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Viewer Discretion Advised: Moral and Emotional Codes in NYPD Blue

E. Deidre Pribram Ph.D.
Molloy College, dpribram@molloy.edu

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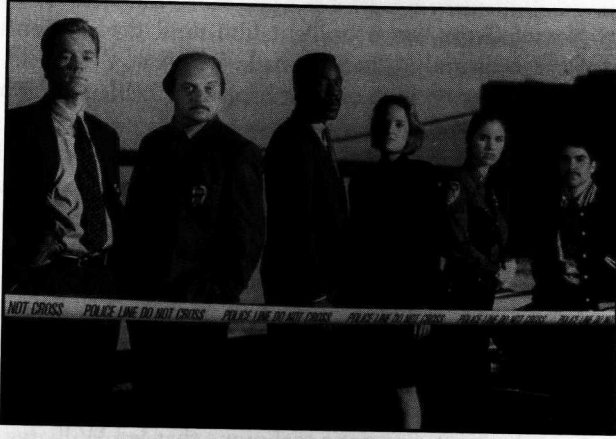
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VIEWER DISCRETION ADVISED

Moral and Emotional Codes in *NYPD Blue*



The first season cast of *NYPD BLUE* (NBC)

BY E. DEIDRE PRIBRAM

NYPD Blue's opening shot is a white-on-black warning label: "This police drama contains adult language and partial nudity. Viewer discretion is advised." A self-imposed rating on the part of ABC, the show's broadcaster, it originated in response to the police drama's "controversial" use of (limited) profanity and partial nudity, a singular departure for conservative, "family-oriented" U.S. television networks and their advertisers.¹ The addition of a viewer advisory, initiated by network and advertising caution, played on the show's controversial status, turning it to promotional advantage. From its debut, the series began to be watched by many viewers curious about the fuss,² and the warning label continues weekly, displayed like a badge of honor by a cutting-edge program, breaking the rules and challenging the status quo.

One of *NYPD Blue's* hallmarks is its distinctive formal style. The show pursues an edgy, aggressive visual approach, matched by repetitively driving music, in-your-face dialogue, and tough attitudes. The visual style is based on the use of rapid editing, jump cuts, and an almost constantly moving camera—panning, tilting, and hand-held. While critics praised the program as innovative from its outset, they were usually hard-pressed to explain how it renews the familiar police drama beyond citing its use of street-smart language, nudity and formal techniques. Many reviewers described the show as strong on story, dialogue, and character, but it's the specific utilization of these elements towards its narrative purposes that initially set the series apart and reinvigorated the genre. For if *NYPD Blue's* first season broke the rules, it did so less for its language and the occasional shots revealing women's breasts or David Caruso's backside, but rather because it took us into a world where we rarely see film and television cops go: the emotional dilemmas and interpersonal conflicts of human relationships.

E. Deidre Pribram teaches in the College of Communications at the Pennsylvania State University. She is an independent filmmaker who wrote and directed the feature film, *The Family Business*.

NYPD Blue's narrative concerns owe much to feminism, shifting gender relations, and programming such as *Cagney and Lacey*, which preceded it. *Cagney and Lacey*, by placing two central women characters in a "typically" male genre, reworked the police drama and simultaneously made changing gender identities apparent, showing it was possible to represent familiar issues and situations from the perspective of an alternative set of priorities. In comparison, *NYPD Blue* can be analyzed as a further revision of the genre in its appropriation of cultural changes in gender relations, reinstating central male characters and a "male" formal presentation with narrative goals more akin to women's drama and what historically have been considered women's issues.

NYPD Blue's narrative preoccupations, in opposition to its formal coding, are evident in the delineation of its central male characters and through two recurring, sometimes overlapping, arenas of activity: professional ethics and personal relationships. This analysis will focus predominantly on the show's first season when gender/genre tensions are most apparent. The second season offers useful comparison. It is possible that the replacement of the lead character (Jimmy Smits stepping in as Bobby Simone for the departing David Caruso in the fifth show of the second season) provoked caution among the show's producers, resulting in a reversion to more familiar narrative concerns and traditional police fare.

CHARACTERIZATION

Andy Sipowicz

The teaming up of John Kelly (David Caruso) and Andy Sipowicz (Dennis Franz) has the two working in tandem, reverse sides of a similar coin. Each character and his conflicts serve to clarify the other. Sipowicz is the guy who almost always gets it wrong. He is combative, insulting, and insensitive to others, often losing control of the situation. He is also very funny, and the source of much of the show's rough-edged, biting eloquence. As Peter Humm and Paul Stignant write of William McIlvanney's literary detective, Jack Laidlaw, "he uses words like weapons—he uses them to hurt people, to puncture pomposity, to gain control in different situations."³ Balding, overweight, mean, and constantly screwing-up with the people in his life, Sipowicz, nonetheless, manages to exude a certain charm and command audience affiliation. While the character should be difficult to empathize with in many ways, what aligns him with viewer affection is, precisely, the error of his ways. Sipowicz acknowledges his personal deficiencies—he doesn't *mean* to get things so wrong; he just can't help it. Pathos is provided by his impressive skills as a detective, so often threatened and nearly undermined by the failings of his emotional and psychological being.

Sipowicz is a good cop, in both an efficacious and a traditional moral sense, frequently seeming to operate from an intuitive base, a combination of years of accumulated experience and facility for the job. If he often crosses the line into harassment when interrogating witnesses, he is also savvy enough to pose the pivotal questions. He is diligent and conscientious in carrying out his job, adheres to the code of faithfulness to his fellow officers, and despite his surface cynicism, believes in the social value of his role as a cop—if not in ensuring the forces of good over criminal anarchy, then at least in holding back the tide of disorder.

