

The Person Behind the Uniform

How the Dutch TV series Bureau Maastricht and Bureau Rotterdam Reinforce
Dominant Media Discourses and Stereotypes of Crime and Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

What happens if the public's primary source of knowledge about crime and law enforcement comes not from experience, but from a mediated reality? The topic of policing and crime has captured public attention for decades. As early as 1951, the American crime drama *Dragnet* was produced with direct involvement from the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department), setting an example for collaborations between the media and the police. Since then, crime shows have continued to affect how audiences understand crime, justice, and policing. As research has shown, much of society forms views on crime through mediated representations, which significantly shape public perception and trust in the justice system. The issue with these representations is that they often prioritize entertainment over accuracy and rely on dominant discourses, stereotypes, simplified narratives and characters, resulting in biased views about crime and police authority.

This study investigates in what ways the Dutch TV series *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* reinforces and/or subvert dominant media discourses and stereotypes about crime and law enforcement in the Netherlands. The key theoretical concepts that enhance this study include crime and law enforcement, media framing, dominant discourses, narrative structures, character portrayals and stereotypes. To investigate, this study employs Norman Fairclough's (1993) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines selected episodes of *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* in terms of three key categories: narrative structures, character portrayals, and framing techniques. These categories serve as starting points for exploring how meaning is constructed and discursively shaped, as well as how these series contribute to broader societal understandings of policing.

The findings reveal that while the series present a realistic and observational tone, it ultimately reproduces dominant institutional narratives. The narrative structure frames police officers not only as enforcers of the law, but as caregivers and moral agents operating in a chaotic society. Through selective inclusion of public perspectives and heavy reliance on police narration and voice-over commentary, the narrative of the series consistently centers the police's viewpoint. Character portrayals humanize the officers, highlighting their stress, doubts, and emotional labor, while often depicting civilians, particularly suspects or marginalized individuals, as aggressive, irrational, or deviant. Framing techniques further support this bias. Use of police force is justified through calm explanations, racial profiling is neutralized through colorblind discourse, and accusations of discrimination are dismissed as emotional or unfounded. While moments of critique are present, they are often reframed to

reinforce the professionalism and neutrality of the officers. In this way, the series sustain the dominant and hegemonic image of the police as rational, restrained, and necessary, while limiting space for critical engagement with systemic issues such as institutional racism or social inequality.

In conclusion, I argue that *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* contribute to the normalization of police authority and institutional legitimacy through media framing and narrative structures, subtly reinforcing dominant discourses about crime and law enforcement.

KEYWORDS: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Media framing, Dutch law enforcement, Stereotypes, Institutional legitimacy*

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1. Introduction

Crime and justice have long been central themes in television entertainment to capture audience's attention, not only to entertain, but also reflect and influence societal attitudes toward crime and authority. However, the media often presents a distorted reality to capture audience attention (Quinney, 1970, as cited in Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 681). This distorted reality actively forms how people view crime and law enforcement, often reinforcing biases and stereotypes, and uphold dominant ideologies in society (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 683). Therefore, people's view of crime and their support for certain crime policies are significantly impacted by how crime is framed, including how frequently it occurs.

According to research, most of society learns about crime and the justice system through media exposure, rather than firsthand experience (Surette, 2007, as cited in Donovan & Klahm, 2015, p. 1261). Given that many individuals lack direct experience with crime or complete information of crime, they form judgments based on incomplete portrayals and shape their perceptions with limited or inaccurate knowledge (Drakulich, 2013). Similarly, Pickett et al. (2015) highlight how media consumption influence public attitudes toward justice and policy results (as cited in Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 685). Factors influencing these perceptions include personal interactions with officers (Donner et al., 2015), neighborhood characteristics (Reisig & Parks, 2000), and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Peck, 2015, as cited in Graziano, 2019, p. 209).

Since most people rarely interact with police directly, their views are largely shaped by media representations (Surette, 20215, as cited in Donovan & Klahm, 2015, p. 1261). This process connects with media framing of crime and law enforcement. Media framing goes beyond only twisting information, it serves as a powerful tool for legitimizing specific narratives and institutional practices. The media creates specific understandings of crime by selecting certain types of crimes, such as violent or sensational incidents, and portraying them with emotional tones or story structures. This influences public perception of crime's prevalence and severity and informs support for crime policies and practices (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 685).

Nevertheless, it is also argued that, by offering complex representations of law enforcement and crime, these narratives have the potential to challenge dominant discourses (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 684). The framing process significantly shapes dominant discourses, overarching and culturally accepted narratives that define how crime, law enforcement, and justice are understood (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 192). Together, media framing and dominant discourses provide the foundation for understanding how narratives about crime and law enforcement are constructed and disseminated. A dominant discourse relevant to this study is what Dixon (2015) explains as the "ethnic blame discourse" (p. 786). This discourse suggests that White audiences are more likely influenced by portrayals where

ethnic minorities are depicted as perpetrators, while White individuals, including police officers, are shown as victims or heroes.

Characters in crime shows are often depicted as complex figures who must navigate personal struggles while upholding justice, thereby reinforcing familiar stereotypes such as the “tough-but-fair” officer, the moral protector, or the heroic individual fighting against chaos (Denman, 2023, p. 24). These stereotypes work to humanize the police and align them with the viewer's sympathies. In media, stereotypes function as simplified representations that help audiences understand characters or situations. While this can make storytelling more fun and efficient, it often comes at the cost of nuance and accuracy.

Dominant discourses often align with societal power structures, reinforcing narratives that serve institutional interests (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 192). These narratives tend to exaggerate on framing crime as more violent while overlooking systemic issues. Therefore, understanding these dominant discourses is essential for analyzing how crime portrayals shape audience attitudes and perception toward crime and law enforcement. This raises the critical tension concerning whether crime series function as platforms for critique and reflection, or if they largely reinforce societal biases.

In the Netherlands a great example of a trending television series is *Bureau*, a television series that follows the daily operations of police officers, offering viewers an inside into law enforcement practices through a documentary-style format. This series not only shed light on criminal cases, but it also addresses broader societal issues such as cultural diversity, regional identity and trust in law enforcement. However, little is known about the extent to which series challenge or reinforce dominant stereotypes and discourses about crime and law enforcement, particularly in the Netherlands. Therefore, in this research, I seek to address whether the Dutch TV series *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* reinforce and/or subvert dominant media discourses and stereotypes about crime and law enforcement in the Netherlands through their narrative structures, character portrayals, and framing techniques.

I also seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of how media culture reflects, reinforces, and challenges dominant ideologies related to crime and law enforcement. This might add to the fields of media studies and cultural criminology by providing insights into how visual storytelling construct public perceptions of justice, authority, and social norms. Understanding how media representations of crime and law enforcement influence public perceptions and societal attitudes is also societally relevant. In a multicultural and diverse society like the Netherlands, series such as *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam*, shape the narratives of trust in law enforcement, the portrayal of regional and cultural diversity, and the framing of crime. Additionally, the urban-rural contrast enhances the

comparative dimension of the research, allowing an analysis whether dominant discourses and stereotypes shift based on geographical setting and socio-cultural context.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis, I have examined how these series frame dominant discourses and stereotypical representations, with the aim of exploring how television functions as a medium for framing. I argue that *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* appear neutral and realistic because of its documentary style, ultimately reinforcing dominant discourses about policing. Through narrative structure, character portrayal, and framing techniques, the series consistently center the police perspective, presenting officers as rational, empathetic, and heroic figures, while marginalizing or delegitimizing civilian voices, especially those that raise critique about systemic issues like racial profiling. I also argue that this framing naturalizes the authority and legitimacy of the police, subtly shaping public perception by portraying their actions as necessary, objective, and morally justified. In doing so, the series covers structural inequalities and limits critical engagement with law enforcement as an institution.

2. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework underpins the discussion of the key concepts relevant to the research question. These concepts are crime and law enforcement, media framing, dominant discourses, narrative structures, character portrayals and stereotypes. Together, these elements form the analytical lens through which the portrayal of crime and law enforcement in *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* are examined.

2.1 Crime and law enforcement

What is crime? At first glance, crime is often understood as a deliberate and dangerous act, an illegal action punishable by the government (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). However, crime is not only defined by the act itself. It is important to recognize that crime is a socially constructed concept, shaped by the values, norms, and historical context of a particular nation. Legal frameworks reflect these societal standards, which is why what constitutes a crime can vary significantly between countries. An action considered criminal in one nation may be considered acceptable or even lawful in another. For example, some behaviors considered criminal in certain states might be legal or tolerated in others, such as drug use or specific forms of protest. Here, the public opinion on crime and law enforcement is crucial when defining and responding to criminal activity. Citizens' perceptions of safety, trust in the police, and attitudes toward punishment influence how laws are enforced and prioritized.

Law enforcement can be defined in two ways. At first, is what Nurse (2024) describes as the 'narrow' sense of policing and upholding the law. In this narrow sense, policing can be interpreted as that which the police and recognized policing agencies perform. Along with these agencies, the police are responsible for detecting, investigating, and preventing crime. These institutions are part of what is collectively referred to as law enforcement, a system in which members of society are organized and authorized to uphold laws, maintain social order, and protect people and property (Nurse, 2024). In contrast, law enforcement is not just about acts of policing. It is more comprehensive and includes both criminal and civil justice mechanisms, functioning outside the limits of the criminal justice system.

The second way Nurse (2024) refers to is the reinforcement of societal rules and dominant ideologies. When, for instance, societal rules are violated, effective law enforcement is crucial not only to show that society disapproves of this behavior but also to provide punishment through justice mechanisms.

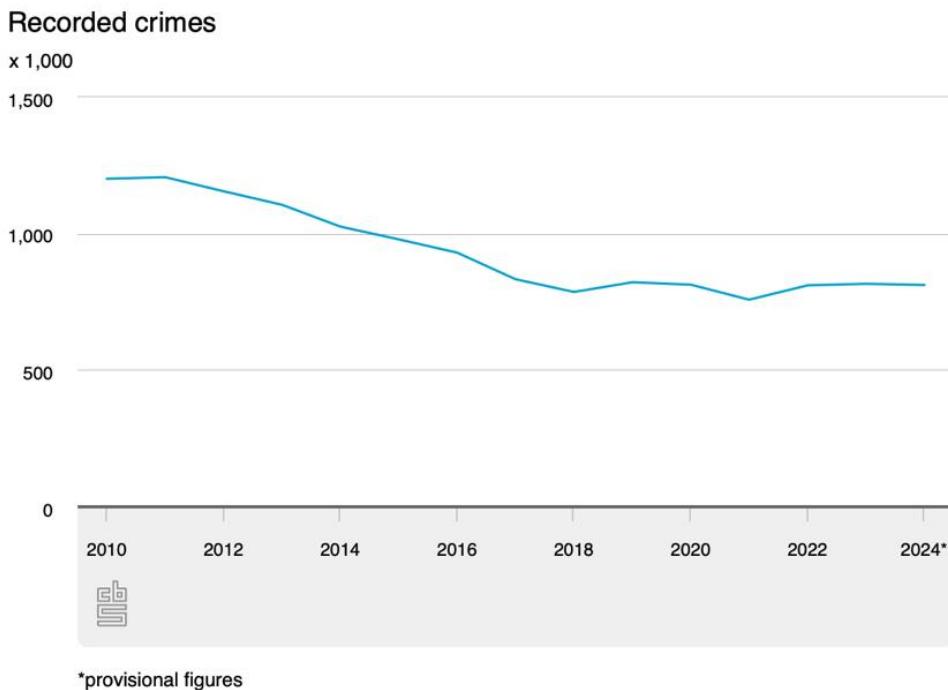
2.1.1 Crime in the Netherlands

The Government of the Netherlands describes crime as something that "can involve violence, sex or drugs but also discrimination, road rage, undeclared work and burglary. Crime is any behavior and any act, activity or event that is punishable by law (Ministerie van

Justitie en Veiligheid, n.d.-b)." This definition seems so logical one could hardly forget that crime in the Netherlands, like other parts of the world, has undergone significant changes, influenced by social, political, and cultural developments. Recent statistics from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) illustrate the shifts in crime patterns.

Figure 2.1

Recorded crimes in The Netherlands from the year 2010 to 2024



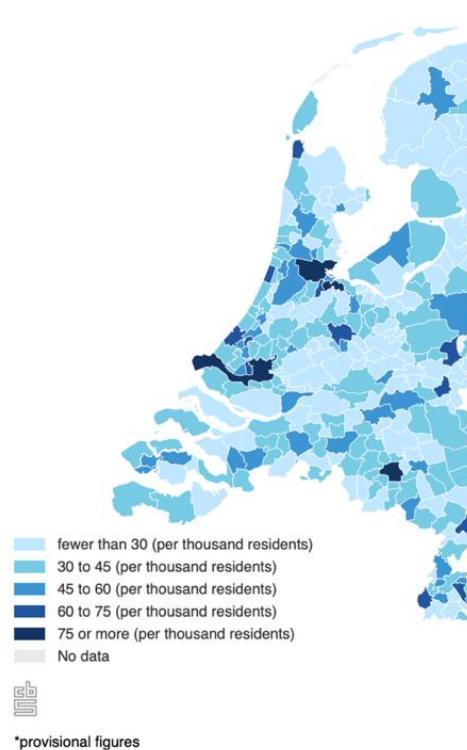
Note. Adapted from "Fewer crimes recorded in 2024," by Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2025, (<https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2025/10/fewer-crimes-recorded-in-2024>). Copyright 2025 by Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.

As reported by CBS (2025), there has been a decline in recorded crimes since 2010. The most significant decreases occurred between 2011 and 2018, after which crime rates have been stabilized over the past six years. While overall numbers have gone down, the types of crimes differ. High-impact crimes such as burglary, violence, robbery and street remained relatively stable. For example, the domestic burglaries per year dropped to 20.000 in 2024, continuing a steady decline since 2014. In contrast, reported violent crimes, including sexual offences, have increased compared to 2023. When looking into crimes involving weapons, there is also an increase of 24% since 2014. However, the number of drug-related crimes stayed stable compared to ten year earlier.

Figure 2.2

Number of Recorded Crimes by Municipality in the Netherlands in 2024

Number of crimes recorded by municipality, 2024*



Note. Adapted from “Fewer crimes recorded in 2024,” by Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2025, (<https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2025/10/fewer-crimes-recorded-in-2024>). Copyright 2025 by Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.

Looking into the municipalities with the most crime, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Eindhoven had the most crimes recorded per 1,000 residents. For the interest of this study, Rotterdam (2) had a total of 81.8 recorded crimes per 1,000 residents and Maastricht (10) 65.8 recorded crimes per 1,000 residents.

