Law, Justice, and All that Jazz: An Analysis of Law's Reach into Musical Theater

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Law, Justice, and All that Jazz: An Analysis of Law's Reach into Musical Theater

Abstract
Narratives or stories are present in many facets of life. Narratives especially are seen in the media, fiction and nonfiction alike. These stories, seen in media, fiction, and nonfiction alike, have an immense impact on their audience. This influence displays the importance of continued research into media's narratives, especially legal narratives. Much of past research looked at the social construction of these stories and its framing. Framing refers to how a subject is discussed in the media. While there is much research on media, framing, and legal narratives, very few researchers have examined live entertainment, including musical theater. My study explores the legal narratives within musicals. I completed a qualitative media analysis of seven Broadway shows and six Off-Broadway shows. My research questions include the following: Are there legal narratives in musical theater? What are those narratives? How do they compare on and Off-Broadway? Lastly, how have they changed over time? My analysis led to the emergence of three primary themes: deviancy, inequality, and institutionalized justice. In addition, there were also strong differences between the two venues. Specifically, Broadway shows largely criticize and discuss societal structures as they impact individuals. Conversely, Off-Broadway focuses on individual stories and tends to ignore societal structures. Some themes were also observed as changing over time. These changes either discussed important themes, new emergent themes, or changes in language over the decades. These findings are further complicated by hegemonic and counter hegemonic narratives. I discuss implications, limitations, and future research opportunities.

Keywords
Law, Media, Narratives, Theater, Performing arts, Sociology, Law
LAW, JUSTICE, AND ALL THAT JAZZ:

AN ANALYSIS OF LAW’S REACH INTO MUSICAL THEATER

BY

AMY L. OLDENQUIST

BA Psychology & Justice Studies, University of New Hampshire, 2014

THESIS

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in
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September, 2015
This thesis has been examined and approved.

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September, 2015

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of New Hampshire Graduate School.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, my mother Jean and my brother Billy who have stood by me and encouraged me to keep going through thick and thin. Also I would like to dedicate this thesis to my nephew, Damien, who hopefully will be inspired to continue his education once he is older and continue the Wildcat tradition.

I would also like to take this time to thank the teachers, professors, and professionals who have helped me as a student, but have also encouraged my passion and appreciation for musical theater. This master’s thesis would not have been possible without you.
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ABSTRACT

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by

Amy Oldenquist

University of New Hampshire, September, 2015

Narratives or stories are present in many facets of life. Narratives especially are seen in the media, fiction and nonfiction alike. These stories, seen in media, fiction, and nonfiction alike, have an immense impact on their audience. This influence displays the importance of continued research into media’s narratives, especially legal narratives. Much of past research looked at the social construction of these stories and its framing. Framing refers to how a subject is discussed in the media. While there is much research on media, framing, and legal narratives, very few researchers have examined live entertainment, including musical theater. My study explores the legal narratives within musicals. I completed a qualitative media analysis of seven Broadway shows and six Off-Broadway shows. My research questions include the following: Are there legal narratives in musical theater? What are those narratives? How do they compare on and Off-Broadway? Lastly, how have they changed over time? My analysis led to the emergence of three primary themes: deviancy, inequality, and institutionalized justice. In addition, there were also strong differences between the two venues. Specifically, Broadway shows largely criticize and discuss societal structures as they impact individuals. Conversely, Off-Broadway focuses on individual stories and tends to ignore societal structures. Some themes were also observed as changing over time. These changes either discussed important themes, new emergent themes, or changes in language over the decades. These findings are further complicated by hegemonic and counter hegemonic narratives. I discuss implications, limitations, and future research opportunities.
Introduction

“So pursue, but not too eagerly, injustice. Track down injustice... it hound us, But it will perish in its own great cold” (The Threepenny Opera; Weill & Brecht, 1954, p. 61)

“Sure; it’s a free country and I ain’t got the right. But it’s a country with laws; and I can find the right. I got the badge, you got the skin. It’s tough all over. Beat it!” (West Side Story; Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 51).