Sipowicz's defining dilemma as a character, his personal incapacities often resulting in drastically inappropriate professional behavior, is one of the foundations upon which the show is built. Sipowicz's failings and inadequacies—as well as his strengths—elaborate *NYPD Blue*'s emphasis, at least during its initial run, on the interconnectedness between professional ethics and personal behavior. Application of the letter of the law is insufficient without the companion abilities of knowing one's self and interacting with others. The show's narrative drive often follows the search for a balance between a moral code and an emotional code. The conflicts faced by the first season's two main characters, both in their public and private spheres, question the validity of placing worldly, "professional" criteria above human and personal values; and how an individual, conditioned and skillful at dealing with the world one way, begins to redress that balance. Sipowicz, as one side of the coin's dilemma, more often than not exemplifies the costs of failure; Kelly his inverse, holds out the promise of success.



David Caruso as John Kelly in *NYPD BLUE*
(Twentieth Century Fox)

John Kelly

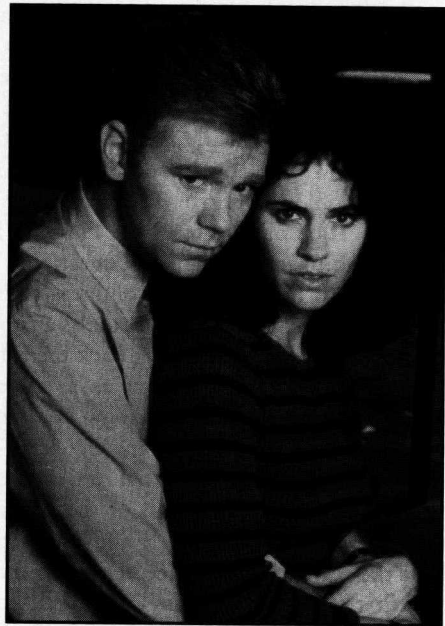
John Kelly is *NYPD Blue*'s moral authority and romanticized lead, conforming to the conventions of dominant narrative forms, including the detective genre, of a central heroic figure with whom the audience identifies. Kelly as "romantic" hero may have developed, in part, because of his highly-publicized nude shots, male nudity still a rarity in either American film or television. But, as is regularly noted, David Caruso isn't traditionally handsome or stereotypical romantic lead "material." The character's manner—his nurturing and supportive qualities—rather than any physical attributes, appear to have created his rapid and widespread popularity, including a solid appeal among women viewers.⁴

Kelly is given to acts of kindness and gestures of compassion. He is intensely protective of his friends, and sensitive to their needs and feelings. The character depicted is a version of an idealized '90s man. But simultaneously, these qualities also represent Kelly's flaws. As a cop, Kelly—the figure of compassion and the arbiter of moral behavior—lies to, threatens and, on occasion, roughs up witnesses,

informants and suspects. His "good cop" routine is more chilling than Sipowicz's bullying, up-front intimidation because Kelly coerces people by seeming to be on their side—precisely by appearing to act out of compassion for them, and so calls into question what is sincerity on his part and what is performance.

His relationships with women elaborate the downside to his positive attributes of sensitivity and loyalty. He interferes, overprotects, and is unable to allow others sufficient independence. The decision to end their marriage was his ex-wife's, not his, a result of feeling constrained by his telling her what to do and how to run her life. In one storyline between the two,⁵ Laura Hughes Kelly (Sherry Stringfield), an Assistant District Attorney, approaches Kelly because she feels she is being followed. Her suspicions prove correct, but prior to discovering this, and in the process of Kelly's checking on Laura's suspicions, tension between the two occurs. Laura accuses Kelly of using the situation to intrude upon her life, particularly in her burgeoning relationship with a pediatrician. The narrative is inconclusive on the accuracy of Laura's accusations: Kelly could be using the situation as pretext to learn more about her new lover, or she could, as he accuses in return, be misreading and overreacting to his genuine efforts to help her.

More conclusive, however, is Kelly's response when he learns of the death threat to Laura.



David Caruso as John Kelly and Amy Brenneman as Janice Licalsi in *NYPD BLUE* (Twentieth Century Fox)

Confirmation of her fears of being followed is made when Zeppo Marchansky (Leland Orser), the detectives' wire-tapped informant in another case, is discovered to be the person hired to carry out the contract on Laura. As soon as Zeppo leaves the revelatory prison meeting, Kelly punches him in the face, knocking him out cold. In the following scene, Zeppo's lawyer threatens to file assault charges against Kelly. The dialogue has been transcribed from the episode as aired.

KELLY

Your client slipped.

SIPOWICZ

He fell on his face on the slippery ice.

ATTORNEY

I guess it's no holds barred, right? As long as you know you're the good guys.

Subsequently, Laura confronts Kelly again about interfering in her private life. He angrily insists he will no longer become involved in her personal concerns.

KELLY

Laura, you're upset. Okay, two minutes ago you found out you were the subject of a hit and now you're in my face about invading your privacy, okay. You came to me, remember? The next time you get into trouble, you go ask this doctor you're seeing for help.

LAURA

You're totally out of line.

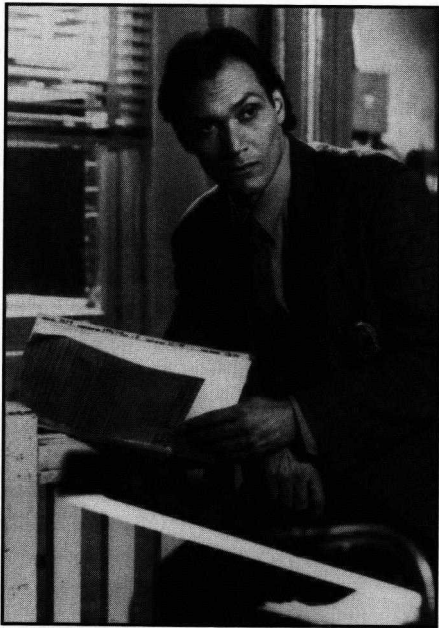
KELLY

Why don't you take off. Take off and beat that uptown traffic [a class-based reference to her new lover who, unlike Kelly, lives in Manhattan].

