

Professional Summary

With the advent of forensic science based crime-dramas such as *CSI*, *Crossing Jordan* and *Bones* some prosecutors and social scientists have expressed concern about the emergence of a “CSI Effect.” This theory suggests that viewers of crime-dramas are becoming convinced that readily available forensic evidence such as DNA, hair and fiber, etc., should be available in all criminal cases. However, in many criminal cases such evidence is not available, and prosecutors argue, unnecessary. The theoretical result is that jurors are more skeptical of criminal cases lacking forensic evidence than in the past and less likely to convict. Yet, this theory has not yet been subjected to rigorous testing. The current study proposes to address this issue through a mock-trial format. Participants will be randomized to watch either a show with forensic science as part of the plot (*CSI*) or a similar drama without forensic analysis (*Law and Order: Criminal Intent*). The latter show will be carefully screened to make sure that no mention of forensic analysis is made. They are otherwise designed to be very similar in format and genre. A third group will be randomized to watch a TV show that is not a crime drama at all. Participants will also report on their past real-life viewing of crime dramas. Participants will then be randomized to watch a filmed mock jury trial (a staged trial using actors) in which forensic analysis either is or is not available. Participants will then report on their likelihood of convicting. This design allows for testing both causal and real-life correlational aspects of the “CSI Effect.”