“Rich man, poor man, black or white, pick your apple, take a bite, everybody just hold tight to your dreams, everybody’s got the right to their dreams” (Assassins; Weldman & Sondheim, 1991, p. 13).

Noah Novogrodsky (2014, p. 48) writes, “Words and phrases, particularly performative utterances, can haunt listeners”. The above excerpts serve as examples from musicals. The haunting quality of these utterances is tied to the social importance of storytelling and narratives (Novogrodsky, 2014). Stories for hundreds of years have been important tools for discussing cultural topics, such as religion or justice (Foley, 2007; Johnson-Sheehan & Lynch, 2007; Novogrodsky, 2014). Our understanding of the world – including concepts of law and justice – are influenced by these narratives or “performative utterances” (Johnson & Buchannan, 2001). My research aims to better understand the development of legal narratives in musical theater, a unique and popular form of media.

The American musical is a distinct subset of the performing arts with a reputation as a flamboyant, frivolous, sparkly, and gregarious series of dances, songs, and scenes (Kantor & Maslon, 2004; Patinkin, 2008). What developed into the American musical began as minstrel
shows, traveling vaudevillian shows, and operettas around the turn of the century (Patinkin, 2008). After the turn of the twentieth century, drastic cultural changes (e.g., increase in immigration and multiculturalism) shaped the introduction of musical theater (Spevack, 2006). By the 1940s, the integrative musical was born with Oklahoma. After Oklahoma’s critical and commercial success, musical theater blossomed and remained popular for decades to come (Patinkin, 2008). The title of the “American” musical became commonplace. Even today, it remains a symbol of American culture (Heide, Porter, & Saito, 2012; Jones, 2005; Knapp, 2005). As American musical theater has evolved, its roots have remained in our country’s beliefs, norms, and identities (Hirschak, 2011; Jones, 2005; Knapp, 2005). The current study will examine the presence and form of legal narratives within American musical theater. For my research, law refers to social norms (formal and informal) and legal norms in our culture (i.e., equality for all; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness).

Media’s depiction of law – in the news, courtroom dramas, and police procedurals – has been popular for years (Cavender & Jurik, 2012), influencing countless individuals. Researchers suggest that these legal narratives have effects on the audience’s legal and moral reasoning (Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Cavender et al., 2010; Geisler, 2006; Lemal & Van den Bulck, 2009; Mah, Taylor, Hoang, & Cook, 2014; Narvaez & Gleason, 2007), ability to empathize (Bonds, 2009; Farber & Sherry, 1993; Novogrodsky, 2014), perceptions of the law, and legal literacy (Brisman, 2010; Britto, Hughes, Saltzman, & Stroh, 2007; Gies, 2003; Goidel et al, 2006; Kang, 2006; Lindahl, 2007; Lucia, 1999; Pollack & Kubrin, 2007; Watkins, 2011). Legal narratives impact their audiences’ legal consciousness in many different ways.¹ Firstly, these narratives provide experiences and perspectives otherwise unavailable to audiences. This “role-taking” fosters empathy for others’ experiences (Altheide, 2011; Altheide & Grimes, 2005; Bonds, 2009;  

¹ Legal consciousness, refers to the way “people understand, imagine, and use the law” (Brisman, 2010).
Increased sympathy for others is tied to more mature levels of legal and moral reasoning (Bond, 2009). By understanding different viewpoints and perspectives, viewers can make better moral and legal decisions (Brisman, 2010; Lemal & Van den Bulck, 2009; Lindahl, 2007). Furthermore, narratives improve legal literacy. Individuals are better cognizant of legal actors and their responsibilities, furthering the audience’s ability to empathize with alternative viewpoints (Farber & Sherry, 1993; Lucia, 1999). This leads to mature legal and moral reasoning, better understanding of law, and better comprehension of how it shapes an individual’s construction of law in society and thus their legal consciousness.

