

Just How Accurate Are Television Crime Dramas?

By Elliot Rozenberg

Turn on the television at any given moment during the day and there is sure to be a television crime drama airing on one channel or another. Millions and millions of people tune in to these shows every week looking for intense murder mysteries and shocking forensic cases. But just how accurate are the crime shows that the American public has grown to love? According to most experts in the fields of law enforcement and forensic pathology, not accurate at all.

There are many things that have been deemed inaccurate by both forensic pathologists and employees of the criminal system. However, the one inaccuracy that is talked about most is the misrepresentation and falsified image of time. In these hour-long crime dramas, cases are quickly and efficiently solved within days of their discovery.

According to an article written by Jason Schultz of the Santa Cruz Sentinel, cases may take months and even years before any verdict can be reached. Schultz interviewed Lt. Joe Haebe, a Santa Cruz detective about the time it takes to solve a case and he said, "It gives people the perception that all this stuff can be solved in an hour." Furthermore, Haebe went on to say, "They don't show police laboring over evidence and filling out reports."

Moreover, crime dramas tend to show crime labs with the most technologically advanced and extravagant equipment, which allows for easy answers when investigating a crime. According to Jim Gray, a district attorney, most of the pieces of equipment that are used on the sets of these shows do exist however, they are rarely seen in any crime lab, let alone all of the equipment in one crime lab.

One other thing that has been noted by forensic experts across the country is the inaccuracies in the procedure of collecting the evidence at a crime scene. In shows like "Law and Order" and "CSI" investigators often pick up samples of evidence and smell them and in some instances they taste them. According to Mary Villani, teacher of forensic biology, a forensic investigator is never allowed to taste an unknown substance.

While these television crime dramas continue to gain popularity, forensic investigators and law enforcement officials continuously and clearly stated that many of the things that happen on these dramas would never happen in real life. When sitting down to watch your favorite crime show, just remember that the information that you may receive is not always true.