Organized crime events and its impact on Dutch society

The Netherlands has experienced several high-profile criminal events in recent years that have significantly shaped public discourse around crime. The assassination of prominent crime reporter Peter R. de Vries shocked the nation in July 2021 when he was shot in Amsterdam after leaving the TV studio of RTL Boulevard, dying days later. Eksi and Sergi (2023) explain this as another shocking event that crossed the line and started a new approach of the Dutch state against organized crime (pp. 120-121). Up to this day, the case around the murder has new developments, such as the arrest of a 39-year-old man from

Curaçao with the suspicion of having a leading role in the murder itself (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2025).

This incident is connected to the Marengo Trial, ongoing since 2019, and centers around multiple murders and attempted murders allegedly ordered by Ridouan Taghi, considered one of the Netherlands' most dangerous criminal leaders and the chieftain of the so-called 'Mocro-Maffia' (Eksi & Sergi, 2023, p.121). The term 'Mocro Maffia' refers to criminal organizations primarily of Moroccan and Antillean descent operating in the Netherlands, linked to international drug trafficking. The trial has exposed the violent nature of drug trafficking networks and has been marked by the murder of the brother of a key witness and the assassination of lawyer Derk Wiersum in 2019. Another event concerned the emerging threats against Crown Princess Amalia in 2022. These threats were reportedly connected to organized crime networks, including Ridouan Taghi (Rebergen, 2022). This forced the princess to abandon living independently as a student in Amsterdam and return to the royal palace.

These events collectively demonstrate the increasing violence of criminal organizations in the Netherlands. The assassination of Peter R. de Vries, the murder of lawyer Derk Wiersum, the incidents connected to Ridouan Taghi, and threats against Princess Amalia represent outstanding attacks on pillars of Dutch society, including the free press, the judicial system, and the royal family. These were not random acts but targeted strikes against individuals perceived as threats to criminal operations. In relations to these events, more often there is spoken of the media and police-fuelled narrative around the Netherlands as a 'narco-state' (Eksi & Sergi, 2023, p. 121). A narco state refers to a country where drug trafficking organizations have become so powerful that they significantly influence or control state institutions, political decisions, and social systems. However, these concerns about becoming a narco-state do not suggest that the Netherlands has reached this status but rather highlight the worrying trends.

Understanding these high-profile crime events is essential, as they provide the real-world context that shapes media representations and public discourse about crime in the Netherlands. These events not only highlight the real threats and violence associated with organized crime, but also influence how media construct narratives around criminality, law enforcement, and social order.

2.1.2 The Dutch media system

A media system refers to the overall structure, organization, and functioning of media institutions and practices within a given country or society. Important to note is that these media systems are not static but characterized by substantial historical change (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 72). The Netherlands, as outlined by professors Hallin and Mancini (2004),

fit primarily within the Democratic Corporatist model. Their model compares media systems with concepts adapted from politics and political sociology that are closely related to the media system.

The Democratic Corporatist model is characterized by a high degree of journalistic professionalism, strong traditions of press freedom, significant state intervention infringing on independence, and a historically pillarized media system with political affiliations. These characteristics have large influence on how crime and law enforcement are represented in the media. Because of its history with depillarization, the Netherlands has a diverse media landscape, allowing for the creation of more neutral/liberal broadcast organizations and differing portrayals, including law enforcement (Hallin & Mancini 2004, p. 166). The strong public broadcasting sector, exemplified by organizations such as NOS or BNN VARA, further reinforces a pluralistic approach by incorporating multiple perspectives in media coverage.

When looking at the role of the state in democratic countries, the state plays a key role in safeguarding pluralism and public interest in media content, which means that the government actively takes ensuring measures. This also allows for high levels of journalist professionalism and ethical standards, promoting accuracy, neutrality, and accounting in news reporting (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 34-36). This means that media coverage of crime often moves beyond sensationalism, aiming at providing deeper analysis of legal, political, and societal dimension. Specifically, the influence of media portrayals extends beyond public perception, they also impact political decision-making. High-profile media coverage of certain crimes can create public pressure for harsher laws and increased surveillance, often resulting in symbolic policy responses rather than evidence-based solutions. For instance, recent concerns about narco-criminality in Dutch ports have stimulated intense media attention and prompted government suppressions, reflecting how media can influence the agenda for political action (Eksi & Sergi, 2023, p.120).

2.1.3 The National Police

In the Netherlands, like in any democratic society, law enforcement plays a central role in maintaining public order and upholding justice. This function is executed by the National Police (Nationale Politie) where the police system is nationally organized to ensure effective and consistent coordination of operations. The police consist of ten regional units and one central unit, each responsible for different tasks. While the regional units focus on local policing, the central unit handles more complex matters such as organized crime and national security (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, n.d.-c).

The Dutch criminal justice system was traditionally known for its stability and humanitarian approach (Pakes, 2004, p. 284). However, since the 1990s, crises such as the assassination of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, the murder of Peter R de Vries in 2021, and further

public unrest have driven a shift toward a stricter policy. This aligns with Garland's (2001) concept of 'crime complex', in which crime is perceived as out of control leading to policies focusing on harsher law enforcement and increased incarceration (as cited in Pakes, 2004, p. 284). Pim Fortuyn and his movement had a great impact on the political discourse in the Netherlands. This as well as the rise of populism reinforced the idea that crime is linked to immigration and government failure what led to stricter immigration and integration policies, closely tied to crime control measures (Pakes, 2004, pp. 289-290).

To address the changing nature of crime, the Netherlands relies on a combination of prevention, enforcement and collaboration. To make the Netherlands less attractive for criminal activity, various government organizations and security specialists are striving to prevent crime by anticipating criminal behavior, as well as investigating and arresting offenders (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, n.d.-a). In this process different partners are involved, including the police, who identify criminal networks, deal with major actors within those networks, and seize criminal proceeds.

Policing styles

When looking more closely at the policing styles in the Netherlands, there seems to be a tension between a care-based policing and the need for more authoritarian measures. Dutch policing is traditionally characterized by a community-oriented approach, emphasizing collaboration, prevention, and visibility in the neighborhoods (Van Lit, 2023). Community policing focuses on building trust between law enforcement and local communities through dialogue, transparency, and responsiveness to local concerns. Officers are encouraged to develop relationships with citizens, schools, and local institutions, with the goal of preventing crime before it occurs and reducing fear within the community.

However, over the past decades, shifts in public discourse, particularly around terrorism, organized crime, and youth violence, have triggered debates about the balance between community policing and more securitized or militarized forms of policing (Van Lit, 2023). Militarized policing refers to strategies that adopt a more hierarchical, force-oriented, and surveillance-driven style, often visible during protests or in high-risk areas (Lemieux, 2023). Although the Netherlands does not show the extreme militarization, seen in some other countries like Mexico or Russia, certain units such as the Dienst Speciale Interventies (DSI) or the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (RNM), demonstrate the readiness for tactical response in crisis situations (Ministerie van Defensie, n.d.).

2.2 Media framing

2.2.1 *Media framing of crime*

The media does not simply reflect reality, it actively constructs it through processes of selection, emphasis, and interpretation. By choosing which events to report on, and how to present them, the media therefore plays a key role in defining what has happened and which events are recognized within a society. This process, known as media framing, involves highlighting certain aspects of an issue while omitting or downplaying others, thereby shaping public perception and guiding interpretation. In the context of crime and law enforcement, framing plays a crucial role in defining what counts as crime, who is seen as criminal, and how justice is perceived. These interpretations and explanations are compact bundles of information that help individuals organize and make sense of the vast amount of information they encounter. Goffman (1974) describes these as frames that people rely on and identify what is taking place (as cited in Baranauskas & Drakulich, p. 681). Frames not only influence whether people recognize an issue but also shape how they evaluate and respond to it. Edelman (1993) expands on this idea, emphasizing that framing shapes perceptions of causes and consequences by selectively certain elements of reality while disregarding others (as cited in Entman, 1993, p. 54).

Since media shapes how events in society are perceived and understood, the issue of how crime and violence are portrayed in the media is crucial. In addition to offering interpretations and justifications for how these events should be interpreted, the media also chooses which incidents to cover. Therefore, the question is raised of how media representations affect public opinion and what possible effects this may have. In this case, framing plays a central role in how the media shapes public understanding of social issues. As Althoff (2018) explains, “framing is not just about whether an issue receives attention, but about how that issue is presented” (p. 342). Rather than merely reporting on events, media actively construct meaning by highlighting specific aspects of a topic and presenting them within a particular interpretive framework (Althoff, 2018, p. 341). Within this framework, issues such as crime are not only brought to light for public attention but are also given a specific social and political meaning. Althoff (2018) gives an example of how public debates about drug users in city spaces can be framed in terms of safety, criminality, or public health, each framing suggesting a different way to understand and respond to the issue, giving specific interpretations and associated meanings to public discourses.

Media hype

Since crime tends to have a high news value, it is a constant source of media attention, also known as media hype. Media hypes are characterized by a feedback loop between news

reporting, politics, and policymaking, often resulting in widespread social, cultural, and political effects (Althoff, 2018, p. 347).

One of the effects can be that it seems as though the crime problem is far more serious and widespread than it actually is. A second result is ramatization and moral concern, which can trigger moral panic in society toward a social issue or a social group (Althoff, 2018, p. 348). According to Cohen, the concept of moral panic is not a descriptive but a normative concept, it concerns the negative representation of an individual or social groups who are portrayed as threatening to society and the prevailing morality. As explained by Cohen (1972):

A moral panic occurs when a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests. The claim of threat is disproportionate to its actual risk, and the issue is sensationalized through social discourse (that is, media, public figures) to enhance hostility toward a targeted group and engender a consensus toward action (as cited in Eversman & Bird, 2017, p. 29).

This process closely connects to crime framing, which refers to how media outlets select, structure, and present information about crime. It involves emphasizing certain aspects of a crime story such as the type of crime, the background of the suspect, or the societal impact, while downplaying or ignoring others. In the Dutch context, this is evident in television programs like *Opsporing Verzocht*, *De Jacht op de Mocro-Maffia* and *Bureau*, the subject of this study. These series often collaborate directly with law enforcement agencies to dramatize real cases or reconstruct police operations. These series may enhance public trust in law enforcement by depicting how police officers handle in such situation and events. However, this also risks presenting a one-sided view that downplays issues such as police misconduct, racial profiling, or institutional bias.

In addition, the influence of online platforms and social media in shaping public discourse is worth noting, particularly through viral videos and commentary that often bypass traditional journalistic standards. While this creates space for alternative voices and citizen journalism, it also introduces risks such as misinformation, online vigilantism, and the spread of fear-based narratives.

2.2.2 Dominant discourses

Dominant discourses refer to the widely accepted ways of thinking and talking about certain topics, often reflecting the values and interests of those in power. In other words, dominant discourses, also referred to as dominant ideologies, are overarching and culturally accepted narratives within society that define how crime, law enforcement, and justice are understood, constructed and disseminated (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 192). Through framing, the

media plays a role in circulating these dominant discourses by selecting which perspectives are made visible and which are downplayed. Together, media framing and dominant discourses provide the foundation for this understanding. In doing so, media representations often naturalize specific ideologies, such as the legitimacy of state authority, or the criminality of marginalized groups, presenting them as common sense or taken for granted. In crime-related media, for example, frames often support the authority of the police or justice system, while downplaying structural causes of crime or alternative viewpoints. As a result, media framing contributes to maintaining existing power structures by reinforcing certain ideas about crime, justice, and who holds authority.

According to Croteau and Hoynes (2019), a key debate surrounding media ideology lies in whether the media primarily serve to reinforce dominant power structures or whether they also contain elements that question them. As they put it, the debate is between “those who argue that media promote the worldview of the powerful, the ‘dominant ideology’, and those who argue that the media include more contradictory messages, both expressing the dominant ideology and at least partially challenging worldviews” (p.192). By offering complex representations of law enforcement and crime, these narratives have the potential to challenge dominant discourses (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 684). However, the challenge lies in the fact that audiences may not interpret or understand the content in the same way.

2.3 Narrative structures and stereotypes

2.3.1 *Narrative structures*

In crime dramas, narrative structures serve as dominant tools through which ideologies are communicated, reinforced, or challenged. Simply put, ideology refers to a set of meanings that help define and explain the world, shaping the fundamental ways in which the world is understood (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.191). This belief system help justify the actions of those in power by distorting and misrepresenting reality, a “distorted reality” offered by the mass media (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 681).

Narrative structure refers to the organization and prioritizing of events that shape the way stories within this reality are told and interpreted. As Althoff et al. (2020) describe:

Narratives are linguistic and cultural patterns of the construction of crime that organize the production of crime. By “patterns” we mean that narratives do not simply exist. They are established and negotiated in social and institutional processes. Some narratives can be established in these processes in the longer term, others will be forgotten or wither. This is a conflictual process. (p.2)

In understanding crime, narratives play the role of constructing meaning around events that are labeled as “criminal”. Rather than serving as objective reflections of reality, crime narratives are socially and culturally constructed stories that involve relationally connected actors, temporal progression, and a high degree of communicative significance (Althoff et al., 2020, p.3). As Althoff et al. (2020) explain, society understands crime through stories that assign roles, responsibility, and moral meaning to people involved, turning certain actions into ‘crime’ based on shared cultural ideas. These stories don’t exist on their own, they are shaped and judged within systems like the law, media, and other institutions (Althoff et al., 2020, p. 5). Courts, for instance, act as authoritative spaces that decide which stories about crime are accepted as true, even though such stories are often open to interpretation and debate. Crime stories also depend on the situation and the audience, which means they can lead to disagreement or conflict. Telling a crime story is not just about describing what happened, it is also about convincing others of one version while ignoring or rejecting others.

Althoff et al. (2020) also explain that dominant narratives, also known as hegemonic narratives, shape our understanding of crime by presenting events and responses as ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’. Because these narratives are deeply rooted in cultural norms and power structures, it makes it difficult to recognize their influence. As Ewick and Silbey (1995) argue, an essential element to consider is that hegemonic narratives exclude alternative narratives. The contingency of narratives is rendered invisible. "The events seem to speak for themselves; the story appears to tell itself" (as cited in Althoff, 2020, p.7).

Hegemonic narratives are widely accepted stories that reflect prevailing social norms and values. However, hegemony does not function simply through obvious forms of

domination, but rather at the level of what is perceived as 'common sense' in society. This concept refers to the taken-for-granted ideas that are widely accepted as natural or obvious, what people believe 'everyone knows.' As Gramsci (1971) argues, one of the most powerful forms of control is achieved by influencing these everyday assumptions, embedding dominant ideologies within the cultural norms people live by (as cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 198). When people adopt these commonsense views, they are also internalizing specific beliefs about how society works and who holds power. Television series such as *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* contribute to this process by depicting law enforcement in ways that often align with hegemonic discourses, which frame the police as essential to social order and rational in their use of force, thereby reinforcing a sense of institutional fairness and authority. As such, viewers may come to accept that police authority is inherently to be trusted, or that certain groups are more likely to be criminal.

