
MAKE BELIEVE REALITIES

Comparing the fairytale world portrayed on ABC cop show *The Rookie* to the gritty reality on HBO's *The Wire* through Christopher Henson's article "A Man Must Have a Code."

BY CAROLINE DEE PADEN

David Simon's *The Wire* highlights the profanity of the police while ABC's *The Rookie* focuses on the sacredness and humanity within law enforcement institutions. *The Rookie* is about John Nolan, a forty-year-old rookie who decides to change his career and become a cop after witnessing a bank robbery. The other officers, especially Sargent Grey, are skeptical of Nolan's decision to become a cop and question if he is cut out for the job. In Season One, Episode One, Sargent Gray says, "I will haze, harass, and humiliate you every chance I get in the hope that you will abandon this misguided quest" ("Pilot" 0:40:55). Despite Gray's attempts to push Nolan out throughout the first two seasons, Nolan is able to prove he belongs. John Nolan brings a unique perspective as his background and lifelong experiences gives him an edge over the other cops. Officer Nolan is a people person and that allows him to have a unique perspective on his role as a police officer. His compassion for others shines through and impacts the way he polices his territory. Christopher Hanson's article "A Man Must Have a Code" analyzes The use of the code in police dramas and the impact it has from a linguistic perspective to the code's function in the show. In *The Rookie*, the code of the police is clearly followed as the show depicts the police in a positive light, highlighting the sacrifices and the pursuit of justice in the police line of duty leading to a happy ending. *The Wire* captures the gritty realism of the police and portrays the uncertainty of reality, it leaves the viewer shutout and forces them to decode the world that is *The Wire*.

The Wire is an untraditional cop drama. When David Simon pitched the show to HBO, he argued that in order to truly appreciate the show the viewer would have to watch multiple episodes. Simon states, "watching only ten minutes of the show would, in his words, cause the viewers to come to the conclusion that 'It's not HBO. It's TV' (qtd. in Hanson 204). The serialized police drama that is *The Wire* highlights the



gritty realism of the world. Simon tells it like it is as he creates a call to action for his viewers, highlighting the crooked system of Baltimore and the cost to produce change. The Wire, however, still maintains the same structures and realisms of the genre often seen in more traditional cop shows, like *The Rookie*. In Hanson's article he cites Brooks Robards who suggests, "that programs in the police drama are 'grounded in reality' . . . Realism and authenticity are generally privileged within the police drama and *The Wire* clearly stresses both" (qtd. in Hanson205). ABC's *The Rookie*, is inspired by LAPD Officer William "Bill" Norcross story and is privileged to be able to portray the same 'realism' and authenticity' seen in *The Wire*; despite the fact that *The Rookie* is a traditional police procedural that does not demand the viewer to watch every episode, like *The Wire*. Hanson makes the claim that police shows are automatically grounded in reality because of the nature of their genre, however, ABC's *The Rookie* and HBO's *The Wire* are set in very different realities.

Alexi Hawley police procedural focuses on an altruistic reality, rather than the harsh and gritty reality present in *The Wire*. In Season One, Episode Fifteen, "Manhunt" a prison bus transporting criminals crashes and the prisoners are able to escape; it is up to the rookies and their training officers to track down the criminal. *The Rookie* is considerate of the ethical dilemmas the police face as Hawley is able to create a space to make the perfect choice in a hypothetical perfect world. Officer Tim Bradford and his trainee Officer Lucy Chen catch the last escaped prisoner. In the scene the escaped convict upset a gang on the outside before his arrest. Lucy asks, "Hypothetically is there ever a scenario where we just, you know, g-give them what they want? Where we, you know, balance one life against the lives of many lives and. . . make that hard call" ("Manhunt" 0:34:48).



Lucy pitches the idea of utilitarianism. This ethical theory can easily be distorted as it believes a person should make choices that benefits a majority however in the real world not everyone is going to agree. Bradford refuses to sink down to Lucy's level as he is willing to die for the criminal because his job is to serve and protect and he does not choose who he serves and protects. Bradford represents strength when he refuses to stray from the police code; this morally sound choice is Hawley's way of portraying police as sacred saints. Tim Bradford leaves the house where they were hiding and confronts the street gang in a one versus all situation. Backup of course arrives just in time and Officer Chen and Officer Bradford are able to apprehend the last escaped fugitive, making all the escaped criminals caught by the end of the episode.