Later, during a conversation with Sipowicz, Kelly adamantly reiterates his vow of non-involvement in Laura's life. Yet, despite his heated insistence, the next and final scene of the episode finds Kelly at Rikers Prison. As he is let in to see the Oliva brothers (George Alvarez and Carlos Palomino), the two men responsible for putting out the contract on Laura, Kelly overturns a table and painfully, judging by their expressions, pins the Olivas under it, physically and verbally threatening them. Scene and show end with a shot of Kelly walking away, back to camera, his mission completed.

Kelly's actions indicate, on the one hand, the depths of his feelings for Laura, but they also reveal his deepest flaw: a suffocating overprotectiveness. Despite his repeated avowals to let Laura fight her own battles, he continues to fight those battles on her behalf, without her permission or even her knowledge.

Punching Zeppo out and physically roughing up the Olivas raises issues around professional ethics, for instance, in how Kelly and Sipowicz lie so glibly to Zeppo's lawyer about the incident, *knowing* they can get away with it, *knowing* it's his word against theirs. The two protect themselves, and protect their own, as indicated by Sipowicz's immediate confirmation of Kelly's



Jimmy Smits as Bobby Simone in *NYPD BLUE*
(Twentieth Century Fox)

version of events. Similar attitudes carry through to Kelly's protectiveness towards Laura and towards women in general. On the one hand, he represents concerns surrounding contemporary debates on gender—a previously under-valued emphasis on emotional codes such as sensitivity to the needs of others. On the other hand, he symbolizes an old-fashioned, “chivalrous” protectiveness, more in keeping with the detective format and other male-identified genres such as Westerns. His character is informed by these conflicting tendencies, in a search for balance, similar to Sipowicz's, between the values of a traditional moral code and the imperatives of a changing world and what its newer (for them) personal codes imply.

Bobby Simone

The introduction of the Bobby Simone (Jimmy Smits) character during *NYPD Blue*'s second season posed certain levels of risk to a successful and popular, but new, series. Institutional caution and concern, as well as an attempt to carefully “manage” the transition, is evidenced in the delineation of the

new lead. The character depicted suggests a reduction in the risk-taking that had previously been one of the series' hallmarks. Simone returns more closely to the traditional generic hero of police dramas—self-contained, isolated, and whose power resides in his self-reliance and personal resiliency. Simone is both tougher than Sipowicz, and simultaneously, more compassionate than Kelly. As a character, he veers towards the unified entity of “hero”: all things to all people.

A comparison of the Kelly-Sipowicz relationship to the Simone-Sipowicz team points to production-imposed constraints. Sipowicz's initial mistrust of Simone, when he replaces his old partner Kelly (never referred to by name but through phrases such as “the other guy”⁶), is parallel to and eases the audience through its own “period of adjustment.” While a clever strategy, of equal significance is what occurs to Sipowicz's established character in the process. Simone's first appearance is made in the fifth show of the second season.⁷ The episode opens with Sipowicz in the locker room, trying on a pair of reading glasses, price tag still hanging from them. His embarrassment at requiring glasses is made evident by his quick removal of them when he hears someone at the locker room door—Simone's entrance. The episode ends with the two working at their respective desks. Sipowicz takes the glasses out of his pocket and puts them on.

SIPOWICZ

I've got to wear glasses now.

SIMONE

It's all the paperwork, man.

SIPOWICZ

Yeah, I just need them for reading.

Simone is the first and only other person in whose presence Sipowicz will wear the new glasses, a sign that their bonding process is beginning. However, the choice of reading glasses as “bonding material” simultaneously indicates a marginalization of Sipowicz's character as top cop in the face of Simone's presence, the older detective ceding ground to the power of the new, younger man.

Early in the same episode, Adrienne Lesniak (Justine Miceli) is taken hostage, at gunpoint, by a former boyfriend, Jimmy Abruzzo (Bruce Nozick). When Adrienne manages to push him away, Lieutenant Art Fancy (James McDaniel) jumps in, struggling with Jimmy, able to hold his own but not wrest the gun away. Two shots go off, prompting Sipowicz to join in. Jimmy, however, manages to land a kick, knocking Sipowicz back and out of the way. Sipowicz bumps hard into a filing cabinet, injuring his back. Now Simone runs in, the force and immediacy of his action emphasized by a low, direct-to-camera angle as he rushes into the fray, successfully bringing Jimmy down—his first act on the job.

Unlike the earlier Kelly-Sipowicz pairing, this is much less a case of recognizing that each partner brings a particular set of skills to the mix, but Simone proving, in repeated dramatic incidents, that he encompasses *all* of them. He is simultaneously tough, compassionate—and right. Whereas Kelly could frequently defer to Sipowicz's greater experience and policing savvy without undermining his own proficiency as a cop, Simone must be seen to match each of Sipowicz's skills, one by one, via his own talents and by the move towards rendering Sipowicz's character "over the hill." In the second season, Simone is not permitted the comparable professional deference Kelly frequently displayed towards Sipowicz. Kelly was given the latitude to view and treat Sipowicz as his mentor, as the first and only partner he has had since getting his detective shield. Simone, in contrast, is restricted to being all things, replacing or bettering Kelly's compassion, matching or bettering Sipowicz's toughness, as his character juggles the challenge, and false notion, of "unified" being.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Narrative concerns in traditional police dramas are embedded in a strict moral code founded upon socially sanctioned concepts of justice: a system based upon the preservation of established law and order. Within this framework, the function of the hero(es)-detective(s) is to ensure the continuation of a moral order based on such a concept of justice. The hero-detective is a representative of the institutions of juridical protection, and as such, moral authority is embedded in him/her.