Counter-narratives or subversive narratives, challenge these dominant stories by exposing their underlying assumptions and offering alternative perspectives. They often come from individuals or groups whose voices are less heard and highlight how crime is experienced differently depending on one's social position. However, the relationship between hegemonic and counter-narratives is not always distinct. Counter-narratives frequently draw on elements of dominant stories, reworking them to resist or question their meaning (Althoff et al., 2020, p. 7). As a result, storytelling around crime is not only about describing events but also about negotiating meaning, power, and social legitimacy.

Within the media, hegemonic power is maintained and reproduced. Rather than simply mirroring reality, media actively shape how the world is understood by selecting and framing events in specific ways. Through these representational practices, media outlets assign meaning to social issues, reinforcing certain interpretations while excluding others. As Hall (1982) explain:

Representation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but more active labour of making things mean (as cited in Croteau and Hoynes, 2019, p. 199).

What becomes evident is that the media holds a significant power in informing and actively shaping the public understanding. This means that repeated portrayals of crime, justice, and social roles in media, such as in crime dramas, shape what audiences come to accept as normal, acceptable, or deviant.

2.3.2 *Character portrayals*

Character portrayals are central to crime shows narratives and are closely intertwined with narrative structures. A character refers to the specific grouping of qualities that distinguishes

a person or object from others (Cambridge, n.d.-a). The portrayal refers to how this character is depicted or portrayed in a book, movie, television shows, or other creative efforts (Cambridge, n.d.-b). The way characters are presented serves broader storytelling goals, shaping how viewers interpret both the plot and its underlying messages. As Thorburn (1976) note, character construction is often a key reason why audiences engage with television series (as cited in Porter et al., 1978, p. 23). The dynamic in character portrayals becomes even more complex in shows, such as *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam*, that deal with real-life events and people. In this case, character portrayals go further than creative invention and enters the space of representation and interpretation. The portrayals involve real individuals with their own personalities, behaviors, and perceptions, which may place restrictions or moral dilemmas on their portrayal. Unlike fictional characters, real-life portrayals must navigate authenticity and audience expectations. Because of this, criminal shows that are based on actual events or real individuals require a more careful balance between truthful portrayal and storytelling, which can affect how the audience reacts to the show and how authentic the story appears to be.

Law enforcement characters in crime shows are often depicted as complex figures who must navigate personal struggles while upholding justice, thereby reinforcing familiar stereotypes such as the “tough-but-fair” officer, the moral protector, or the heroic individual fighting against chaos (Denman, 2023, p. 24). These stereotypes work to humanize the police and align them with the viewer’s sympathies. At the same time, other characters such as suspects, civilians, or marginalized individuals may be portrayed to reinforce social hierarchies through the logic of the narrative. But, in the rare instances where structural issues are addressed, characters characterize police injustices as tragic inevitabilities that are either naïve or impossible (Denman, 2023 p. 25).

2.3.3 Stereotypes

As explained by Lindsey (1997) stereotypes are simplistic and generalized ideas that assume all members of a group have similar characteristics (as cited in Garland et al., 2017, p. 610). In media, stereotypes function as simplified representations that help audiences understand characters or situations. While this can make storytelling more fun and efficient, it often comes at the cost of nuance and accuracy. For example, the recurring depiction of white officers as heroes and protectors, while minority officers are underrepresented (Dixon, 2015, p. 786).

Often, stereotypes reduce complex individuals and groups to a set of predictable traits, reinforcing social norms and existing power structures (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1031). For example, women may be stereotyped as overly emotional or passive, while racial minorities may be portrayed through the lens of criminality or deviance. These portrayals not

only reflect societal biases but also actively contribute to maintaining them by normalizing unequal roles and relationships, representing society in ways that are both incomplete and inadequate (Hall et al., 2013, as cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 227).

While not all stereotypes are always negative, they are frequently used in ways that support inequalities, including sexism in the representation of gender. A clear example of this is found in work of Garland et al. (2017), who examined how female federal law enforcement officers are portrayed in prime-time television dramas. Their study investigated whether female agents are underrepresented compared to male agents, subjected to gender stereotypes and discrimination, overly sexualized, or more likely to be victimized than male characters. They found that, when it comes to representations of female officers, media portrayals often reinforce harmful gender norms by initially presenting female officers as “naive and ill-equipped for a male-dominated career” (Garland et al., 2017, p. 610).

Although crime itself is not inherently tied to stereotypes, media portrayals of crime often reflect and reinforce biased representations of certain groups or behaviors. Drakulich (2012) explored how racial anxieties, particularly those stemming from perceptions of crime, shape stereotypes about racial groups. He argues that individuals who have limited direct contact with members of other racial groups tend to rely more heavily on negative stereotypes, often associating minority groups with criminality (p. 322). This aligns with broader media discourses, where ethnic minorities are frequently portrayed as criminals, reinforcing racial bias. In his contact model, Drakulich (2012) suggests that these stereotypes are not only shaped by personal experiences but are also maintained by media representations. Similarly, Baranauskas and Drakulich (2018) argue that the portrayal of race is particularly influential in shaping understandings of crime and crime policy (p. 684). They highlight that various studies have shown that crime is often framed as a predominantly Black phenomenon in media narratives, thereby strengthen the association between race and criminality. Dixon (2015) looked at the psychological effects of this racial misrepresentation, specifically on television news. In his study he found that viewers often misremembered unidentified suspects as Black and unidentified officers as White, especially among heavy news consumers regularly exposed to racial disparities in crime reporting. Such distorted representations can also influence public opinion on criminal justice policies. Furthermore, he demonstrated that exposure to an overrepresentation of Black suspects increased viewers’ perceptions of a defendant’s culpability. Moreover, news content can foster stereotypical associations between race and criminality, Dixon (2008) reported that portrayals of Black criminality in the media reinforced negative racial stereotypes, while Oliver et al. (2004) observed that violent news stories shaped participants’ mental images to align with darker-skinned Black individuals (as cited in Dixon, 2015, p. 777).

Another relevant stereotype is the 'racist cop'. Especially after the incidents involving George Floyd in 2020 and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, media and public discourse have become more aware of how racism operates within police forces, with activists demanding an end to police discrimination (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1032). Research indicates that racial prejudice and stereotypes influence police practices. In this context, stereotypes may shape police officers' perceptions of specific groups and their alleged association with terrorism and/or crime. The repeated exposure to these stereotypes can therefore negatively impact police officers' interactions with those communities (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1032). However, this racial prejudice is for some officer's unconscious, mostly referred to as unconscious bias or implicit bias. This means that their cognition, action, and decisions are made in an unconscious way. Morrow and Shjarback (2019) confirm that police "can incorrectly identify individuals as suspects and subject them to law enforcement practices because cues, like race and ethnicity, at the unconscious level trigger police action" (as cited in Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1032). Recent studies indicate that one possible reason for the unequal treatment of minority communities by police may stem from stereotypes about law enforcement, such as the "racist cop" image. This stereotype is one of the most widespread and commonly associated with police officers (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1033). The 'racist cop' is often portrayed in crime dramas as an overtly prejudiced character who targets individuals based on their ethnicity. While this stereotype can serve to criticize racial injustice, it also tends to individualize the problem, presenting racism as the fault of a few bad actors rather than a systemic issue embedded in policing culture. This framing can allow crime series to appear socially aware while still protecting the broader image of the police as fundamentally good or reformable. In addition, Goff and Martin (2012) suggest that police officers may find the fear of being seen as 'racist' deeply unsettling, which can contribute to racial inequalities in policing practices (p. 1034). Those officers who expressed greater concern about being perceived as racist were found to have used force more frequently in encounters with African American individuals.

A similar dynamic can be observed in the portrayal of police brutality within crime dramas. Police brutality is, and has been, a very familiar concept, especially for the African American communities (Clayton, 2018, as cited in Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1031). As Dowler (2016) states, police brutality is not the result of a few 'bad apples' and has unfortunately not disappeared overtime (p. 10). When officers use excessive force, it is often shown as a justified reaction to a dangerous situation or as the result of personal stress, rather than as part of a broader problem within the police system (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1036). This individualizes the issue and presents it as an exception rather than something rooted in institutional practices. As a result, police brutality is acknowledged but not deeply questioned. Much like the 'racist cop' stereotype, this approach allows the TV series to seem

socially aware while still protecting the overall image of the police as trustworthy and fair. In doing so, these stereotypes can contribute to copaganda, reinforcing public support for law enforcement while avoiding criticism of deeper, systemic issues.

2.3.4 Copaganda

In today's world, television and streaming platforms are filled with cop series and crime dramas, from series like *Law & Order* and *NCIS* to local productions like *Flikken Maastricht*. The popularity of these shows can be traced back to the mid-20th century, when law enforcement agencies began collaborating with Hollywood to shape public perceptions of policing. In the United States, for example, shows like *Dragnet* (1951) were produced with the direct involvement of the LAPD, portraying officers as honest, disciplined, and morally upright (Dowler, 2016, p. 6). To claim the shows realism in its portrayals, at the beginning of each episode there was a declaration of "What you are about to see is true." This partnership marked the beginning of what is now often referred to as copaganda.

Over time, this genre became a powerful tool for reinforcing the legitimacy of law enforcement, often ignoring systemic issues such as racism, corruption, or abuse of power. Especially during periods of public distrust or protest against police violence, copaganda serves to rebuild the image of the police as protectors, using emotional storytelling, selective framing, and heroic character portrayals. More recently the term has gained more attention, particularly following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, when activists and scholars began to critically question how media representations of the police shape public attitudes and obscure real-world inequalities.

The representation of law enforcement in crime dramas can be aligned with what is described as copaganda. Copaganada, a blend of 'cop' and 'propaganda', refers to the ways in which media, particularly TV shows, news, and social media repeatedly portray police officers and law enforcement in an overly positive, heroic, and uncritical manner (Bernabo, 2022, p. 488). More generally, copaganda is a specific form of propaganda, which more broadly refers to communication strategies that aim to influence public opinion in a biased or misleading way to support a particular political agenda or maintain the power of dominant institutions (Denman, 2023, p. 21).

In this context, copaganda specifically idealizes or promotes police forces without critical reflection, relying on emotional storytelling and often overlooking real-world issues. This framing often emphasizes stereotypes of police as protectors, while downplaying instances of misconduct and ignoring systemic issues such as racial profiling, excessive use of force, or corruption. Denman (2023) points out that critical research shows that policing has historically been used to maintain a social order based on racial control, the suppression of political resistance, and the management of marginalized groups (pp. 21-22). According to

social scientist like Alex Vitale and Naomi Murkawa, not militarization or the excessive use of force is the issue, the police force itself is (Chazkel et al., 2020, p. 2). Vitale (2017/2021) explains that with the use of police force the ‘warrior-mentality’ is part of the problem where officers often think of themselves as soldiers in a battle with the public (pp. 3-4). However, this is just a tip of the iceberg when it comes to the problem of over-policing. Vitale (2017/2021) further highlights that although reforms such as improved training, diversifying the police and adopting community policing are meant to address the issue, most of them fall short in addressing the core issues that arise in law enforcement.

Scholars challenge the misinformation about policing by studying radical literature and historical narratives that undermine the role of police in society. As Chazkel et al. (2020) argue, the idea of police as an inevitable part of society is a historical construction, which challenge the idea promoted by copaganda that police are necessary for order and safety (p. 3). According to them the idea that the police are essential to maintaining social is so deeply embedded in people’s minds that it obscures the reality that the police frequently fail to prevent harm or foster social peace but instead causing violent and sometimes even fatal harm that disrupts entire communities (Chazkel et al., 2020, p. 2). These deeper functions of policing are often left out or hidden in media portrayals. As a result, copaganda can significantly shape public perception by reinforcing this one-sided and favorable narrative about policing.

3. Method

3.1 Description and justification of method

The primary method employed in this research is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which focuses on the ways in which language, media, and discourse shape and reinforce social power dynamics, ideologies, and stereotypes (van Hulst et al., 2024). Through CDA, this study analyzed how *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* used narrative structures, character portrayals and framing techniques to construct specific representations of crime and law enforcement. This approach allows an exploration of the underlying ideologies within the series, particularly how these TV series reinforce or challenge dominant cultural discourses related to crime and justice in the Netherlands.

More specifically, this study conducted its analysis using Fairclough's (1993) framework for a Critical Discourse Analysis. This framework aims to explore the often-unclear connections between discursive practices, such as language, events, and texts, and the broader social and cultural systems in which they occur. It explores how such practices are not only shaped by but also contribute to maintaining powerful structures and ideologies. The fact that these connections are often hidden, or not immediately obvious, helps maintain existing power relations and social dominance (Fairclough, 1993, p.135).

Fairclough's (1993) framework includes three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice. These dimensions offer three perspectives one can take upon a complex social event (p.136). To deepen this analysis, Fairclough (1993) draws on the work of Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci and his concept of hegemony. Gramsci's idea of hegemony refers to how dominant groups in society maintain their power, not just through force or laws, but by shaping common sense, values, and norms in ways that make their dominance seem natural or legitimate (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 198). By applying these three dimensions, the analysis aimed to provide a critical understanding of how crime and law enforcement were framed through stereotypes, narrative structures and character portrayal within the TV series.

3.2 Data collection and sampling strategy

For this study, episodes of the Dutch television crime series *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* were selected as primary data sources. These series are a part of a broader trend in Dutch media that blends reality television with elements of factual storytelling, often aiming to bridge the gap between the public and institutional authorities. In collaboration with the police, the series is produced by No Pictures Please, a company specialized in reality television, factual entertainment and workplace reality, founded by Ewout Genemans (No Pictures Please, n.d.). Ewout is a well-known Dutch media personality and documentary filmmaker, whose presence in the series plays an important role in forming the tone and

perspective of the series. Ewout acts as both narrator and participant, guiding the viewer through various cases while maintaining a respectful and observant distance.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select a limited number of episodes, based on their thematic relevance and narrative diversity. Episodes that featured clear representations of crime types, law enforcement practices, and character interactions were prioritized, allowing for a focused yet diverse dataset. The selected episodes were accessed via streaming service Videoland and viewed in full, along with detailed notes taken on narrative structure, character portrayal, visual framing, and dialogue. The goal was to gather rich qualitative material that could reveal how dominant discourses and stereotypes are reproduced or challenged through framing techniques, narrative structures and character portrayals.

The research corpus consists of ten episodes, each approximately 60 minutes in length, spanning from two seasons of the *Bureau* TV series. This included five episodes from *Bureau Maastricht*, which aired in 2024, and five from *Bureau Rotterdam*, which aired in 2023. *Bureau Maastricht* is set in Limburg, a southern province bordering Belgium and Germany, where storylines frequently explore cross-border smuggling and rural criminal activities, reflecting a regional perspective on crime. In contrast, *Bureau Rotterdam* takes place in one of the largest and most diverse urban areas in the Netherlands, focusing more prominently on urban crime such as drug trafficking and organized violence. This urban-rural contrast enhances the comparative dimension of the research, allowing an analysis whether dominant discourses and stereotypes shift based on geographical setting and socio-cultural context.