Investigations in *The Wire* do not go as smoothly. In Season One, Episode Ten, Officer Kima Greggs is shot when a drug bust investigation goes south. The officers are tailing Orlando, a snitch in Barksdale organization, who ends up driving into a "set up". The officers wanted Orlando to try and "buy" drugs from the Barksdale origination and arrest the people who sell Orlando the drugs. In reality, the Barksdale Crew realizes that Orlando is working for the police and shoots him and Kima. The detectives lost Orlando's bugged car in chase as the music was too loud for them to hear Kima announcing her location. The detectives got turned around as the street signs were purposely reversed reading the wrong directions. Forcing the police to be a step behind the criminals once again as they were too late to stop the tragedy. Kima Greggs was unable to reach for her gun as the tape broke under the seat leaving her vulnerable and unable to protect herself. Kima Greggs is shot and in critical condition as she is forced to fight for her life.

The Wire contrasts with the world Alexi Hawley creates and draws the viewers' attention to the brutality of the job. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass observe in Hanson's article, "HBO stakes its reputation on consciously violating codes policing the illicit" (qtd. in Hanson 206). *The Rookie* and *The Wire* parallel each other on the plot lines of facing ethical dilemmas as both deal with the aftermath of an officer being shot. In the crooked world of *The Wire* the administration that is the police decide to make an example of the assailant that shot the police officer Kima Greggs. In Season One, Episode Eleven, "The Hunt"

the officers are sent in to make big drug busts in order to impress the press and show they have the power in the city. The police aggressively raid various locations to find drugs, as they carry heavy duty weapons and are dressed in protective gear. One police officer brutally charges in and shouts, "Show your hands asshole" (TheHunt 0:52:06). Throughout the scene the officers show little respect for the people in the neighborhoods as they are violently throwing people on the ground and arresting them. The police treat the individuals like objects as they completely destroy the furniture and trash the individual's homes. All the gathered items such as the dug money and drugs are taken to the press conference where Commissioner Ervin Burrell says, "when an officer falls in this war others stand ready to pick up the challenge and carry the fight to the doorsteps of those responsible" (The Hunt 0:53:50).



The Wire focuses on a problem and highlights the officers' power to do, no matter the costs, as the officers disregard the moral implications of their actions

The Rookie responds to an officer shooting in a much more civil way as the officers ignore their inner voices enticement to seek revenge. In Season One, Episode Sixteen, "Greenlight" Captain Anderson is shot, and the most powerful arrest of the season takes place later on in the episode. Before the officers leave to catch the captain's killer, Sargent Gray lectures his team and tells them they have a job to do, "Killing this loser won't honor her memory. Doing our jobs will. And we owe it to her to do it the right way" ("Greenlight" 0:36:16). The officers set up a blockade on the road to catch

the shooter. The shooter finally shows up in his car and Sargent Gray tells Nolan to make the arrest. Nolan was with the captain when she was killed, and Gray recognizes that the best person to arrest the shooter is Nolan. As Nolan approaches, his hand holding the gun is shaking and pointed at the shooter. In this moment, Nolan easily could kill the man that killed his captain, however, he is not that kind of cop. The shooter pleads with Nolan and says that he will never make it in a cell. As Sargent Gray stated earlier, "Word is --you kill a cop, you never see the inside of a cell" ("Greenlight" 0:35:55). The reality Gray is describing is the given reality perceived in The Wire. The Rookie contradicts The Wire's harsh outlook as the officers abide by a different police code. One of the most memorable lines of the season is spoken by Nolan in response to the shooter's fear of his fate, "It's not our job to punish you. Just to see to it that you are" ("Greenlight" 0:39:37). John Nolan truly wants to help people and his compassion towards others allows him to promote the individual humanity as he is extremely sympathetic and cares about the wellbeing of others, including criminals and drug addicts. The Rookie accentuates the good of the police as they take down the bad guy Los Angeles criminals thus creating a falsified dream world.

HBO's The Wire is famous for being a cop show with no good guys or bad guys. Hanson describes this dynamic by stating, "The show's sympathetic and nuanced depictions of criminals and underclass drug addicts, in particular, places them in stark contrast to the corresponding stereotyped characters found in other police dramas" (204). In The Wire the characters on the side of the drugs and side of the police are flawed. The viewer does not have a clear favorite as officer Jimmy McNulty struggles with the same complicated lifestyle decisions that D'Angelo Barksdale is faced with. D'Angelo Barksdale is the leader of "the pit" which is the hub for drug trafficking in the low rises. D'Angelo has the same intellect and emotional intelligence as the police officers. D'Angelo and McNulty both recognize how messed up the system is and want to change it. D'Angelo says to McNulty, "I should've done more" ("Sentencing" 0:17:45). D'Angelo was unable to protect Wallace from dying at the hand of the system. The same overarching corrupt system McNulty is trying to expose. Both characters sadly find themselves unable achieve the outcomes they want, at the end of the first season. D'Angelo and McNulty are trapped in a system of corruption and are unable to change the system despite their best efforts. D'Angelo grew up in the system of the