In *NYPD Blue's* first season, in contrast, the challenges posed often originate internally, self-provoked by the show's central hero-detectives. So while Kelly and Sipowicz must fight traditional and expected criminal elements, solving the case and thereby reinstating justice (in a genre in which solving the case and bringing to justice are interchangeable phrases/ concepts), they are also consistently forced to examine their own roles in that spectrum, and repeatedly found wanting.

An episode titled "Zeppo Marks Brothers," which deals with the police and legal system's treatment of witnesses, opens as Kelly and Sipowicz drag Nicky (Robert Cicchini), a material witness on one of their cases, into the station. A very frightened Nicky is wearing a paper bag over his head in order to conceal his identity. The detectives have just recaptured him after he escaped from a motel where he was being held in protective custody. As the ensuing conversation among the three men makes clear, Nicky took off in terror at the prospect of being killed for testifying before a grand jury as a witness to a murder committed by organized crime figures. As Nicky makes equally clear, he believes Kelly and Sipowicz are responsible for the danger he is in by repeatedly lying to him and setting him up (originally Nicky came forward anonymously). Sipowicz's response to this is, "Hey bright eyes, you want anonymous don't use your own phone. You know we trace incoming calls here." Sipowicz accompanies his words with taps to the side of his head to indicate Nicky's lack of smarts. When a disinterested Kelly tries to reassure Nicky, "You're not going to die. You're going to testify and that is it," Nicky's response is:

NICKY

I don't believe a word out of your mouth,
Kelly. Oh just come in and ID the man, Nicky,
pick him out of a lineup. You don't have to

(CONTINUED)

NICKY (CONT'D)

go to the grand jury. I come in, I make the ID. Two days later, boom, oh Nicky, our other evidence fell out. You gotta come in and testify. And when I say I won't do that you guys make me a material witness and throw me in a civil jail.

Kelly's and Sipowicz's attitudes, ranging from amusement at Nicky's fear to impatient forbearance, further indict them. Throughout the conversation, the bulk of which takes place in an interrogation room, both detectives sit in profile to the camera, turned away from Nicky or rarely looking at him, indifferent to his terror. During the sequence, Kelly is often turned two-thirds away from the camera as he works on something written, a report presumably. Midway through the conversation, Sipowicz picks up a book. They never indicate sympathy, but rather treat Nicky's fear as if it is paranoid overreaction, something they must, grudgingly, put up with.

In the following sequence, Kelly and Sipowicz hand Nicky over to two police officers from the District Attorney's office under whose surveillance Nicky originally escaped and who are to watch over him until he is to testify in forty-eight hours. After Nicky is taken away, the detectives verify their unsympathetic and arrogant attitudes towards their witness in a private exchange:

KELLY

Calling that tip in is probably the only good thing that guy's ever done in his life and it winds up jamming him up.

SIPOWICZ

Not like he had much of a life to ruin.

This is, of course, the last time we see Nicky alive.

When this story line is taken up again, one scene later, Kelly and Sipowicz arrive at the scene of Nicky's murder. Nicky, who escaped from the D.A. police by jumping out of their car, met his girlfriend, Kimmy (Anna Gunn), in a bar and, when they left together, he was shot down. The presence of the D.A. detectives at the murder scene sparks an altercation between them and the Kelly/Sipowicz team.

SIPOWICZ

You got this guy killed.

D.A. COP

I think you got him killed.

SIPOWICZ

Oh I got him killed, huh, you prick? I got him killed?

D.A. COP

All he could talk about was how you and Kelly lied to him. Made him testify.

Kelly steps in between a very angry Sipowicz and the D.A. cop, continuing the argument himself, with equal anger.

D.A. COP

How he knew he was going to be taken out, which it looks to me is exactly what happened.

KELLY

Hey, shut up and get in your car....This is your screw-up. This is your mess. If you know what's good for you, get in the car.

SIPOWICZ

We didn't kill nobody, pal. We're not the ones that let him escape, alright.

The D.A. detectives drive away, but the point about Kelly's and Sipowicz's complicity in Nicky's death has been successfully established (Sipowicz himself, in his final comment, raising the stakes from who "got" him killed, to who killed him). This is further solidified by the final shots of the scene. Kelly and Sipowicz return to the site of Nicky's body, at the base of a set of stairs. They stop at the top of the stairs and, together, look down. We see the reverse shot of Nicky's bullet-ridden and bleeding body. This view of Nicky's body, linked to their two-shot, works less to establish the criminal act the two must avenge within concepts of justice—this week's case to be solved—but rather, to confirm their own guilt in its occurrence. These final shots also merge their anger at the D.A. cops with their feelings of guilt. The question, how responsible are they for Nicky's death? has been raised, but neither of the two central characters are willing to acknowledge their guilt in moral terms, or their feelings of guilt in emotional terms, resorting instead to anger and attribution of blame elsewhere.

From here, this story line repeats itself with Kimmy, Nicky's girlfriend, replacing Nicky in a virtually identical situation as reluctant, terrified witness, realistically fearful for her own safety, non-compliant as a result of personal risk and better judgment. Kelly and Sipowicz must now address the same issues about the handling of witnesses, ethical police behavior, conflicts between solving a case and the treatment of individuals—the demands of justice versus the reality of human lives. But they must do so with the stakes raised as a result of Nicky's death, and because Kimmy is a character towards whom the audience, as well as Kelly and Sipowicz, feel sympathetic. Their cold, unfeeling treatment of Nicky has been put to the test via his murder, bringing into question their attitude toward him as a "witness," that is, as a means to a legal end rather than as a person.

When Kimmy is brought in to identify Nicky's killer in a lineup, Kelly, Sipowicz, and Laura, as Assistant District Attorney, are all present. At the last moment, Kimmy gets scared and backs down from making the identification because she believes, as happened with Nicky, that once she does so, they can force her to go to the grand jury as a material witness. Kelly takes Laura aside for a private conversation, pressuring her to convince Kimmy into making the identification:

KELLY

You've got to sell this girl on the fact that she's not going to have to testify for the grand jury.