3.3 Data analysis

The specific analytical method used in this study is a Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis followed a structured and systematic approach. The selected episodes were analyzed in multiple stages, beginning with a detailed note-taking and watching all 9 episodes of both seasons. Once this was completed, the notes were carefully read through, and 10 episodes in total were chosen to be analyzed using the CDA framework of Fairclough (1993).

Within the framework of CDA, the analysis pays attention to textual elements such as language, certain dialogues, word choices, and recurring patterns that frame the concepts of law enforcement and crime (Fairclough, 1993, p.135). The first dimension, text, refers to the written or spoken language produced in a discursive event and focuses on the detailed analysis of the text itself, such as what is said, how it is said, choice of words, tone, and visual elements. In this study, specific scenes, dialogues, and visual cues were analyzed to

explore how officers, suspects, and situations are portrayed. This included how authority is expressed, how suspects are spoken to, and what kind of language or images are used to represent crime or disorder. The next dimension, discursive practice, considers how the text is produced, distributed, and consumed. Here, the analysis looked at how the series constructed meaning through editing, scripting, and character development, and how viewers might interpret these portrayals. This also involved reflecting on genre conventions, such as police procedurals, and media logic that influence these representations. The final dimension, social practice, links the discourse to wider social and cultural structures. This dimension is used to interpret how the series contribute to broader ideologies and power relations and if they are reinforced or challenged. Once the CDA was completed, the analysis and its results investigated how the series frames crime and law enforcement, with emphasis on the portrayal of stereotypes. The goal was to identify dominant discourses and to explore whether these representations reinforce or challenge existing narratives and assumptions.

3.4 Operationalization

In this study, several key concepts are operationalized that guided the analysis. The key concepts include crime and law enforcement, media framing and its connections to dominant discourses, narrative structures, stereotypes and character portrayals. These concepts were operationalized in the following manner.

The first key concept focuses on crime and law enforcement, and how the media contributes to this construction, therefore influencing how it is understood by the public. Because these concepts are not just considered as being just a “dangerous act” or as a “narrow sense” of policing, it is important to recognize these concepts as socially constructed, shaped by the values, norms, and historical context of a particular nation (Nurse, 2024). The concept of crime is operationalized using indicators of how frequently and in what context crime occurs in the series, the types of crimes depicted, the setting and environment in which the crime takes place, as well as the consequences of the crime. The concept of law enforcement is operationalized by investigating the roles and functions of police officers, including their specific tasks, responsibilities, the nature of policing and the use of force. These elements reveal not only how crime and law enforcement are framed but also how particular social groups are associated with specific forms of criminality.

Media framing is the second key concept of this study. Media framing refers to the process of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality to shape audience interpretations (Entman, 1993). Through this framing, the media plays a role in circulating dominant discourses, widely accepted ways of thinking and talking about certain topics, often reflecting the values and interests of those in power. This concept is operationalized using

indicators derived from various sources, including Entman (1993), Van Hulst et al. (2024) and Baranauskas & Drakulich (2018). The indicators for this concept included repetition, selection and exclusion of information, framing categories such as character positioning and role framing, moral evaluation and blame attribution. The framing analysis reveals how the series guides viewers toward certain understandings of crime and justice while marginalizing alternative interpretations.

Narrative structures are the third key concept and is analyzed to understand how stories are constructed and what ideologies they promote. When it comes to understanding crime, narratives help shape the meaning of events that are identified as 'criminal'. Instead of offering an objective account of reality, these crime stories are socially and culturally shaped, involving interconnected individuals, unfolding over time, and carrying strong communicative importance (Althoff et al., 2020, p. 3). To operationalize this concept indicators are derived from Althoff et al., (2020) and Croteau and Hoynes (2019). Indicators for this concept include the narrative format, the types of incidents shown across each episode, the introduction and development, resolution of crime cases and the presence of recurring themes. Additionally, the analysis also considers the perspective from which the narrative is told, whether it centers the police, victims, or alternative voices.

The fourth key concept examines the use of stereotypes in the depiction of crime and law enforcement. Stereotypes reduce complex individuals and groups to a set of predictable traits, reinforcing social norms and existing power structures (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1031). In media this serves to reinforce or challenge dominant perceptions, particularly in relation to race, gender, and class. This concept is operationalized by analyzing the presence of ethnic or cultural markers, gendered behavior, and class-based traits in the depiction of both criminals and law enforcement. To operationalize this concept indicators are derived from various sources, including Murphy and McCarthy (2021) and Baranauskas and Drakulich (2018). Additionally, indicators include the portrayal of minority groups as suspects, the depiction of female officers as either nurturing or marginalized, and the repetition of specific narrative tropes that associate certain crimes with identities. The use of language and imagery that supports or resists generalized group assumptions is also a key indicator.

The fifth and final key concept is character portrayals and refers to the specific grouping of qualities that distinguishes a person and how this character is depicted or portrayed (Cambridge, n.d.). The way characters are presented often serves broader storytelling goals, shaping how viewers interpret both the plot and its underlying messages. This concept examines how individuals were represented and what meanings were attached to their role, and the indicators include the identifying of the narrative role and function of characters, actions and behaviors, speech and dialogues, the characteristics including age, ethnicity, and class, the framing of characters, their alignment with or resistance to

institutional norms, and their moral stance toward justice or systemic critique. Attention is also given to the characteristics of officers such as age, gender, ethnicity, background, and personality traits, as well as their interpersonal relationships with colleagues and the public, the portrayal of law enforcement, the investigative processes and the power dynamics between law enforcement and other institutions or individuals.

Table 1

Conceptualization Table of the Key Concepts

Concept	Definition	Indicators
Crime	<p>Understood as a deliberate and dangerous act, an illegal action punishable by the government (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).</p> <p>It is important to recognize that crime is a socially constructed concept, shaped by the values, norms, and historical context of a particular nation.</p>	<p>Frequency and context in which crime occurs</p> <p>Types of crimes (violent, organized, white-collar, petty offenses, economic)</p> <p>Context of crime: setting, surrounding, etc.</p> <p>Anchors of crime: locations or environments</p> <p>Consequences: punishment, resolution, etc.</p> <p>Demographic factors: age, sex, gender, social status</p> <p>Situational factors: environment, culture</p>
Law enforcement	<p>Law enforcement can be defined in two ways: in the 'narrow' sense of policing and upholding the law, and in the broader sense of upholding social norms and dominant beliefs. Law enforcement has a critical role in maintaining social order, protecting citizens, and preventing and redressing harms to people, property, and nonhuman nature (Nurse, 2024).</p>	<p>Role and function: types of tasks, division of responsibilities</p> <p>Investigative processes portrayed</p> <p>Success rates in solving cases</p> <p>Power dynamics between law enforcement and other institutions or individuals</p> <p>The nature of policing: following the law, maintaining order, protecting citizens and property, preventions of harm and further escalations</p> <p>Use of force and authority</p>
Media framing	<p>Media framing refers to the process of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality to shape audience interpretations (Entman, 1993)</p>	<p>Language and narrative elements, such as use of repetition, descriptive language, or loaded terminology, emotional tone in storytelling (e.g., fear, sympathy, authority)</p> <p>Selection and exclusion of information, such as whose perspectives are highlighted and what structural or societal causes are ignored or emphasized</p> <p>Framing categories: emphasis on conflict, human interest, morality, or responsibility</p> <p>Character framing (heroic, corrupt, emotional, rational)</p>

		<p>Portrayal of police officer</p> <p>Portrayal of civilians, suspects</p> <p>Portrayal of investigation outcomes (success, failure, ambiguity)</p> <p>Types of crimes depicted</p>
Stereotypes	Stereotypes reduce complex individuals and groups to a set of predictable traits, reinforcing social norms and existing power structures (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1031).	<p>Ethnic/cultural markers</p> <p>Gendered behavior</p> <p>Class-related traits</p> <p>Portrayal of immigrants/minority groups as suspects</p> <p>Portrayal of police officers as either idealized or criticized, heroic vs. corrupt, female officers as nurturing or marginalized</p> <p>Repeated representations of specific types of crimes or certain individuals in stereotypical ways</p> <p>Language and imagery reinforcing group assumptions</p> <p>Mental state</p>
Narrative structure	Narratives are linguistic and cultural patterns of the construction of crime that organize the production of crime. By “patterns” we mean that narratives do not simply exist. They are established and negotiated in social and institutional processes. Some narratives can be established in these processes in the longer term, others will be forgotten or wither. This is a conflictual process (Althoff, 2020, p.2).	<p>Narrative format</p> <p>Types of narratives</p> <p>The types of incidents shown across each episode</p> <p>Introduction, development, and resolution of crime cases</p> <p>Presence of recurring themes</p> <p>Centrality of police vs. alternative perspectives</p> <p>Role of Ewout Genemans</p> <p>Role of the characters</p> <p>Point of view</p>
Character portrayal	A character refers to the specific grouping of qualities that distinguishes a person or object from others. The portrayal refers to how this character is depicted or portrayed in a book, movie, television shows, or other creative efforts (Cambridge, n.d.). The way characters are presented serves broader storytelling goals, shaping how viewers interpret both the plot and its underlying message.	<p>Actions and behaviors: motivations, values</p> <p>Roles and functions (detective, victim, suspect, superior)</p> <p>Power dynamics and institutional alignment</p> <p>Speech and dialogues</p> <p>Characters' stance toward justice or systemic critique</p> <p>Motivation and background of criminal characters</p> <p>The characteristics of police officers, suspects (age, ethnicity, class, background)</p> <p>Personality traits of officers, relationships with colleagues, the public)</p>

Note. This table summarizes the conceptualization and operationalization of key concepts used in this study. Definitions and indicators are drawn from existing literature.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This study is based on the analysis of publicly available data of *Bureau Maastricht and Bureau Rotterdam*. Although the data collection did not involve dealing with participants or personal data, limiting the privacy risks, ethical considerations remained important. The research acknowledges and respects the creative intentions of the series' producers and people involved and aim to engage critically without misrepresenting the material.

Given the focus on the representations of crime, law enforcement, and the discussing of portrayals surrounding stereotypes, this study recognizes the importance of ethical sensitivity in the analysis. Particular attention is paid to how stereotypes are identified and discussed, ensuring that the research does not accidentally reproduce or reinforce the very biases it seeks to critique. To address this, a reflexive approach is employed throughout the research process. Reflexivity involves ongoing self-awareness of the researcher's own positionality, assumptions, and potential biases (Babbie, 2016 p. 303). This is especially important in qualitative research, where interpretation plays a central role.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which draws on Fairclough's (1993) three-dimensional model to investigate how *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* reinforce and/or subvert dominant media discourses and stereotypes surrounding crime and law enforcement in the Netherlands. In this model Fairclough conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice, enabling a layered analysis that connects language and imagery to broader socio-political ideologies. His framework distinguishes three interconnected levels of analysis: (1) the textual level, which examines linguistic and visual features; (2) the discursive practice, focusing on how media discourse is produced and interpreted; and (3) the social practice, which considers the ideological structures that shape and are shaped by these discourses.

In line with the research question, the analysis and so the sections in this result chapter are structured around three key discursive dimensions: narrative structures, character portrayals, and framing techniques. These dimensions provided a lens through which to examine how the series construct meaning around law enforcement and crime. The results are presented in the following three sub-sections. Sub-section 4.1 discusses narrative structures, sub-section 4.2 examines character portrayals, and sub-section 4.3 explores framing techniques.

4.1 Narrative structures

This dimension shows the narrative structures in *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* and reveal how these series construct meaning around crime and policing. Drawing on all three dimensions of Fairclough's (1993) CDA model, this section addresses how narrative structures contribute to reinforcing hegemonic discourses, such as the police as heroic and morally grounded, while also exposing the limits placed on alternative or resistant viewpoints. These narrative choices shape not only how the police are portrayed, but also how crime and justice are culturally understood in the Dutch context.

The narrative anchor

Every episode follows a consistent structure starting with the officers receiptal of a report and a discussion of the upcoming incident while en route in the police car. Upon arrival, they handle the situation on location. During each scene, Ewout Genemans asks questions and given commentary on the situation, reflecting on the event and those involved. This repetitive format reinforces a sense of routine and reliability in police work.

Ewout acts as both narrator and participant, guiding the viewer through various cases while maintaining an observant distance. His involvement lends the series a sense of

credibility and familiarity, reinforcing the notion that what is being shown is trustworthy and representative. Ewout further strengthens the human connection by speaking directly to the camera within the scenes where the officers are actively working on the street, offering context, reflection, and interpretation in real-time. This direct mode of address establishes a personal connection with the viewer, positioning Ewout as both guide and interpreter through the different narratives. His presence and commentary in the series constructs a mediated narrative that shapes how the public understands policing, framing the officers not only as authority figures but also as relatable individuals who operate within challenging social contexts. As such, the series is not a neutral observation of reality, but a curated and guided portrayal of law enforcement, shaped by editorial decisions and Ewout his role as a mediating figure.

Constructing the police narrative

Editorial choices contribute to a narrative of police work being diverse, reactive, and socially necessary. This type of narrative is than constructed as dominant or hegemonic and seen as 'natural' or 'obvious' (Althoff et al., 2020). When people adopt these commonsense views, they are also internalizing specific beliefs about how society works and who holds power (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 198). Here, it constructs the idea that law enforcement is not just about maintaining order, but also about providing care, offering emotional support, and managing the social consequences of vulnerability and dysfunction. In Fairclough's (1993) terms, this is a kind of ideological framing where the police are presented through language as an essential part of society that responds to all public needs, not just crime. By embedding these different case types into each episode, the series reinforces a narrative technique that humanizes the officers, emphasizing their personal dimension and reinforcing the notion that they are not merely enforcers of the law, but individuals with relatable emotions, challenges, and values.

The consistent centering of the officer's perspective, through interviews, voiceovers, and narration, ensures that power remains discursively located with the police. Even when civilians speak, their voices are often shown as less important or are explained through what the police say. This means the police are in control of the story. Civilians who cooperate are shown in a more positive light, while those who argue or resist are often seen as troublemakers, even if they didn't commit a crime. The fact that many scenes follow the same pattern also gives a message, the police face the same problems over and over, sometimes tired and frustrated by it. Phrases like "dweilen met de kraan open" (mopping with the tap running) show that officers feel like they can't really fix the problems. This portrayal not only humanizes the police but also reinforces a status-quo narrative, one where law enforcement is seen as doing its best within a broken system. Rather than examining the structural roots

of crime or inequality, the narrative directs sympathy toward police limitations and resilience, effectively guarding the institution from deeper critique and presenting them as the only reliable force in the middle of social dysfunction. This shifts the narrative focus from questions of accountability or structural underfunding to one of empathy for the officers' dilemma.