of the street and is unable to escape. He tells McNulty, "you just live with this till you can't breathe no more" ("Sentencing" 0:21:58). McNulty's code is violated as he wants to do his job the way he feels morally right. The system, forces McNulty to compromise under their police code as he is pressured to police how the police institution sees fit. Despite his best efforts to fix the inner-city corruption, D'Angelo ends up taking the fall for the entire organization as both discover that they cannot escape the harsh realities of life. Hanson argues that the entrapment of these characters in the system is linked to them being forced to obey the codes of the system. Both characters attempt to pursue the same outcome as they try to fix the system but are unable to as David Simon does not force a perfect world reality. The complex characters are one of the elements that make The Wire so compelling and separates it from other cop shows.

The characters in The Rookie are more transparent and predictable than the characters in The Wire and can easily be categorized. An example of this is in Season Two, Episode Four, Nyla explains to Nolan that, "There are two kinds of cops, Officer Nolan -- there are Warriors and Guardians. One's a hunter, the other's a nurturer. One is only alive when they're in the fight. The other is happy to clock out after 12. One is worth my time. The other is not" ("Warriors and Guardians" 0:2:46). Nolan is a guardian and wants to help protect people from the demons in the world. The Rookie capitalizes on the belief of fate and sends a message that everyone has a purpose in life and is able to achieve their own personal goals. The episode titled "Warriors and Guardians" starts with Officer Nolan getting a new training officer, Nyla Harper. Officer Harper makes split judgement decisions and sees the simplistic emotional depths of others. Harper is skeptical of Nolan's choice to become a cop and is constantly testing him. In the opening scene Nolan gets a call from Officer Harper, she says that she wants to meet up at a local bar to get to know him before his shift starts. Harper poses as a waitress at the bar and quizzes Nolan on why he decided to become a cop. He tells her, "you know sometimes life just gives you a nudge" ("Warriors and Guardians" 0:01:53). The idea of fate is introduced here which hints at the "fairytale" everything is going to be okay attitude present in The Rookie. Nyla Harper responds to Nolan, still skeptical that he is in some sort of misguided midlife crisis and says, "Makes sense. Wife left you, kid left you. Nothing like a gun in hand to make you feel powerful again" ("Warriors and Guardians" 0:02:04).

Nolan is adamant that those are certainly not his reasons to become a cop and is taken aback by her words and finds them to be insulting. He later realizes that the lady posing to be his waitress is really his training officer. She was testing him to see if, "he could play" she then asks, "So, if it wasn't about your gun, then why do you want the badge?" ("Warriors and Guardians" 0:02:23). The transition of asking him first before he knew her identity why he wanted to be a cop to later asking why he wants the badge shows the prominence and respect for policing that Hawley attempts to portray in his version of a cop drama, The Rookie.

In David Simon's The Wire characters have depth as Simon allows the viewer to see the characters struggle with social issues, family struggles, economic concerns, as well as addiction. The Wire shows the viewer a raw reality, critiquing the work of the police, while The Rookie shows a fictionalized version with a "feel good" outcome on reality. The two shows take two very different and extreme approaches to portray their messages to the world. The Rookie and The Wire create captivating, yet equally engaging, portrayals of police, the law, and criminals. The Rookie highlights police heroics and the individual officers' willingness to put their lives on the line to protect the greater good of humanity. While, The Wire takes an "in your face" approach depicting individual officers and criminals who are selfish and self-absorbed. Characters in The Wire are multifaceted, as humans are, while in contrast The Rookie's characters are more generalized as all are good or bad. The characters in The Rookie are in a story book reality where the cops always catch the bad guy. Everyone wants to live a perfect life one that is clear cut and predictable with "good guys" prevailing in the end. In society, individuals pursue the ethical, more fanciful world that is portrayed in The Rookie. The Wire characters never resolved their conflicts and have inner demons. The Wire is viewed as a deeper complexity of abstract reality and addiction. Life gets in the way of the perfect world with corruption, temptation and individual challenges. A quote from The Wire is, "Gettin' Clean's the easy part. Now comes life" (The Cost 0:12:42). This quote does not just apply to drugs but also to life itself.