LAURA

And how am I going to do that?

KELLY

Any way you want, you're comfortable, but I think she has an excellent chance not to go.

LAURA

John, I'm not going to do this. If this guy doesn't testify and he doesn't give you the Olivas, believe me, my boss is going to make her go to the grand jury, he's going to get something out of this.

KELLY

We can't flip this guy unless we get him ID'ed and we can't get him ID'ed unless you talk to this girl and reassure her.

LAURA

I'm not comfortable doing that.

Kelly finalizes the conversation with a brusque, "Okay," as he walks off in frustration. There is then an abrupt cut to the next scene in which Sylvia Costas (Sharon Lawrence), also an Assistant District Attorney, convinces Kimmy to make the identification exactly as Kelly had requested of Laura, by assuring Kimmy that she, Sylvia, is to be trusted and that Kimmy will not have to testify. Sylvia's reassurances are intercut with shots of Kelly and Sipowicz standing silently together, almost identical in their blue shirts, ties, and smug looks. This sequence confirms that their method of keeping their promise to Kimmy is via purposefully deceiving her, in essence playing a crap shoot in which the wager at risk is Kimmy's safety.

In the instance of this storyline, Kelly and Sipowicz manage to get the hired killer to confess to and testify against those who hired him, and Kimmy is off the hook. In this instance. As if to emphasize the point, when the two detectives say good-bye to Kimmy, she asks:

KIMMY

You were going to make me testify, weren't you?

KELLY

It's our job to clear the case. If you're in a position to help us do that, we gotta get you to do that. But telling you the truth is always our first choice.

KIMMY

And if you can't do that, you're gonna lie.

KELLY

We gotta clear the case.

It is possible to argue that Kelly and Sipowicz are caught in a Catch-22 situation between the demands of their job as custodians of law and order and the restrictions placed upon them by legal safeguards, uncooperative citizens, and so on, a theme taken up in other police-based dramas. But the narrative works to align audience empathy with Kimmy and away from Kelly and Sipowicz too consistently to make this an entirely convincing read. Dialogue, camera, and *mise-en-scène* all explicitly render Kelly and Sipowicz culpable in the train of events, rather than being caught in the constraints of a system that makes it impossible to "do the right thing" in the demands of their office. Their complicity ranges from their indifference, condescension, and outright callous ill-treatment of Nicky (who was only expressing reasonable, and, as subsequent events prove, realistic

fears) to repeated verification that they have knowingly lied to both Nicky and Kimmy, to their willingness, despite Nicky's fate, to place Kimmy in the same danger.

Throughout the Nicky-Kimmy storyline, Kelly's and Sipowicz's deceitful behavior is certainly ethically questionable, and hardly a "pure" pursuit of justice, especially given that it is the witnesses' lives which are placed at risk, not the detectives' own, examples of the very lives which it is their professional mandate to protect. As Kelly's final exchange with Kimmy makes evident ("We gotta clear the case"), the demands of the job come first, prioritizing professional concerns above the welfare or safety of individuals involved, and before any ethical considerations or dilemmas. For Kelly and Sipowicz, which side of the moral equation they come down on is clear. But the narrative is framed in such a way that we, the audience, are not led to view this as the same easy or clear-cut "right" decision. We're not positioned to believe it's the clearly wrong decision either, but rather, the episode has outlined the ethical ambiguities and human toll of the situation.

If Kelly and Sipowicz are let off the hook by being allowed to "win" the case, at least as far as Kimmy, if not Nicky, is concerned, they are permitted no easy or heroic way out. They don't, for instance, come to see the error of their ways and undergo a moral or personal redemption, in the traditional formula, and as the early scene at the site of Nicky's murder suggests they might, a result of their guilt in both the ethical and emotional senses. If Kelly and Sipowicz are let off the hook as the show's hero-cops, by virtue of the situation with Kimmy ending happily, in another sense, and in contrast to Laura who has similar professional demands at stake, they have come down on the wrong side of the issue. Perhaps by making a clear-cut decision over a much more complex situation, by seeing ambiguous ethical and professional considerations in black and white terms, by choosing too simply, too easily. The characters' decision to opt for clearing the case, for a binary version of right and wrong and the prioritizing of abstract concepts of justice over individual and situational considerations, makes their moral code apparent and renders visible the terms by which it operates.

THE PERSONAL

In *NYPD Blue's* initial season, more screen time and narrative attention is devoted to working out relationships and achieving a state of emotional order than is spent in the business of policing law and order.⁸ The show revolves around what have traditionally been considered women's concerns (and the stuff of women's genres, such as melodrama): the realm of relationships and emotional issues—how one interacts with other people, how to confront one's own fears and personal obstacles.

In an episode titled "Good Time Charlie," Sipowicz meets Sylvia Costas' family for the first time. Early portions of the show focus on Sipowicz's nervousness at the prospect of the occasion, a birthday party for Sylvia's father. Sipowicz's anxiety is well-founded, or perhaps self-fulfilling, as the encounter and subsequent events prove disastrous.

When the two arrive at the party, it is evident Sylvia's entire family knows Sipowicz is a recovering alcoholic. Much fuss is made at the outset about not drinking in front of him although Sipowicz insists it's not a problem. Shots within the party sequence stress people talking, laughing—and drinking. During a private conversation, Sylvia's father, Kostas Costas (Joe Greco), talks to Sipowicz about having emigrated from Greece, worked his way up in the States, and how much Sylvia, his only child, means to him. Then, in the portion of the conversation that seems to trigger Sipowicz's subsequent difficulties, Kostas continues:

COSTAS

Andreas, I do not ask what your intentions are, eh? Whatever they are, they are your own business.

SIPOWICZ

I have good intentions.

COSTAS

This is your business, your intentions for Sylvia.

SIPOWICZ

My intentions are good, real good. The best.

COSTAS

If you ask for her hand, it's your own schedule, huh?

