatever it takes" in his ruse as sheriff, ignoring laws and restrictions, as well as making deals with Proctor to protect himself. Unlike Givens, whose violence is both clean and deadly (e.g., reliance on guns, one-shot kill), Hood's violence is physical, and he tends to rely on his fists more than other tools. His dominance is shown explicitly through the use of physical violence, such as in the third episode when Hood has an ultra-violent fight with a champion boxer when attempting to arrest him for rape. He also prides himself on his virility, having

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numerous sexual encounters with various women throughout the season, even as he pursues a permanent relationship with Ana/Carrie.

Where *Justified* and *Banshee* provide examples of more traditional frontier masculinity (i.e., masculinity primarily predicated on violence), *The Red Road* offers a more “modern” example of masculinity. Rather than falling in frontier masculinity, the hegemonic masculinity Harold Jensen displays has more in common with what Brannon (1976) describes as “Be a Sturdy Oak,” which is the idea that men should be strong and reliable in a crisis. A man is the support necessary to weather any particular crisis. Jensen attempts to be this “sturdy oak” when his family is in crisis due to his wife’s mental illness, alcoholism, and hit-and-run car accident. For Jensen, this need to weather the crisis is demonstrated by his covering up Jean’s action, specifically through using his knowledge of police work to keep her actions hidden. Further, he lies to Jean when she is unable to remember her actions. He also institutionalizes her as an additional form of protection and to attempt to get her help for her alcoholism; this action effectively gaslights her until the end of the season when she discovers the truth.

With the characters of Cohle and Longmire, *True Detective* and *Longmire* provide the two examples least like the idea of frontier masculinity. Both characters give a good *appearance* of frontier/hegemonic masculinity, particularly in that both are fairly stoic and commanding personalities. However, *True Detective* shows Cohle’s struggles with alcoholism, depression, PTSD, and grief over the death of his child and subsequent divorce. Cohle provides a sharp contrast to his partner; when prompted, Cohle is completely open and honest about his mental health issues and problems, whereas Hart prefers to keep his indiscretions hidden and his reputation unblemished. Cohle is shown as a man who understands himself and his own problems and is willing to acknowledge the kind of person they make him:

HART: Do you think...Do you ever wonder if you’re a bad man?”

COHLE: No, I don't wonder, Marty. The world needs bad men. We keep the other bad men from the door.

This openness and willingness to acknowledge both faults and mental illness is directly opposite the masculinity norms included within the "Be a Sturdy Oak" conception of masculinity. As Kimmel (2008) points out, those norms include not just being the support but also being as emotionless as a block of oak. Cohle suffers the consequences of visibly being emotional and spends most of the season alienating his coworkers, especially Hart. These fairly explicit consequences for breaking gender norms within *True Detective* essentially code Cohle's behaviour as unacceptable.

Longmire, in contrast, also displays atypical masculine behaviour, breaking the norms of both frontier and hegemonic masculinity by openly showing emotion and his inability to handle either himself or his responsibilities during the year following his wife's murder. However, throughout the season we see the recovery from his grief while Longmire continues to display empathy and compassion for both victims and criminals, regaining the trust and respect of Absaroka County citizens and his deputies. Longmire is rewarded for continuing to break masculine norms, coding these behaviours as not only acceptable but desired in men. Further, as the season goes on the audience discovers more information about the murder of Longmire's wife and that Longmire had attempted to find the man and kill him. When Longmire failed and Henry Standing Bear succeeded, Longmire helped to cover the crime up. The murder of this man brings an investigation to Absaroka County, and Longmire's previous "good" behavior begins to unravel. Instead of the more open version of masculinity the audience had seen prior to this, Longmire's actions become more closed off and hidden. This change re-alienates his coworkers and destroys his relationship with his daughter, Cady. Unlike in *True Detective*, where Cohle is punished for his non-normative behaviour, *Longmire* provides narrative punishment only when Longmire returns to normative hegemonic masculinity.