While the series looks like a neutral documentary, highlighting vulnerable or complex situations, the way it's built clearly supports the police view and does not leave much space for other perspectives and counter-narratives (Althoff et al., 2020). The structure subtly affirms that it is the police who have the tools, authority, and moral grounding to intervene. This results in a narrative of reassurance, the public sees not only that the police are in control, but also that their role extends beyond punishment, reinforcing their role as pragmatic and morally responsible actors.

The hero narrative

A recurring narrative across both *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* is the construction of the police as heroic figures who restore order in a society marked by disorder, uncertainty, and vulnerability. For instance, many episodes begin with a voice-over, introducing the police patrol as entering a situation of risk or unpredictability. This is then reinforced by Ewout, who asks the officers why they make certain choices, choices in which the officer is portrayed as the hero with the willingness to protect.

In *Bureau Maastricht* (Episode 5) the narrative is highlighted with an incident where a man is arrested on suspicion of having stabbed a delivery worker. The crime scene is located on a busy terrace, with many bystanders witnessing the situation. The man becomes agitated during the arrest, verbally abusing the officers and ultimately biting one of the officers. Eventually, the police overpower the man and take him into custody. In the background, applause from the bystanders can be heard. Here, the police operate within a narrative in which it legitimatized they uphold authority and restore order, while the man explicitly uses his language and behavior to challenge that authority. This example, and the decision to include the applause of the bystanders, align with the classical 'hero narrative' structure, where law enforcement officers are positioned as moral agents navigating a chaotic world (Denman, 2023, p. 24).

Such narrative framing reinforces traditional discourses and stereotypes in which the police are portrayed as protectors of the public good. The series subtly complicates this by including moments of reflection and vulnerability. In several episodes, officers are shown expressing frustration, doubt, or emotional exhaustion, especially after dealing with psychological distress, confused individuals, or drug-related cases. These narrative choices partially subvert the typical all-powerful image of the police, suggesting a more complex and

humanized perspective. This type of narrative can be linked to counter-narratives that frequently draw on elements of dominant stories, reworking them to resist or question their meaning (Althoff et al., 2020, p. 7).

The civilian vs the police

In different episodes the interaction between an officer and civilian are often featured with discursive polarization between two contradicting narratives, on one hand the civilian's experiential counter-narrative and on the other hand the police's institutional narrative. A clear example appears in *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 9). In a scene, the civilian expresses a strong feeling of being targeted or disrespected, connecting it to broader national critiques of the police, such as having a 'liegcultuur' (culture of lying) and being 'provocerend' (provocative). Although these claims are provocative, they represent a personal attempt to resist perceived institutional injustice. In contrast, the police rely on a media-aware discourse of neutrality, repeatedly emphasizing that identity markers like ethnicity and nationality do not influence their actions. This framing shifts accusations of systemic bias toward individual misunderstanding or projected resentment. One officer even tries to reassert the civilian's Dutch identity: "Volgens mij bent u ook gewoon een Nederlander, want u woont hier ook" (I believe you also have the Dutch nationality, because you live here as well). This is a rhetorical move aimed at inclusion and at reducing an us-versus-them divide. However, it also risks overlooking real or perceived experiences of marginalization by insisting on shared national identity. As Goff and Martin (2012) suggest, police officers who may find the fear of being seen as 'racist' deeply unsettling, can contribute to racial inequalities in policing practices (p. 1034).

In this scene, another police response emphasizes colorblind neutrality with saying "of je nou paars, groen, geel of wit bent" (whether you're purple, green, yellow or white), resonating with a dominant liberal ideology that refuses to acknowledge racial or ethnic dynamics as significant factors in policing (Vitale 2017/2021, pp. 32-35). While this can appear inclusive, it also neglects structural inequalities and delegitimizes emotional or experiential accounts of discrimination. At a broader level, this example reflects ongoing tensions in multicultural societies like the Netherlands, where notions of national identity, belonging, and institutional racism are contested. The civilian's sweeping statements, though aggressive, likely stem from perceived structural marginalization, particularly in interactions with law enforcement.

Recurring narrative of institutional friction

Multiple scenes show the police regularly in meeting individuals who deal with mental health problems, sometimes suicidal, often appearing confused and under the influence of alcohol

and/or drugs. Various institutions, including the police, ambulance services, and psychiatric crisis teams, are responsible for responding to such cases. However, the burden often falls disproportionately on the police. Officers frequently find themselves dealing with situations that fall outside their traditional role of law enforcement, reflecting a broader shift in which the police are increasingly expected to act as first responders in matters of public mental health.

One example in *Bureau Maastricht* (Episode 2) involves a disoriented man, who poses a threat because he is carrying knives. In this scene, the officers are left waiting more than two hours for the crisis service to arrive, expressing clear frustration with the delay and describing themselves as mere 'oppas' (babysitters) in a situation they feel is not their responsibility. This example reveals how the boundaries between medicalization and criminalization become blurred, as the police must step in as first responders to a mental health crisis due to systemic gaps in care, highlighting the institutional friction between the police and mental health services. Ewout's commentary "het botert niet altijd tussen de politie en de crissdienst" (Things don't always go smoothly between the police and the crisis team), invites further reflection from the officers, who describe ongoing ambiguity about who should take charge in such cases. Although the officers distinguish their task, such as public safety and criminal law enforcement, from the duties of healthcare providers, the lack of clear protocols and limited capacity leads to overlap and confusion. The explanation of 'capaciteitsproblemen' (capacity problems) as the core issue depoliticizes the problem, reducing it to logistical strain rather than a symptom of deeper institutional inefficiency.

Remarkable, in terms of framing, mental health professionals are absent from the scene, and their perspective is not represented. This reinforces a narrative in which the police are portrayed as practical and patient, while other institutions are framed as unavailable or ineffective. This framing normalizes police intervention in care-related contexts and downplays the need for systemic reform in mental health response infrastructures.

Another example comes from *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 7), where a man, already known to a clinic, becomes the focus of both police and ambulance responders. Ewout's commentary foregrounds institutional inefficiencies and the emotional toll on police officers. Ewout notes how officers encounter such individuals repeatedly within many hours before there is even a possibility for admission. The frustration is evident, hours are spent waiting for the crisis team, which hinders officers from engaging in other duties. The officers express a sense of helplessness as they are caught between institutional logics, unable to leave the individual unattended, but also unable to ensure the receiving of care due to strict intake criteria. This dialogue reveals a systemic issue where confused individuals fall between the cracks of medical and legal institutions. The metaphor of being passed "van het kastje naar de muur" (from pillar to post) captures the loop in which responsibility is continuously put back.

These examples illustrate the growing role of the police in non-criminal, care-driven incidents. This may suggest a new form of systemic overload. When cases arise for the police around confused or mentally unwell individuals, they expand the scope of police tasks when duty is laid-out to include care and social support roles. These examples show that not only are the institutions in friction but also depict police as over-exhausted caretakers who are caught in the care vacuum for which neither the medical system nor the law enforcement program can fully address. Although this narrative seems to report an event, it serves to reinforce a dominant frame that shows officers as heroically overburdened, positioned as the only reliable responders in an otherwise deficient system. In Fairclough's (1993) terms, such narrative structures function as social practice, reinforcing hegemonic assumptions of police legitimacy and normalizing their roles and responsibilities that are determined by the absence or dysfunction of other institutions.

The narrative difference between Bureau Rotterdam and Bureau Maastricht

An overarching feature of *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* is the considered balance in the types of incidents shown across each episode. The narrative does not center solely on violent crime or drug-related arrests, which dominate many other police-focused formats, but instead presents a broad cross-section of the cases officers handle in their daily routines. Viewers are shown officers responding to welfare checks such as someone not being seen for days, minor traffic accidents, neighbor disputes, alcohol-related incidents, and mental health crises, in addition to more stereotypical police television material like drug possession, theft, and public disturbances.

Although both seasons follow the same documentary format, each is set in a different city with its own social, cultural, and geographical characteristics. At the start of the season the series offers a contextual introduction to the city itself. Rotterdam is portrayed as a large, multicultural metropolis known for its tough reputation and complex urban dynamics. As primary port city in the Netherlands, the city has a crucial economic role, but its dense population and urban environment also reveal a darker side. The city is frequently associated with high crime rates, ranking prominently on national crime indexes. This contributes to its portrayal as a city where safety and public order are significant concerns. Vulnerable youth are presented as a key priority for the Rotterdam police, highlighting a recurring theme in the series, the preventive and disciplinary efforts aimed at addressing youth criminality within high-pressure urban contexts. The season places youth criminality at the forefront of its narrative. The series shows how young people, often minors, become involved in theft, group violence, and confrontations with authority, sometimes revealing underlying social issues such as poverty, unstable home environments, or peer pressure. These portrayals frequently highlight the tension between the role of law enforcement in maintaining order and the

challenges of addressing the root causes of juvenile misconduct. Additionally, shooting and stabbing incidents are a recurring element, emphasizing the growing visibility of weapons in urban youth conflicts. This framing positions Rotterdam not only as a dynamic and diverse city but also as one facing urgent social challenges.

In contrast, Maastricht is introduced as the capital of Limburg, situated at the crossroads of Belgium and Germany. The city is characterized by its Burgundian lifestyle, but also by unique security challenges due to its geographical location. With approximately 12,000 crimes reported annually, Maastricht is depicted as vulnerable to transnational criminal activity. Its position between two borders gives rise to concerns that the city has become a playground for various criminal networks. This portrayal is further intensified by reports of a severe shortage of police personnel, and the suggestion that criminals may at times rule the city, fueling fears that the province of Limburg is less safe than it appears. *Bureau Maastricht* combines numerous themes that show its place on the border and the problems that come with it. The AZC is a recurring central point with stories generally showing residents committing small crimes or causing trouble in the community. While there's sometimes an effort to explain the difficult circumstances people from the AZC face, like poverty or trauma, the episodes also risk reinforcing the idea that asylum seekers are a source of trouble. Another unique element in the show is how the police collaborate with Belgian officers, which sometimes leads to humorous or tense moments. These cross-border cases show how different the systems can be, even just a few kilometers apart. Drug cases are also a regular part of the storylines, from people dealing small amounts to bigger operations tied to Maastricht's position near the border. The show gives a sense of how drugs are part of everyday policing in the region and how officers balance being strict with staying human.

The differentially social, cultural, and geographical locations of Rotterdam and Maastricht shape the narrative structure of each series and contribute to the ideological framing of crime and policing. These cities do not simply serve as settings, they inform the choice, sequencing, and framing of events and incidents to create meaning about how audiences generally understand policing and the role of law enforcement within society. This directly refers to the function of narrative structures, where the organization and prioritizing of events shape the way stories within this reality are told and interpreted (Althoff, 2020). The downside of prioritizing certain issues of crime is that they can be seen as far more serious than there are, causing moral panic in society toward a social issue or a social group (Althoff, 2018, p. 348).

4.2 Character portrayals

This second dimension focuses on character portrayals, which are central to the storytelling in crime dramas. These portrayals do more than represent individuals, they shape the viewer's understanding of social roles, behaviors, and power dynamics. They are closely tied to the narrative structure, helping to frame certain characters such as police officers as rational or authoritative, while framing others such as civilians as chaotic, emotional, or problematic. The following results explore how both police officers and civilians are depicted in the series and what these portrayals suggest about broader social issues.

The police officer

In each season, six police officer duos, differing in terms of gender, age, and somewhat in ethnicity, are introduced within the first two episodes. These introductions include their names, roles within the police force, and brief background information. Throughout the season, Ewout engages in personal conversations with the officers, providing viewers with deeper insight into their thoughts, motivations, and personal lives.

The officers often characterize themselves not just only as professionals, but also as normal human beings. They show their mistakes, frustrations or doubts, making them appear more relatable and presenting themselves as people who care about society and want to help, even when situations are tough or repetitive. In addition to operational scenes, informal moments, such as officers eating meals during their shifts and having funny conversations and interactions, subtly reminds the audience that police officers are also regular people with everyday routines and vulnerabilities.

These personality traits also become more visible when, for instance, Ewout asks them direct questions about their decision-making processes or personal experiences. Each officer has their own personality where they speak in their own way, sometimes making sarcastic or emotional comments that don't always sound professional or correct. This mix of professionalism and personal voice not only helps the viewer connect with the officers, but it also influences how the audience perceives the civilians portrayed in the series, such as suspects, bystanders, or individuals in conflict with the police.

The personality traits also come forward when a police officer is verbally attacked or humiliated. Suspects regularly insult and sometimes even spit at officers. Female officers, in particular, face sexist or degrading language. In *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 4), a female officer experience reflects the intersection of gender-based harassment and the exposure to violence during her work. The verbal abuse she receives reinforces dominant gender roles where women in positions of authority, especially in public service, are delegitimized through sexist language. In both seasons, such moments highlight the difficult and often disrespectful situations the police deals with and may shape how viewers feel about both the officers and

the civilians they confront. By normalizing unequal positions and relationships, these portrayals not only reflect but also actively support societal biases, portraying society in ways that are both insufficient and incomplete (Hall et al., 2013, as cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 227). It adds tension to the scenes and creates sympathy for the officers, reinforcing their role as figures of authority who are under constant pressure.

By highlighting these character traits, the goal of the series is to make the police more relatable and sympathetic to the public. Simultaneously, the narrative logic may represent other characters, such as suspects, civilians, or marginalized people, to uphold societal structures. In such, characters see police injustices as tragic inevitabilities that are either naïve or unachievable in the few occasions when structural concerns are addressed (Denman, 2023, p. 25).

The civilian

During the series, the police officers deal with a lot of different civilians, each an individual with its own personality, behavior, background and experience with crime and law enforcement. Often, civilians show their vulnerable side, sometimes clearly in need of mental health support, struggling with addiction, confusion, or emotional distress. These factors influence how they respond to authority and how they engage with the officers.