Kostas calls Sylvia over, proposing a toast to her happiness and to Sipowicz, the man who has made her happy. Sipowicz takes a small sip from a glass of ouzo, and then puts the glass down, out of his reach. Soon afterwards, Sylvia is called away on a work-related matter but arranges to join Sipowicz at his place later.

When Sylvia arrives at Sipowicz's apartment, he is obviously drunk and very disheveled—wearing an undershirt, his pants unbelted and partly unzipped. He has shattered the screen of his TV in anger and is verbally abusive, shouting at her to, "Just get the hell out of here." Sipowicz emphasizes what has upset him, and triggered his drinking bout, as he continues, "Go on back to those happy-go-lucky bunch of moron shepherders. Asking me what my intentions are." Sylvia, as Sipowicz heaps abuse on her, is silent, shaken, and crying until, at this stage, she turns and leaves his apartment.

The extent of Sipowicz's anger is shocking—to Sylvia and to the viewer. Nothing has occurred between them, either that evening or in their relationship, that would explain, if not justify, his behavior towards her. The problem is solely Sipowicz's.

Despite his mistreatment of Sylvia, two factors mitigate against the audience shutting off to Sipowicz as a character. The first is that the narrative contextualizes the source of Sipowicz's poor behavior. Prior to the party, two scenes (one with Sylvia; one with Kelly) are devoted to Sipowicz's anticipation of the event precisely to establish his nervousness at the prospect of meeting her family for the first time. He is anxious that Sylvia's family will not find him "good enough." Sipowicz says to Kelly, "They're probably expecting some young hot-shot D.A. type. I walk in." At the party, the emphasis on his alcoholism brings that home to him like a public announcement of his failings. The stakes are then raised through Kostas' comments concerning Sipowicz's intentions, adding pressure in an area in which he already has self-doubts due to his divorce and strained relations with his son. For all his tough, macho stances, his "attitude" and intolerance of authority, Sipowicz is a deeply insecure person, driven as much by his weaknesses and vulnerabilities as by professional competence. So, unable to cope with the pressures that his relationship with Sylvia provokes, Sipowicz gets drunk and pushes her away.

The second narrative element that maintains audience empathy for Sipowicz, simultaneous to shock and anger at his mistreatment of Sylvia, is that he lingers late at work in order to catch Sylvia on her way out to apologize in what becomes a moving scene between them. Sipowicz's apology doesn't excuse his behavior, but rather acknowledges his failings and outlines the fears and inadequacies he must yet confront.

The subjects chosen and the specific ways they are treated in *NYPD Blue* have as much in common with women's programming, and what historically have been considered women's concerns, as they do with police dramas' traditional focus on the imposition of externalized moral order and authority. Such conflicting tendencies and struggles can be seen in the complexities of Kelly's relationship with Janice Licalsi (Amy Brenneman). Their relationship is derailed when Janice shoots Angelo Marino (Joe Santos), a mob figure, and his chauffeur. Janice has been blackmailed to work for Marino in order to protect her father, also a cop who has been on Marino's payroll for years. The shooting occurs because Marino orders Janice to kill Kelly, pushing her to the final limit. She sees no other way out of her desire to protect herself, her father, and her lover. As the storyline progresses, Janice's character and her predicament engage the audience's sympathy.

When Kelly learns of the murders, and against Janice's wishes (she is in love with him), he breaks off the relationship. In doing so, Kelly apparently takes the moral high road. As an honest cop, committed to his job and, ostensibly, to the concepts for which it stands, it would be difficult for him to date a murderer. Yet three episodes later⁹ he becomes involved with Janice once again, and shortly afterwards makes the commitment to take their relationship "as far as we can."¹⁰

How Kelly chooses to deal with the knowledge of her crime is as significant as his decision to continue seeing her. He does not report it nor tell anyone else about it (except much later and only partially, to Sipowicz). Further, Kelly cannot manage to distance himself from Janice's problems. He wants to take care of her, to solve her problems for her, to tell her what to do, despite her adamant insistence that she will handle the situation, and her life, on her own.

In an episode titled "Ice Follies,"¹¹ Janice is again blackmailed, this time by another crime figure, Tommy Linardi (Anthony Powers), who, by coming into possession of Marino's personal notebook, has found evidence of Janice's previous service to Marino. Kelly, having become aware of the new problem, presses Janice, while they are in bed together and against her strong opposition, to tell him what is going on.

KELLY

You're involved with these people again, aren't you? Trust you, Janice?

JANICE

Well, it's my problem.

KELLY

Your problem? Trust you but you can lie to me anytime you want, huh? We can have a life, but you don't have to tell me the truth.

Janice, in response, tells him about the renewed blackmail. Here Kelly, by questioning her desire to be with him without complete honesty between them, succeeds in getting her to "confess" to him. His proffered solution is for Janice to call up Richie (Larry Romano), the underling blackmailing her, and Kelly will "meet" with him, "handle" him on her behalf, just as he "handled" the Olivas for Laura. Janice refuses, insisting she will find a way to deal with the situation herself, telling him to get out, "I want you to go get your clothes, go away, and let *me* figure out how *I'm* going to deal with this." The scene closes with Kelly's line, "Janice, don't get in bed with these people again, I'm telling you." Given the scene's sexual intimacy, this broadens the scope of those posing problems for Janice as a result of her getting in bed with them.

Janice's solution is to go to Inspector Lasterza (Tom Towles), the head of the Organized Crime Unit, and confess to Marino's killing, thereby ending the ability of organized crime figures to blackmail her (she is no longer motivated to protect her father, he having committed suicide). When Janice tells Kelly she has gone to Lasterza, he is furious, "You went to Lasterza. Lasterza the asshole . . . He's going to eat you up, spit you out, get what he wants and you're going to end up in jail." Not only does he wish to run her life, but he makes it clear he believes the decision she has made is wrong. The implication is that he could do a better job than she, undermining both her responsibility for herself and her competence. Their profession mandates the continual resolving of problems via the solving of cases, a concept Kelly well understands in terms of his own existence. Yet his need to overprotect, his drive to be the hero responsible for others, robs her of the same opportunity and autonomy.