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**Discussion**

When coding for the four representational areas of networks, resource allocation, visible vs. non-visible crimes, and frontier masculinity, we found that, ultimately, examples of all four were present within our sample to varying degrees. However, this presence was consistently exaggerated for dramatic effect to give an unrealistic impression of both rural life and rural policing, placing the type of work being done in these areas to have more in common with urban environments. This stylized version of rural life and rural crime could have potential effects on residents both within and outside of rural areas, increasing their sense of insecurity or rating crime as a higher problem than it really is within their communities (Ball, 2001). Residents of rural communities may become more fearful of crime that may not actually be a current social threat. In addition to increasing citizen misperceptions of crime, these melodramatic portrayals of rural crime could also potentially shift the perceptions of rural police, as well as potential police officers that are currently working in rural areas, or those beginning their career in law enforcement: specifically, the perceived perception that rural policing should be centred specifically on the more visible crimes as opposed to much of the service work and policing of non-visible crimes that is the reality of rural officers. Further, the excess of resources (e.g., funding, officer coverage, victim resources, equipment, etc.) shown within all five series could potentially give rural residents an unrealistic expectation of the police departments that serve their communities, many of which operate with far more limited resources.

The television shows within our sample almost exclusively focused around male narratives and male stories, although all but one had strong female deuteragonists. This emphasis on masculinity further obscures the very real threat rural women face from the men in their lives that is often compounded by geographic and physical isolation (Websdale, 1997), the tightknit ties of small communities (DeKeseredy, 2015; Donnermeyer, 2007), and cultural “idyllization” of rural masculinity (Carrington, Donnermeyer, & DeKeseredy, 2014; Scott & Biron, 2010). Essentially, by glossing over the

existence of crimes against women and ignoring women's lives and stories, this emphasis on masculinity continues to hide the reality of the victimization rural women experience.

One area in which our sample did shine was representation for people of colour, particularly Native Americans. Kidd's (2014) analysis of racial representation in prime time television showed that whites account for 81.2 percent of television roles, blacks for 9.6 percent, Asians for 3.4 percent, and Hispanic for 3.5 percent of roles, with Native Americans virtually invisible. Outside of the geographic areas near tribal lands and/or communities that are well-represented by those of Native American descent, the majority of American citizens are unapprised of the issues facing predominantly Native American communities, and policies specific to serving and policing tribal lands. However, within our sample, all but *Justified* provided representation of multiple Native characters and locations. Similarly, while the protagonists were overwhelmingly white, black and Asian characters also had reoccurring roles in multiple series.

The stories we tell influence how we see the world and the people in it, and the stories we tell and believe influence how we feel about ourselves (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Maines, 1993; McAdams, 1996; Plummer, 1995; Polletta et al., 2011). Ultimately what we see in the stories we tell about rural policing is largely a misunderstanding about the nature of rural life and rural work. While this analysis was exploratory in nature, it is not surprising that the themes delineated in the television dramas incorporating rural policing are not represented as matching the contemporary nature of rural law enforcement. While popular with laypersons and frequently watched by many members of the public, the representation depicted could serve to mislead all consumers; further, and possibly most alarming, there is the potential that rural residents will have inaccurate perceptions of the social problems and crime that may impact their community. Many of these misperceptions could lead to deep-rooted, damaging misconceptions of the needs of female

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victims in the community, as well as issues affecting racial and ethnic minorities in rural areas.

Without a doubt, television “cop-dramas” make excellent entertainment, and they are undoubtedly quite popular; thus, it is not suggested that the production content of these shows be markedly changed or even eliminated. We recognize that such drastic measures would be naïve, unrealistic recommendations that individuals creating and developing such media would pay little heed to. Yet, system personnel that can impact the operations of the law enforcement enterprise in rural areas such as grant writers, victim service providers and advocates, county sheriffs – especially those with strong political ties and clout – and even administrators/policymakers in federal agencies should be aware of the misrepresentation of rural crime and policing in these productions. The training of officers who work in rural settings could benefit from the addition of a discussion of this disjuncture; again, we note that while the inclusion of such topics in training opportunities seems overly optimistic, many law enforcement agencies have been welcoming academic discourse in training with greater frequency (Bratton, 1999). Most importantly, the representation of rural policing in television drama may cause pushback with the very people that officers in these communities are serving – the rural public. If officers are aware of what can influence perceptions and expectations of rural residents, they can have a more robust understanding of how to best serve their respective communities, and maintain a healthy set of expectations for their own job performance.

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