A relevant example appeared in *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 9) and reveals several notable dynamics worth discussing. During the scene, two officers respond to an incident involving a fight between three to four men with a Polish background. The civilian makes sweeping, negatively charged generalizations about immigrants such as "Het is een grote ellende met al die buitenlanders." (It's a complete mess with all those foreigners) and "Ze hebben overal schijt aan, ze doen hun eigen ding." (They don't give a damn about anything; they just do whatever they want). The use of "al die buitenlanders" (all those foreigners) in these generalizations exemplifies a stigmatizing and homogenizing discourse that depersonalize people based on ethnicity or origin. The way the individual talk in this specific scene reflects common stereotypes about immigrants as non-contributing, disrespectful and criminal. These ideas are strengthened by examples of violence and crime, such as a stabbing incident or the forced entry of a SWAT team into a neighbor's home. Nevertheless, the civilian also turns their frustration toward the police. Using quotes such as "Wauw, ga je dat gebruiken, ja?" (Wow, are you going to use this, really?) or "Je hoeft mijn gevoel niet te bagatelliseren." (You don't have to dismiss my feelings), sketch a shift from aggressive generalization to defensiveness. This appeal for recognition reveals a desire to have emotional experiences taken seriously, despite the problematic framing. In this matter the officer maintains a controlled yet defensive tone. Meanwhile, the police discourse is oriented toward damage control and legitimacy maintenance where one officers attempt to reframe the issue as a

misperception using the statements: “Soms zeggen mensen ook: de politie doet er niks aan. Dat is niet het geval.” (Sometimes people say: the police do not do anything about it. That is not the case). However, by invoking resource scarcity (“we have more things to do”) and professionalism, the officers risk appearing dismissive, especially when the civilian asks them not to “dismiss” their feelings. The frustration of the civilian in the series often turns into respond to the police with anger, distrust, or disrespect in the form of shouting, filming the police officers, threatening legal action, or demanding badge numbers. These behaviors, while sometimes confrontational, reflect deeper concerns and lived experiences, including racial discrimination, social exclusion, or systemic disadvantage. In some scenes, civilians directly bring up issues of race or justice, pointing to a desire for recognition, dignity, or fairness, even when expressed in chaotic or emotional ways. These character portrayals do not simply show individuals ‘misbehaving,’ but instead reflect complex struggles tied to identity, mental health, and unequal relations with institutions. By offering complex representations, these narratives have the potential to challenge dominant discourses (Baranauskas & Drakulich, 2018, p. 684).

Another character portrayal within the series is that of youth. Police officers frequently interact with youth, including minors, who are shown navigating a range of challenging social and personal circumstances. These portrayals contribute to broader social narratives that equate urban youth, especially those who are racialized or marginalized, with disorder, irresponsibility, and disrespect for authority. For instance, in *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 4), a man, probably around the age of 25, responds to police intervention with overt hostility, using language such as “dit boeit mij echt geen k*****” (I really don’t give a f***) and “wat wil je doen, mij meenemen?” (What do you want to do, take me with you?). These verbal choices, particularly the use of serious Dutch curse words, reflect a deep resistance to police authority and signal a breakdown in communicative norms. Through a textual level of analysis, this aggressive defiance functions not just as individual frustration, but a way of questioning authority (Fairclough, 1993). The officers’ responses, while attempting to restore order “als je stopt met schelden, kunnen we een normaal gesprek voeren” (if you stop cursing, we could have a normal conversation), shift between professionalism and visible irritation, especially when the officer later refers to the man as a “sukkel” (loser). This emotionally tone of voice humanizes the officers but also shows how difficult it can be for police to deal with troubled youth. However, this portrayal and framing of youth can contribute to the generalizing of the stereotype that most of the youth are ‘troubled’. This reduces complex individuals and groups to a set of predictable traits, upholding social norms and existing power structures (Murphy & McCarthy, 2021, p. 1031).

4.3 Framing techniques

In this third section, the dimension presents the series framing and techniques. With framing, the media chooses events to report on, and how to present them, highlighting certain aspects of an issue while omitting or downplaying others, thereby shaping public perception and guiding interpretation (Althoff, 2018, p. 341). The series aims to present a realistic portrayal of police officers in their daily routines and how they navigate various situations. What comes to the forefront is their lawful conduct, their commitment to being there for the public, and their role in aiding whenever necessary. This includes vulnerable and emotionally charged scenes, such as officers dealing with individuals in poor mental health or showing the tragic outcome of a failed resuscitation attempt. The following results explore the most prominent themes and subjects that receive the greatest emphasis throughout the series and identify the types of framing employed.

Constructing police force, authority, and institutional legitimacy

A recurring element in both *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* is the depiction of police force during interventions. In many scenes, viewers witness suspects being restrained by multiple officers, often three or four at once, as the situation escalates. These scenes are frequently accompanied by resistance from suspects, who claim their bodily autonomy through repeated phrases such as "Niet aanraken!" (Don't touch me!) or "Ik heb niets gedaan!" (I didn't do anything!). These expressions signal more than a brief protest, they reflect broader anxieties around state power, coercion, and the legitimacy of police force. This potentially controversial use of force is discursively managed through framing and verbal justification.

Not only does the camera often privilege the perspective of the officers, but the series also includes direct commentary from police personnel themselves. Officers regularly explain their actions to the viewer, offering insight into why certain techniques are used. For instance, in *Bureau Maastricht* (Episode 1), one officer explains that "it often looks more intense than it is", clarifying that using multiple officers to restrain a person is a preventive measure meant to ensure safety and reduce chaos. These justifications are presented as neutral, factual, and procedural, serving to prevent public criticism and reinforce the image of the police as calm professionals making calculated decisions under pressure. In addition to this perspective, Ewout narration and direct-to-camera explanations offer further legitimization of police force and authority. He often places the viewer on the side of the officers, describing situations as dangerous or unpredictable, and reinforcing the idea that decisive physical action is both warranted and responsible. The suspect's perspective, their fear, confusion, or emotional distress, is rarely explored beyond surface-level reactions. This media strategy aligns closely with Fairclough's (1993) concept of ideology, in which discourses are used to make dominant

power relations appear natural and commonsensical. In this case, the repeated justification of physical force constructs a hegemonic narrative in which state violence becomes re-coded as necessary intervention. Rather than questioning whether such forceful actions are proportionate, the shows normalize them as part of everyday policing, subtly framing resistance as irrational or limiting. This can be directly connected to copaganda, where emotional storytelling is used to idealize or support police forces without critical thought, frequently ignoring real-world problems (Bernabo, 2022, p. 488).

In some cases, when the situation is calm and non-violent, the series allow brief moments where suspects are given a voice. Ewout sometimes speaks with them directly, but only when the situation permits, for instance, after a non-escalated arrest or during de-escalated interventions. These interactions are often framed as moments of reflection or clarification, in which the suspects can explain their perspective or show regret. However, this space for alternative narratives is conditional and controlled. Suspects are only heard when they are calm, cooperative, and non-threatening. In doing so, the series constructs a hierarchy of credibility, in which suspect voices are only legitimized when they align with institutional expectations of order and civility.

From a CDA perspective, this selective inclusion draws attention to a discourse imbalance. While the police are consistently given narrative authority, suspect voices are only included when they do not disrupt the dominant portrayal of the police as rational and fair. This supports Fairclough's (1993) idea that media texts help 'regulate voice', not just by controlling what is said, but also who is allowed to speak and under what circumstances. As a result, even when suspects are heard, their perspectives are framed within a broader structure that reinforces and legitimizes institutional power.

Throughout the series, these framing techniques consistently reinforce a narrative around police authority and institutional legitimacy. At the textual level, the frequent portrayal of police officers as composed, rational, and authoritative, in contrast to the civilian portrayal who are often shown in emotionally charged or chaotic states, creates a dichotomy that legitimize the police as a stabilizing force and frames social disorder as something needing strict control instead of real changes to the system. For example, civilians who question police actions or resist authority are quickly depicted as unreasonable or disrespectful, as where individuals immediately raise their voice or confront officers with a big mouth. These portrayals rarely include contextual reflection on the civilian's perspective, such as distrust of law enforcement or experiences of over-policing. Instead, editing choices emphasize escalation and noncompliance, positioning police responses, sometimes sarcastic or forceful, as justified.

From the perspective of discursive practice, this dichotomy reflects specific production choices that guide how the audience interprets these interactions. The absence of civilian

context reduces opportunities for alternative readings. Instead, the narrative privileges the institutional voice of the police, both during action and in post-event reflections. For instance, closing remarks such as the one in *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 9): “Hij heeft al zo’n mening in z’n hoofd gecreëerd dat gaan wij echt niet meer veranderen” (He already made up his mind, we’re not going to change that) subtly affirm the moral and institutional high ground of law enforcement, embedding the idea that police are not only necessary but inherently right.

At the level of social practice, these recurring patterns used align with dominant media discourses that praise safety, discourage disagreement, and normalize the authority of law enforcement in managing public spaces and their behavior. By consistently framing the police as justified, the series reproduce hegemonic discourses that uphold the status quo and frame systemic issues.

Racial profiling and institutional discrimination in policing

The depiction of racial profiling in the series reveals a subtle reinforcement of institutional authority through framing techniques that center the police perspective while downplaying structural critiques. In *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 4), an interaction unfolds where a civilian accuses the police of racism. Rather than engaging with the substance of the claim, the series provides space for officer to reflect on his emotional discomfort in conversation with presenter Ewout, while the civilian’s voice is marginalized. Ewout’s question “Hoe vind je het dat hij dan over racisme begint?” (What do you think about him bringing up racism?) and “En waarom zeg je dan niks terug?” (And why didn’t you respond?), steer the narrative towards validating the officer’s restraint and professional demeanor, rather than interrogating racial profiling as a systemic issue. The officer’s response, dismissing the civilian’s reaction as “Die mensen zitten in hun film” (They’re stuck in their own narrative), individualizes the encounter and frames the accusation as irrational. This example aligns with a broader discourse strategy in the series that neutralizes racialized critiques by emphasizing the officers’ neutrality and good intentions.

Moreover, it also reflects hegemonic strategies where dominant institutions maintain their authority not by force but by shaping common sense through media (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 197). By showing officers distancing themselves from any form of bias through statements, the series participates in a colorblind discourse that masks systemic inequalities and reframes racism as an issue of individual bad behavior rather than institutional practice. The handling of accusations of racism in the series can also be understood in relation to the ‘racist cop’ stereotype, which the series seems to reject or neutralize. Instead of engaging critically with systemic discrimination, the series frames these moments to protect the professional image of the police. Within Fairclough’s (1993) discursive practice dimension, this involves the selective production and circulation of

meaning, foregrounding the officer's voice and minimizing the civilians. The series narrative structure and framing techniques avoids portraying officers as overtly racist, which could damage their public legitimacy. Instead, it uses moments of accusation to reinforce the idea that officers are rational, restrained individuals unfairly accused due to misunderstanding or emotion. As such, the series reinforces the institutional narrative that police actions are objective and procedurally justified, while civilian accusations are portrayed as emotional and unfounded. Through these narrative and framing choices, *Bureau Rotterdam* and *Bureau Maastricht* ultimately sustains the legitimacy of law enforcement, limiting space for a critical engagement with institutional discrimination.

The framing of the drug issue

Each year the drug problem continues to grow, including in the Netherlands where news statements frequently report on incidents related to drug causes. In May of this year, the Dutch cabinet announced plans to focus on raising awareness and implementing a stricter approach to drug use and drug-related crime (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, Ministerie Justitie en Veiligheid 2025). State secretary Karremans and Minister Van Weel aim to enforce a tough drug policy by reducing both the demand and supply of drugs, preventing a new generation of young criminals, and cracking down on drug-related crime.

This societal issue forms a recurring theme in both *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam*, reflecting these concerns by portraying a pattern of drug-related incidents, including street-level dealing, addiction-related disturbances, and the weight this place on police officers. In both seasons, there is an episode that explicitly introduces the issue of drug-related crime. For example, in *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 9), officers are headed out to arrest suspected drug dealers. With the help of street surveillance cameras, they can monitor specific hotspots and coordinate their actions in real time. The scene not only portrays the operational side of the police force but also reflects the growing normalization of drug-related interventions in urban policing. In *Bureau Maastricht* (Episode 9), the scene begins with an introduction about the ongoing drug problem in the Netherlands, and specifically in Maastricht. Meanwhile, footage is shown of various raids and arrests. The scene continues with the undercover operation planned for that day, aimed at catching both buyers and sellers. Before heading into the city, the officers discuss the plan. They will go undercover, in plain clothes, to a location near the border where they expect that Belgian drug users may cross into the Netherlands to buy drugs. This specific scene reproduces dominant discourses on drug crime, migration, and border-related nuisance. The implicit portrayal of foreign nationals, both drug users and dealers, as a source of local problems aligns with broader societal anxieties about cross-border criminality and migration. One of the police officer's remarks that "in their country, nothing is allowed, and in the Netherlands,

“everything is allowed,” which not only generalizes the cultural norms of an entire group but also reinforces a clear us-versus-them dichotomy. Another officer promotes a work ethic where ‘honest work’ is idealized, and criminality is framed as a personal and risky choice. With this portrayal of the Belgian drug user as a threat, highlights the freedom of the Netherlands compared to their country.

The series also links the connection between drug-related activities and youth criminality. Criminal networks frequently exploit individuals in vulnerable positions, such as young people or those struggling with debt. Several scenes suggest that young people are increasingly involved in drug trafficking or street-level dealing, either because of targeted recruitment by criminal networks or due to socioeconomic vulnerabilities. This link is not only implied through arrests and investigations shown in the episodes, but also through dialogues that emphasize how youth are drawn into the drug trade at an early age. In *Bureau Rotterdam* (Episode 1), two officers respond to an incident in Rotterdam-Zuid where a man has been stabbed in the leg, leading to the involvement of residents and youth from the neighborhood. Ewout discusses the incident with one of the officers. In this conversation, a statement like “Dit is wel typisch Rotterdam” (This is typically Rotterdam) contributes to the normalization and naturalization of violence, especially in specific urban areas. The depiction of a neighborhood in Rotterdam-Zuid as ‘typically’ violent contributes to territorial stigmatization and reinforces existing stereotypes about working-class, ethnically diverse urban areas. The deterministic framing of youth criminality in this scene is linked to bad parenting or toxic environments. As one officer mentions “Soms kan je het van een minderjarig persoon geen eens kwalijk nemen dat ze deze kant op gaan als je een voorbeeld krijgt van je ouders dat dit zo gaat. Je weet niet beter” (Sometimes you can’t even blame a minor for going down that path when their parents set that kind of example. They don’t know any better). The suggestion that “soms zijn ze niet te helpen” (sometimes they just can’t be helped) implies a lack of trust in social support systems and supports punishment over prevention.

The portrayal of drug-related criminality is an example of how the media may influence public opinion through dialogue. At the textual level using language and imagery, drug users and sellers are portrayed as risks to public order, including police raids, undercover operations, and discussions of dangerous options. These scenes focus on individual behavior and rarely show the broader social problems behind drug involvement, like poverty or social pressure. At the level of discursive practice, the series provides the police and narrator the primary voice influencing how viewers perceive drug use and criminal activity. Rather than viewing drug-related concerns as problems that require social or political solutions, viewers are urged to view them as something that the police must manage. At the social practice level, this supports dominant ideas in society that focus on punishment and

control, especially of youth and migrants. As Fairclough (1993) explains, these patterns are not neutral, they help maintain existing power structures by presenting law enforcement as necessary and morally right, while framing social problems as individual failure.