Ironically, what separates the couple is when Kelly gets what he has wished for, the opportunity to rescue Janice from her predicament, arising in the form of Marino's personal notebook falling into Kelly's hands. He notifies Janice that he will leave the book on his desk prior to vouching it

in as evidence, giving her the opportunity to tear out the page with her name on it, thereby destroying all proof of her involvement with Marino. Kelly: "The notebook is on my desk. Now I'm not telling you how to run your life, I'm just telling you where the notebook is, you do what you gotta do."¹² When Janice appears upstairs, Kelly gets up and leaves his desk, and the notebook, unattended.

Kelly succeeds in "rescuing" her, as Janice herself acknowledges during a later conversation in a bar: "I gotta admit, I didn't see all the angles." However, doing so costs them the relationship. Janice continues, "I kept thinking about how it was with us and how maybe we could make it like it was before. But we can't, can we Johnnie? I don't know how long it would take, if we were together, you'd start to hate me for what you did for me." Kelly's illegal action costs them the relationship (until the second season and Kelly's imminent departure from the series) because it places Kelly's self-image as a good cop at risk, one who may bend the rule as exigencies require but who, in his own eyes, does so in a larger attempt to uphold the moral order. Here, Kelly chooses fidelity to the personal over the professional, but significantly, the narrative has depicted the decision as difficult.

In contrast, the second season with its introduction of Simone's character is accompanied by a decrease in such moral/emotional conflicts. In a single episode, "The Bank Dick,"¹³ Simone manages to be instrumental in the capture of a serial rapist, defend a cop being subjected to gay-bashing in another precinct, and begin the process of convincing Diane Russell (Kim Delaney), fellow detective and the woman he is seeing, that she is an alcoholic. In the rape storyline, Simone and Sipowicz must locate a serial rapist who has disappeared. Their leads are two accessories in the crimes. During interrogation sequences, the detectives use physical intimidation to get information from the witnesses. In a certain sense, this pursues the question of professional ethics further than Kelly's and Sipowicz's actions ever did—they lied to and physically threatened witnesses and suspects, but we never saw them cause bodily harm to this extent. However, the serial rapist's depravity is so great that the potential for ethical dilemma is mitigated. In the course of the storyline, the viewer encounters one of his victims in the aftermath of the rape, is introduced to his young niece whom he has habitually molested, and learns that he has abandoned his terminally ill baby. Narrative justification for the cops' excessive conduct is overdetermined by the depravity of the criminal's behavior.

The rape storyline is emblematic of a shift in the series' focus from internal character flaws and a weighing of the conflicts between professional and personal codes of behavior to problems derived from the external world. During the second season, the characters rely on, rather than however tentatively question, the precepts of a familiar moral order in which right and wrong are clearly determinable and they are its arbiters. Simone's and Sipowicz's moral and emotional quandaries are minimized, and their role as defenders of justice comes to the fore.

For instance, in the gay-bashing subplot, John Irvin (Bill Brochtrup), a recurring character and an administrative colleague in the precinct, approaches Simone because he and his partner Paul, a police officer in another precinct, have been physically assaulted in what is part of an ongoing campaign of harassment by some of Paul's fellow officers. John, explaining that Paul won't let him file a complaint because the latter isn't out, and afraid of how Paul might deal with the situation otherwise, asks Simone to intervene with him, as a fellow cop, "to help him see his way clear on how he can handle this."

When Simone and Paul meet, Paul is adamantly opposed to Simone's interference, insisting he will handle the situation in his own way. Simone's presumptuous response is to advise Paul to disclose his homosexuality, "Wouldn't one way for you to deal with this be for you to come out?" Paul rejects the suggestion, along with any further intervention on Simone's part. Despite Paul's objections, Simone calls in the two cops responsible for the harassment, threatening to take action against them if anything further should happen to either Paul or John. When Paul learns what Simone has done, Paul confronts him. Simone's response is once again not limited to advice on how to deal with fellow police officers, but extends to instructions on how Paul should best manage his homosexuality.

SIMONE

Paul, maybe you want to figure how to work your life out instead of letting this blow you apart.

PAUL

You don't know what the hell you're talking about.

SIMONE

You want to stay in the closet, don't walk down the street holding hands with your boyfriend. You want to come out, something like this happens to you, then you bring charges up.

Simone's over-the-line interference into others' lives and into issues over which he has no first-hand knowledge or experience seems a set-up for self-reflexive examination akin to Kelly's. Yet the narrative works to position Simone's actions as justified in the senses of both right and helpful in four ways. One, because these are unresolved issues in Paul's life causing both him and John pain, that is, Paul is so upset he can't "see his [own] way clear" as John initially suggests; two, because John has requested Simone's intervention; three, because Simone's solutions are depicted as more successful than Paul's might have been; and four, because Simone "earns" his empathetic understanding when, repeatedly taunted about his own sexuality by one of the harassing cops, Simone refuses to respond, leaving them free to believe he too might be gay. In other words, while providing lessons for others, Simone learns nothing from the encounters, least of all about himself.

Finally, in case any doubts remain about the benign nature and intent of Simone's intervention, John comes to thank him, "You bought him time, detective. Talking to those cops, talking to him." John adds that Paul may now seek therapy and asks Simone if he believes that to be a good idea. Then, in a stunning example of too little far too late, Simone states, "I wouldn't be comfortable saying, John. I wouldn't want to get into that." John defers, "I understand. An outsider can only do so much." Simone usurps Paul's right to his own decision-making process, solves his problems for him, and does so without his consent. In addition, the narrative pretext in which John's character is made to request Simone's assistance, undermines John's own abilities to aid Paul, in his capacity as an individual or as Paul's partner. The narrative works to validate rather than criticize such behavior on the part of our hero-cop, existing as he apparently does in a world populated by the helpless and misguided.

The evolution in *NYPD Blue's* narrative strategies in the second season might have been the result of external pressures. Jimmy Smits' replacement of David Caruso may have seemed to warrant a greater reliance on familiar generic conceptions and formulaic audience-to-character identification, rather than the previous invigoration of playing on the margins. However, the series' narrative shifts also afford an opportunity to point up the limitations in traditional formulations of the "hero-cop," that all-knowing, all-powerful, entity. In the dominantly unquestioned belief that he can be all things to all people, we see his arrogance of imposing solutions on other individuals' problems.

CONCLUSION

In questioning the validity of placing worldly criteria above personal values, and searching for a balance between moral and emotional codes—the conflict most frequently faced by first season characters—*NYPD Blue* can be viewed as an exploration of changing notions of masculinity. The main characters straddle the dilemma, one foot in each world, hanging onto the familiar safety of

the codes of justice, while testing the dangerous (to some) waters of the integration of self and other. The latter has traditionally been considered more properly the often disparaged realm of women's melodrama and women's concerns, a world more comfortably inhabited by Laura Kelly, Sylvia Costas, and Janice Licalsi. Although their struggles, particularly in the case of Laura and Janice, focus on the maintenance of their separate identities while operating in a professional arena dominated by men and male codes of behavior, the show is primarily concerned with the conflicts of personal/professional discourses facing the central male characters.

NYPD Blue, at its outset, can be viewed as a shift in the generic paradigm at the level of narrative strategies—although encasing such shifts within the reassurance of the stylistic familiarities of the police drama. Further, it is possible to argue that there is an efficaciousness to *NYPD Blue's* approach of embedding gender-inclusive discursive concerns into generically traditional formal coding, and so rendering its intentions less visible and therefore for some—presumably male viewers in particular—more palatable. This is not to suggest that genres (or gender) are ideologically neutral, but rather to question how gendered characteristics in representation are determined and hierarchized. *NYPD Blue* is not at all gender neutral. Indeed, it is its early, opposite ability to encompass highly-gendered concerns which, precisely, calls the criteria of its generic foundation into account and by so doing reinvigorates the genre.

Notes:

1. There is an agreed upon list of acceptable language between the show's creators and ABC's Standards and Practices Department in which, for instance, "asshole" and "dick" are permissible, but "fuck" and any religious-based epithets such as "Goddamn" or "Jesus Christ" are not. Lisa Schwarzbaum, "Top Cops," *Entertainment Weekly*, Fall, 1993, p. 25; James Wilson, "The Filth," *GQ*, February, 1994, p. 35; Andrew Billen, "The Blues Get Even Bluer," *The London Observer*, January 9, 1994. Nudity on *NYPD Blue* does not include full-frontal; women's breasts, without nipples visible, and "rear-view" shots of both men and women are permissible. All of the principal actors' contracts contain a nudity clause. David Rensin, "NYPD Blue's Dennis Franz: The Cop You Hate to Love," *TV Guide*, March 5-11, 1994, p. 14.
2. *NYPD Blue* was a ratings success at its outset, solidifying a position as the highest-rated new drama of the season (Steve Coe, "NYPD Blue: rocky start, on a roll," *Broadcasting and Cable*, November 1, 1993, p. 18, and Brian Lowry, "AD Coin Rolls to Youth," *Variety*, December 27, 1993, p. 34). It also registered a particularly strong showing among the "desirable" demographic of eighteen-to forty-nine-year-olds (Stuart Miller, "'Blue' debut arresting," *Variety*, October 4, 1993, p. 30, and "Blue' Tuesday," *Variety*, December 6, 1993, p. 17). The show's popularity was aided by an almost uniformly positive critical response. The show's controversial status, while an asset in terms of audience numbers, caused difficulties in two respects. First, a number of ABC affiliates initially refused to air the program because of its "provocative content" (Miller, *Variety*, p. 30). The second difficulty, associated with the show's controversial status, was reduced advertising revenue. Despite its rating's success and desirable demographics, the program's advertising slots were sold, initially, for well under the rates received by comparable shows, nor was each episode fully sponsored in terms of number of ads per hour (Lowry, *Variety*, p. 34).
3. Peter Humm and Paul Stignant, "The Masculine Fiction of William McIlvanney" in Derek Longhurst, ed., *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 96.
4. For instance, quoting Wendi Haldeman, a social worker and mother of two, on Caruso's career since departing *NYPD Blue*, "It was definitely the character. Caruso is not that great-looking. His looks became appealing with the character," Debra Nussbaum, "Career Corner," *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, October 15, 1995, p. 6.
5. "Zeppo Marks Brothers" was written by Ann Biderman and directed by Michael M. Robin. Episode stories by David Milch and Steven Bochco unless otherwise specified. The series was created by, and its executive producers are, Steven Bochco and David Milch.
6. For instance, in "Double Abandando," written by Ted Mann, Gardner Stern, and Burton Armus, story by Walon Green, and directed by Andy Wolk.
7. "Simone Says" was written by David Milch and Walon Green, and directed by Gregory Hoblit.
8. For instance, in "Good Time Charlie" (written by Ted Mann and Ann Biderman, directed by Gregory Hoblit) of the four subplots, three are personal. In "Zeppo Marks Brothers," what begins as a complicated professional story line, merges into the personal via John Kelly and his relationship with his ex-wife, Laura.
9. "Personal Foul" was written by Burton Armus and directed by Bradley Silberling.
10. "NYPD Lou" was written by Ted Mann and directed by Gregory Hoblit.
11. Written by W.K. Scott Meyer and directed by Dennis Dugan.
12. "Up On The Roof" was written by George D. Putnam and directed by Michael M. Robin.
13. Written by Victor Bumbalo and directed by Michael M. Robin.