The framing of the asylum center AZC

Lastly, another recurring theme in the season of *Bureau Maastricht* is the police's involvement with incidents at and near the asylum center (AZC), highlighting the broader societal tensions of migration, public safety, and institutional capacity. An example (Episode 1) of the series framing of asylum seekers is a scene where the police is called to the AZC to handle a man who locked himself in his room but must leave the premises because of his behavior. The situation seems to escalate as the man threatens to stab anyone who enters. The officers handling the situation must follow proper procedure, calling for official authorization before intervening, and eventually subdue and arrest the man after he refuses to cooperate. While the officers' actions are portrayed as controlled and procedural, the scene also includes commentary from Ewout and an AZC staff member that subtly navigates a tension between defending the AZC's reputation and distancing the institution from the deviant behavior of one individual. Ewout emphasizes that most residents are 'gemoedelijk' (jovial) and that positive aspects of the AZC are rarely shown in the media. At the same time, he refers to the man as a 'hopeloos geval' (hopeless) and a 'rotte appel' (bad apple), reinforcing a discourse of exclusion and individualized blame.

Another example (Episode 9) is where two officers respond to a shoplifting incident, where asylum seekers are framed primarily through the lens of criminality and deviance. From the outset, the officers establish a causal link between theft and asylum seekers with the remark, "je ziet vaak dat die gasten die diefstallen plegen, dat die woonachtig zijn bij het AZC" (you often see that the guys who commit these thefts live at the AZC). This frames the residents from the AZC as offenders, reinforcing a generalization and stigmatized association between asylum seekers and theft. Even though one officers briefly acknowledges the high cost of living and the difficult circumstances of AZC residents, this is limited and framed in rather individual than structural terms. The focus also shifts rather quickly to police workload "dit kost ons veel werk... drie aanhoudingen" (this costs us a lot of work three arrest), which centers the institutional issue rather than the underlying social problems. Discursively, the scene reflects broader media and societal narratives in which asylum seekers, especially young men, are framed as security risks under constant surveillance.

In contrast, in *Bureau Maastricht* (Episode 9), the series tries to offer a more empathetic portrayal. Ewout visits the AZC in Ter Apel and speaks with a staff member and a resident. Here, asylum seekers are described as hopeless and stuck, with some acknowledgment of trauma and mental health issues. Yet despite efforts to counter

stereotypes, such as highlighting that only a few causes trouble and most want to integrate, the language still centers on instability, unpredictability, and despair. The suggestion that people may do strange things when feeling hopeless risks reinforcing fears around migrants and their behavior.

The framing constructs the officers and AZC staff as rational and compassionate, while positioning the man as a volatile threat who expressing broader public fears about asylum seekers. Through this framing, the series not only reinforces dominant narratives of control and containment, but also contributes to the bordering of migrant populations, presenting systemic issues as isolated behavioral failures. In Fairclough's (1993) terms, these situations can be understood as a part of a broader discourse of the securitization of migration, where the framing of migration is referred to as security threat, rather than a social or economic issues. In *Bureau Maastricht* the asylum seekers are constructed as both needy and potentially threatening. Even though moments of empathy are shown, the dominant framing aligns with a narrative of control, surveillance and restriction, where migrants are othered either as criminal, unstable, or in need of strict management.

It is relevant here to consider the relationship between media framing, and the emergence of media hypes. Framing not only determines which themes are emphasized within the series but also subtly influences how viewers are encouraged to interpret those themes (Cohen, 1963, as cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p. 307). In this way, the series not only shows what the series finds important for the audience to see but also shapes how they are meant to think about crime and public safety. This aligns closely with the concept of crime framing, which refers to how media selectively structure and present information about criminal activity (Althoff, 2018, p. 347). Such framing decisions can have broad social, cultural, and political implications. One potential consequence is the amplification of public perception, making crime appear more frequent or severe than it may be. Dramatization and an emphasis on moral concern can, in turn, contribute to moral panic, intensifying public fear or distrust toward particular social issues or groups (Althoff, 2018, p. 347).

5. Conclusion

The central question of this thesis included examining the ways the Dutch TV series *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* reinforces and/or subvert dominant media discourses and stereotypes about crime and law enforcement in the Netherlands through their narrative structures, character portrayals, and framing techniques. This research finds that *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam* mostly reinforce dominant media discourses surrounding crime and law enforcement. Although subversion does occur, it is mostly empathetic or superficial and ultimately reinforces institutional legitimacy rather than challenge it. Using narrative structures, character portrayals and framing strategies the series construct a hegemonic view of police officers as heroic, morally and rationally grounded figures. In contrast, civilians, including asylum seekers and marginalized youth, are represented in a way that reinforces social stereotypes and structural inequalities.

The analytical chapters, drawing from Fairclough's (1993) Critical Discourse Analysis and the identified key categories, were essential in uncovering how meaning of dominant discourses and stereotypes evolved and constructed in the series. The findings support the theory of Fairclough (1993) where media discourses reflect and reproduce ideological power structures in which it operates. A prominent discourse that emerged is the hero stereotype, thereby constructing the police narrative. This is not surprising, as the series follows police officers in their daily routines and investigations, positioning them as central figures in maintaining social order. This framing inherently casts the police in a positive, action-oriented role, often portraying them as rational, calm, and efficient in dealing with chaotic or dangerous situations. The interplay between narrative structure, character construction and framing illustrate a subtle but powerful process of ideological reinforcement by portraying law enforcement as rational and human, even when using force. Reinforcement creates a form of copaganda, sustaining institutional power by framing law enforcement as necessary. This supports the theory of cultural hegemony that describes how dominant groups, here the police, maintain power not only through coercion, but through the shaping of the commonsense ideologies that are seen as natural or as 'the ways things are', reminding us of the social construction of discourse (Gramsci, 1972). Althoff (2018) and Althoff et al. (2020) provide further insight into how these dominant narratives gain traction and appear natural. The series' repeated emphasis on police rationality and procedural order is according to Althoff (2018) not just a matter of visibility, but of structured meaning-making that reflects institutional and cultural power. Althoff et al. (2020) refer in this matter to hegemonic narratives that organize public understanding through repetition, simplification and emotional resonance.

Media framing theory further illustrates the structure of these portrayals. Goffman (1974) and later Edelman (1993) proposed that frames provide a structuring mechanism

through which audiences make sense of social reality. In both series, framing serves to accentuate officer professionalism and rationality while civilian injustices are degraded to the background, especially concerning issues like racial profiling, social inequality, and institutional failure. For instance, accusations of racism are often met with colorblind counter-narratives or emotional discomfort framed as acts of restraint and professionalism by officers. Such reactions frame systemic issues as mere personal misunderstandings in what Croteau and Hoynes (2019) refer to as dominant ideological discourse, a perspective that affirms institutional legitimacy while rejecting alternative experiences and voices.

The findings further illustrate the relevance of “copaganda” as a contemporary analytical framework for examining the relationship between the media and police. Denman (2023) and Bernabo (2022) have described copaganda as the media portrayal, either intentionally or unintentionally, through which policing is depicted in an overly positive and uncritical manner. Both *Bureau* series fit this definition by consistently reinforcing the assumptions of police heroism, necessity, and moral exceptionalism. Although the shows aim for documentary realism, narrative structures with character interviews and voiceovers serve to omit deeper critique of law enforcement's complex realities. The lack of contextualization of structural factors such as institutional racism, politicized migration or mental health policy demonstrates how copaganda works through systematic erasure as much as emphasis.

Interestingly, this process is not always clear. The series appears to counter public misconceptions about the police by offering an “insider’s” perspective, showcasing the emotional and procedural complexity of their work involving societal expectations placed on the police, expected to provide safety, solve problems, and protect the vulnerable. Some episodes show how these expectations are challenged, for example in interactions with confused individuals, those struggling with addiction, or people with psychological problems. These portrayals complicate the hero narrative by exposing the limits of police authority and expertise, especially in areas that traditionally fall outside of criminal justice. This tension opens a space for critical reflection on the role of the police in contemporary society. It also shows how such roles are imagined, reinforced, or questioned through popular media. However, the narrative focus remains on the burden placed on the police rather than the failings of the justice system.

Finally, this raises important questions about media framing and representation. While the events depicted are based on real-life situations, it is crucial to acknowledge the mediating role of the television format with a process of selection, editing, and framing. This underscores the broader ideological function of media. It does not merely reflect reality but actively participates in shaping a particular view of policing for the audience. It reminds the viewer that what is presented as “reality” is never neutral. Through its editorial decisions, the TV series functions as a gatekeeper, deciding what aspects of police work the audience sees

and, equally important, what remains hidden or underrepresented. This representation can contribute to building trust in authority, reinforcing the legitimacy of policing practices, and framing officers as competent and morally grounded figures. All the while the series offers insight into law enforcement work, they reproduce dominant societal narratives. This tendency presents an oversimplified view of reality. In aiming to offer clarity, *Bureau Maastricht* and *Rotterdam* neglect profound critique-based reasoning and deny discomforting uncertainty.

Overall, this research demonstrates the usefulness of the frameworks discussed in the theory. It also helps in understanding how entertainment media serves as a place for negotiating ideas. While the series sometimes hints at complexity, they mainly support a view that sees law enforcement as necessary, logical, and moral. In contrast, social deviance is portrayed as personal, emotional, and separate from broader causes. These findings urge us to think more critically about popular media, especially those that claim to show “reality.” They invite scholars, practitioners, and audiences to question what is left unseen or unsaid in these portrayals

Societal and practical implications

The findings of this research have broader relevance outside their theoretical implications as they also have implications for the actual shaping of public understanding, institutional trust, and social policy. *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam*’s use of popular factual entertainment can reinforce dominant discourses about social order, citizenship, and deviance, thereby influencing not only viewers’ perceptions but also broader cultural and political beliefs.

One of the most important implications is the normalization of police authority and the reinforcement of public trust in law enforcement through emotional and relatable portrayals. By consistently showing officers as patient, emotionally impacted, and realistic in difficult times, the series provides a reassuring story where law enforcement appears both capable and caring. This framing may lead the public to support greater police powers, surveillance, and harsh measures, even when practical solutions would be more appropriate. Such depictions hide the role of policy failures, welfare cuts, and systemic marginalization in creating the very situations that police are shown as handling.

Additionally, the series may add to the stigmatization and moral panic surrounding certain groups. Recalling Cohen’s (1972) idea of moral panic, these groups are presented as threats to public safety or social unity. Even when there are efforts to show their humanity, the main narrative still portrays them as unpredictable, unstable, or needing strict supervision. This type of framing can feed into public anxieties around immigration, youth

criminality, or urban disorder, potentially reinforcing support for strict immigration policies, social control, or reactive welfare changes.

The practical implications also relate to media literacy and democratic accountability. When media that claims to offer "realistic" portrayals of crime and law enforcement relies too much on institutional viewpoints, it can create an environment that sidelines alternative voices and structural criticism. The repeated focus on the police viewpoint, along with the lack of broader socio-economic context, risks creating a narrow public conversation that limits chances for reform. This highlights the importance of critical media education and the need for more transparency about how these series are made, edited, and framed.

Limitations of the study

This research has proven to provide valuable insights into the framework of *Bureau Maastricht* and *Bureau Rotterdam*. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First and foremost, this study is based solely on the textual and visual analysis of two seasons of crime series. As such, the conclusions drawn concern to these productions and cannot be generalized across all Dutch police media or international formats. Future research may uncover different discursive dynamics in other regions, genres, or cultural contexts.

Moreover, the study's locality can be a limitation to this study. Since the sample is restricted to two cities, Maastricht and Rotterdam, the findings may not be generalizable to other locations or populations. This can be due to differences in demographics, cultural norms, or other contextual factors.

Thirdly, because the methodological approach of Critical Discourse Analysis is interpretative in nature, the findings may vary based on where the researcher positioned themselves in their analysis. Although the analysis evolved from theoretical basis and grounded in textual evidence for conclusions, the materials may be read and interpreted differently, depending on disciplinary focus or ideological orientations.

Fourth, this research focuses on media text rather audience reception. While the analysis uncovers ideologies within the content, it cannot determine how audiences interpret or respond to these portrayals. Do people accept the police perspective without question, or do they push back against it? Are some social groups more critical than others? These are important questions that fall outside the scope of this study.

Finally, the research does not explore long-term media effects. While it analyzes patterns in how crime and policing are portrayed, it does not provide insights on whether and how such representations shape public opinion, policy preferences, or trust in law enforcement over time.

Suggestions for future research

Building on the research and its limitations, there are several promising suggestions for future research which can not only deepen but also expand the insights from this study. A first suggestion is to include and investigate the audience point of view, discovering how different social groups, including marginalized groups, interpret the series and the media portrayals. Such research would provide interesting information regarding the effects of the narratives, character portrayals and framing.

A second suggestion would be to explore the production side of crime media and examining how editorial decisions are made and to what extent law enforcement agencies influence the content. In this matter it would be interesting to see how producers and officers look back to the series, and if they would agree with the outcomes of this research, possibly offering insights or critique. Understanding this production side would offer important insight into the institutional context behind media framing.

Finally, future research could benefit from a comparative approach across countries. For instance, do police series in other cultural contexts frame law enforcement and social order? Are there notable differences in how race, mental health, or youth crime are portrayed? This kind of analysis could reveal whether patterns found in this study are context related or part of a broader media framework.

Rather than simply extending the data or enlarging the sample, these suggestions for further research should push critical and structural questions about the role of media in shaping the understanding of crime and law enforcement. Even though I believe the series holds relevance by giving attention to the multifaceted nature of police work, challenging the public's misunderstandings about crime and law enforcement, it is important that we take note of the problems this research has brought to light. These problems, especially those of representation and framing, are what I think should now be given a critical eye.

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Appendix A

Table A1

Episode Overview Bureau Maastricht

Episode	Length	Air Date	Description (Dutch)	Description (English)
1	61 minutes	22 October 2024	Agenten Jos en Sander achtervolgen een scooterrijder die levensgevaarlijk gedrag vertoont en waarmee veel meer aan de hand is dan ze dachten. Op het AZC moet een agressieve man met veel geweld zijn kamer uitgezet worden door agenten Daan en Tyrone. Ewout raakt verwikkeld in een emotioneel gesprek met een vrouw nadat haar echtgenoot in koelen bloede op een parkeerplaats is neergestoken.	Officers Jos and Sander pursue a scooter driver who displays life-threatening behavior and turns out to be involved in more than expected. At the asylum center, an aggressive man must be forcefully removed from his room by officers Daan and Tyrone. Ewout becomes involved in an emotional conversation with a woman after her husband was cold-bloodedly stabbed in a parking lot.
2	63 minutes	29 October 2024	Agenten Lars en Can verlenen eerste hulp aan een inbreker die met een gestolen auto volledig over de kop is geslagen. Daan en Tyrone komen ter plaatse bij een brandje waarbij een wel heel bijzonder boek in de hens staat. Jos en Sander gaan de Maas op als er een melding binnenkomt van iemand die bewust van een brug het water in is gesprongen.	Officers Lars and Can provide first aid to a burglar who flipped over with a stolen car. Daan and Tyrone respond to a small fire involving a very special book. Jos and Sander take to the Maas River after a report of someone deliberately jumping into the water from a bridge.
3	62 minutes	5 November 2024	Agenten Daan en Tyrone proberen twee ontsnapte rams terug de wei in te krijgen. Jos en Sander uiten hun frustraties over een stomdronken man die	Officers Daan and Tyrone try to return two escaped rams to the pasture. Jos and Sander express their frustration about a completely drunk

			gewoon de weg op gaat. Lars en Can gaan samen met Ewout kijken bij een oudere man die al een week niet te bereiken is. En een 'inbraak' krijgt een onverwachte wending.	man still driving. Lars and Can visit an elderly man with Ewout who hasn't been reachable for a week. And a reported 'burglary' takes an unexpected turn.
4	62 minutes	12 November 2024	Agenten Jos en Sander voelen zich machteloos bij een tankstation dat in lichterlaaie staat. Verder maken buren melding van hun buurman die door een woonwijk loopt met een vuurwapen. Ook op klaarlichte dag maakt iemand melding van een vuurwapen. Nikky en Renaldo gaan erop af. En Ewout ziet van dichtbij de schrijnende situatie van een bejaarde man die zijn huis niet meer uit kan	Officers Jos and Sander feel powerless when a gas station goes up in flames. Neighbors report a man walking through the neighborhood with a firearm. In broad daylight, another firearm report comes in. Nikky and Renaldo respond. Ewout witnesses up close the distressing situation of an elderly man who can no longer leave his home.
5	61 minutes	19 November 2024	Agenten Kirsten en Anouk rijden door de stad als ze worden aangesproken door iemand die een hondje van straat heeft gehaald. Als ze op zoek gaan naar de eigenaar, krijgen ze een melding van een reanimatie. Daan en Tyrone proberen contact te maken met een man die iets te diep in het glaasje heeft gekeken. Ewout praat met een vrouw die een autoongeluk heeft gehad.	Officers Kirsten and Anouk are patrolling the city when someone approaches them with a stray dog. While searching for the owner, they receive a resuscitation call. Daan and Tyrone try to connect with a man who had too much to drink. Ewout speaks with a woman who has been in a car accident.
6	64 minutes	26 November 2024	Guido en Kenia moeten op zoek naar wat mogelijk de overblijfselen van een persoon kunnen zijn. Agenten Lars en Can mengen zich in een relatiecrisis. Jos en Sander proberen een niet zo vriendelijke	Guido and Kenia search for what could be human remains. Officers Lars and Can intervene in a relationship crisis. Jos and Sander try to catch an unfriendly Rottweiler and attempt to locate a

			Rottweiler te pakken te krijgen én doen een poging tot het vinden van een man die meerdere mensen met pepperspray heeft bespoten.	man who sprayed several people with pepper spray.
7	64 minutes	3 December 2024	Er zijn inbrekers in een bedrijfspand gezien en agenten Daan en Tyrone proberen ze te pakken te krijgen. Lars en Can treffen twee minderjarige meisjes aan die stiekem een grote hoeveelheid wodka hebben gedronken. En Ewout gaat samen met Kirsten en Anouk af op een melding van een inbreker, al heeft die wel een heel opvallende outfit aan.	Guido and Kenia search for what could be human remains. Officers Lars and Can intervene in a relationship crisis. Jos and Sander try to catch an unfriendly Rottweiler and attempt to locate a man who sprayed several people with pepper spray.
8	60 minutes	10 December 2024	Agenten Nikky en Renaldo gaan af op een melding van een vrouw die haar verslaafde buurvrouw al dagen niet heeft gezien. Jos en Sander zien een auto in rook opgaan en vermoeden dat iemand zijn sporen heeft willen wissen. Guido en Kenia gaan af op een melding van een suïcidaal persoon en treffen daar een bizarre situatie aan. En Lars en Can krijgen een wel heel merkwaardige tip.	Officers Nikky and Renaldo respond to a report from a woman who hasn't seen her addicted neighbor in days. Jos and Sander witness a car going up in smoke and suspect someone tried to erase evidence. Guido and Kenia respond to a suicidal person report and encounter a bizarre situation. Lars and Can receive a very peculiar tip.
9	63 minutes	17 December 2024	Agenten Lars, Can, Daan en Tyrone gaan undercover op zoek naar drugsdealers. Daan en Tyrone gaan af op een melding van een jong meisje dat zelfmoord wil plegen. Daan en Kenia lichten in alle vroegte een oplichter van zijn bed. En Sander en Jos zetten een man aan de	Officers Nikky and Renaldo respond to a report from a woman who hasn't seen her addicted neighbor in days. Jos and Sander witness a car going up in smoke and suspect someone tried to erase evidence. Guido and Kenia respond to a suicidal person report

			kant die meteen helemaal flipt.	and encounter a bizarre situation. Lars and Can receive a very peculiar tip.
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Note. This table provides an overview of the episodes from *Bureau Maastricht*. It includes episode numbers, the length of the episode, and a brief description of the episodes itself, sourced from the official broadcaster's website.

Table A2*Episode Overview Bureau Rotterdam*

Episode	Length	Air Date	Description (Dutch)	Description (English)
1	55 minutes	10 October 2023	In een Rotterdamse woonwijk gaat het helemaal mis wanneer bij een burenruzie messen worden getrokken. Agenten Nadia en Joyce moeten de gemoederen zien te bedaren. Ewout ziet hoe Keashia en Brian met gevaar voor eigen leven een wandelende man van de snelweg plukken. En Jacco en Guido treffen een vuurwapen aan bij een wel erg jonge verdachte.	In a Rotterdam neighborhood, a neighbor dispute escalates when knives are drawn. Officers Nadia and Joyce try to calm the situation. Ewout watches as Keashia and Brian risk their lives to pull a walking man off the highway. Jacco and Guido find a firearm on a very young suspect.
2	59 minutes	17 October 2023	Tijdens de dienst van Jacco en Guido ontstaat een grote chaos wanneer een boze man met een auto het politiebureau binnentreedt. Lindsey en Wouter zoeken uit of een vissende jongen daadwerkelijk een mensenkoofd in een sloot heeft zien liggen. Agenten Alex en Andrea gaan op een melding van inbraak af en Nadia en Joyce schieten een verwarde man met liefdesverdriet te hulp.	During Jacco and Guido's shift, chaos erupts when an angry man drives his car into the police station. Lindsey and Wouter investigate whether a fishing boy really saw a human head in a ditch. Officers Alex and Andrea respond to a burglary call, and Nadia and Joyce assist a confused man suffering from heartbreak.
3	41 minutes	23 October 2023	Keashia en Brian zitten in een lastig parket wanneer een vrouw binnenshuis ten val is gekomen, maar de agenten de deur niet open mogen breken omdat bij mevrouw dan een oorlogstrauma opspelt. Samen met Jacco en Guido stuit Ewout op een groep ruziënde jongeren,	Keashia and Brian face a difficult situation when a woman falls inside her home, but they're not allowed to break in as it might trigger her war trauma. Together with Jacco and Guido, Ewout encounters a group of quarreling

			waarbij ook een vader door het lint gaat.	youths, including a father who loses his temper.
4	64 minutes	31 October 2023	Wouter en Lindsey belanden in een geheimzinnige situatie waarbij iemand neergestoken is. Maar door wie? Nadia en Joyce willen een drugstest afnemen bij een automobilist, maar die maakt het hen extreem moeilijk. Samen met agenten Andrea en Alex is Ewout ter plaatse bij een mogelijke fietsendief. En Keashia en Brian schieten een vrouw te hulp die te veel drugs op heeft.	Wouter and Lindsey end up in a mysterious case involving a stabbing. But who did it? Nadia and Joyce try to perform a drug test on a driver who makes it extremely difficult. Ewout joins officers Andrea and Alex at the scene of a potential bike thief. Keashia and Brian help a woman who took too many drugs.
5	63 minutes	7 November 2023	Twee vrouwen liggen vechtend op de grond in het centrum van Rotterdam. Keashia en Brian halen ze met pijn en moeite uit elkaar. Jacco en Guido proberen een heftig bloedende man te helpen. Agenten Anouk en Robin krijgen een wel heel bijzondere melding: er zouden twee jongeren op de vluchtstrook liggen	Two women are fighting on the ground in downtown Rotterdam. Keashia and Brian struggle to separate them. Jacco and Guido assist a heavily bleeding man. Officers Anouk and Robin respond to a very unusual call: two youths reportedly lying on the shoulder of a highway.
6	61 minutes	14 November 2023	Een drugsdeal ontaardt in een schietpartij. Agenten Nadia en Joyce zijn als eerste bij het slachtoffer dat met een schotwond op de grond ligt. Andrea en Alex gaan op zoek naar een man waar al een paar dagen niets meer van vernomen is. In een verlaten schoolpand gaat Ewout samen met Robin en Anouk op zoek naar insluipers.	A drug deal turns into a shooting. Officers Nadia and Joyce are first on the scene to find a gunshot victim. Andrea and Alex search for a man who hasn't been heard from in days. In an abandoned school, Ewout joins Robin and Anouk in looking for intruders.
7	61 minutes	21 November 2023	Keashia en Brian komen ter plaatse bij een	Keashia and Brian respond to a

			burenruzie. Agenten Lindsey en Wouter krijgen een melding van een schietpartij. Jacco en Guido laten Ewout zien dat de politie ruzies tussen kinderen ook prima kan oplossen. Robin en Anouk zien een verwarde man die zich vastklampt aan een verkeersbord boven een weg. En Andrea en Ulubat zijn als eerste ter plaatse bij een heftige aanrijding.	neighbor dispute. Officers Lindsey and Wouter are dispatched to a shooting. Jacco and Guido show Ewout how police can also handle disputes between children. Robin and Anouk encounter a confused man clinging to a road sign above a street. Andrea and Ulubat are first on the scene of a serious collision.
8	56 minutes	28 November 2023	Samen met agenten Lindsey en Wouter belandt Ewout midden in een heftige ruzie tussen dronken en hevig bloedende mannen. Keashia en Brian lossen na flink wat speurwerk een beroving op. Als een automobilist door de laaghangende avondzon een voetganger over het hoofd ziet, helpen Ulubat en Andrea deze gewonde vrouw. En Nadia en Joyce moeten een groep mensen die zwaar aan de drugs zit kalmeren.	Together with Lindsey and Wouter, Ewout ends up in a heated argument between drunken, heavily bleeding men. Keashia and Brian solve a robbery after extensive detective work. When a driver misses a pedestrian due to low evening sun, Ulubat and Andrea assist the injured woman. Nadia and Joyce try to calm a group of heavily drugged individuals.
9	55 minutes	5 December 2023	Keashia en Brian nemen Ewout mee op een grootscheepse drugsactie in de binnenstad van Rotterdam. Ook proberen ze een mysterie op te lossen wanneer een man aangeeft al dagen achtervolgd te worden. Agenten Lindsey en Wouter stuiten in het holst van de nacht op een man die zichzelf in de keel heeft gesneden.	Keashia and Brian take Ewout on a large-scale drug raid in central Rotterdam. They also try to solve a mystery involving a man who claims to be followed for days. Officers Lindsey and Wouter come across a man who slit his throat in the dead of night. But why? Nadia and Joyce get

			Maar waarom? En Nadia en Joyce belanden in een chaotische vechtpartij.	caught in a chaotic fight.
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Note. This table provides an overview of the episodes from *Bureau Rotterdam*. It includes episode numbers, the length of the episode, and a brief description of the episodes itself, sourced from the official broadcaster's website.

Appendix B

Measuring instruments

The Critical Discourse Analysis was guided by Fairclough's (1993) three-dimensional framework, focusing on:

1. Textual analysis (word choices, tone, metaphors, visuals)
2. Discursive practice (genre, narrative construction, intertextuality)
3. Social practice (power relations, ideology, institutional framing)

Figure B1

Overview of Related Terms of Fairclough's (1993) Three-Dimensional Framework

DISCOURSE (abstract noun)	language use conceived as social practice.
DISCURSIVE EVENT	instance of language use, analysed as text, discursive practice, social practice.
TEXT	the written or spoken language produced in a discursive event.
DISCOURSE PRACTICE	the production, distribution and consumption of a text.
INTERDISCURSIVITY	the constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres.
DISCOURSE (count noun)	way of signifying experience from a particular perspective.
GENRE	use of language associated with a particular social activity.
ORDER OF DISCOURSE	totality of discursive practices of an institution, and relationships between them.

Note. Adapted from *Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities*, by N. Fairclough, 1993, *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), p. 138, (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002002>). Copyright 1993 by Sage Publications.

Appendix C

Figure C1

Main characters from Bureau Maastricht



Note. The following image shows the main characters featured in *Bureau Maastricht*.

Characters (from left to right)

- Daan, Nikky, Guido, Tyrone, Sander, Anouk, Ewout, Jos, Kenia, Lars, Renaldo, Kirsten and Can

Couples

1. Daan and Tyrone
2. Nikky and Renaldo
3. Guido en Kenia
4. Sander and Jos
5. Anouk and Kirsten
6. Lars en Can

Figure C2

Main characters from Bureau Rotterdam



Note. The following image shows the main characters featured in *Bureau Rotterdam*.

Characters (from left to right)

- Robin, Nadia, Guido, Joyce, Keisha, Wouter, Ewout, Brian, Lindsey, Andrea, Jacco, Anouk, Alex and Ulubat

Couples

1. Nadia and Joyce
2. Keashia and Brian
3. Guido and Jacco
4. Lindsey and Wouter
5. Andrea and Alex / Andrea and Ulubat
6. Anouk and Robin

Appendix D

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Camille Henninger

Student ID: 701172

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Dhr. T. de Winkel

Date: June 25, 2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously. The AI tool ChatGPT was used to improve the clarity of written sections, used to explain concepts or theory, and analyses processes to the researcher. Prompts included, but were not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quill Bot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (format and structuring, research design, method)
- And questions such as:
 - o Please explain more simply *concept*
 - o Please revise *sentence that was not coherent*
 - o What is synonym for *word*
 - o What is meant by *concept*
 - o What does the author mean by *concept, word, sentence*
 - o Does my argument make sense, Is this argument logically structured *own argument*
 - o Is the relation between *A* and *B* clear
 - o How can I make this smoother *own sentences*
 - o Do I use an academically tone of voice *own sentence*

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature:



Date of Signature: June 25, 2025

Extent of AI Usage

I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in this appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized 'J' followed by a surname.

Date of Signature: June 25, 2025