In addition, legal narratives have a social dimension. They discuss the perspectives of marginalized people, affect social movements (Altheide & Grimes, 2005; Bonds, 2009; Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Easteal, Holland, & Judd, 2015; Gamson & Woldsfeld, 1993; Shen et al., 2014; Whiteman, 2004), influence public opinion (Bonds, 2009; Farber & Sherry, 1993; Friedman, 2011; Lancaster, Hughes, Spicer, Matthre-Simmons, & Dillon, 2011; Shen et al., 2014) and impact policy making (Altheide, 2011; Shen et al., 2014; Lancaster et al., 2011). As discussed above, legal stories expose viewers to varied perspectives (i.e., what it’s like to live in poverty or in a war-torn country) and enhance their ability to empathize. This increased empathy leads to activism. For instance, during the Iraq War, mass media framed the war as a patriotic effort to end terrorism in foreign countries, refraining from displaying scenes of violence (McQueeney, 2014). Investigative journalists exposed counter narratives, displaying violence in the Middle East. They showed the impact on the infrastructure as well as individual civilians (Bonds, 2009). These counter narratives increased role-taking and empathy for others and amplified participation in US activism and social movements (Altheide, 2011; Altheide &

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2 Legal literacy is defined as the understanding of legal term, procedures, and actors (Lucia, 1999).
Grimes, 2005; Bonds, 2009; Goidel et al., 2006). As seen in this example, media’s narratives can impact public opinion (see Tautman, 2004 for other examples). They also influence public policy. For example, media’s narratives impacted anti-drug policies in the past (Lancaster, et al., 2011). In Australia, a bill was being proposed to reform drug policies. At the time, media framed the use of heroin as a link to deviance and criminality. This framing crushed the new harm reduction bill as many witnessed the media’s image of the drug user (Lancaster et al., 2011). The previous examples display narratives’ social power, thus detailing the importance of media research.

From an interpretivist viewpoint, mass media’s power remains in its ability to provide public definitions for ideas, events, and people (Altheide, 2009). Media is considered the primary source of knowledge for the average person (Altheide, 2009; Leistyna, 2009). It has the ability to not only inform us on a subject but to shape how we think about it (Altheide, 2009; Leistyna, 2009; Paguyo & Moses, 2011). With this authority, media has the ability to not only endorse certain viewpoints and beliefs, but promote them as commonsensical (Lull, 1995). Because of this, media has an immense power over the public; thus, researchers have sought to document their messages as they appear in various types of media.

Social scientists have the opportunity to extend the field and explore these themes in theater and, of interest to the current study, musical theater. The small amount of research that has been done has analyzed plays involving audience participation, straight plays, and pieces that stress social and political activism (Heide, Porter, & Saito, 2012; Manukonda, 2013; Nag, 2013). We know that musical theater represents and shapes its audience. On the one hand, music and accompanying lyrics have the power to mold personal attitudes (Heide et al., 2012). On the

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3 Interpretivism refers to a social approach in which researchers understand the social world in which they inhabit to conduct research (Blaikie, 2004). “Everyday reality” or the perspective of social actors is important (Blaikie, 2004). The definitions of social concepts need to match those of social actors.
other, musical theater documents our (American) identify, cultural beliefs, and social issues (Jones, 2005; Kantor & Maslon, 2004; Knapp, 2005). It is able to do all this and even challenge its audience’s beliefs, while remaining “light” and “entertaining” (Jones, 2005). Sheldon Harnick, one of the writers behind Fiddler on the Roof, once discussed this paradox when he argued that theater can change people’s lives, teach them lessons, and build a sense of community amongst them (Jones, 2005). Because of this, musical theater, similar to other media (i.e., television and news), is culturally relevant and thus requires sociological and interdisciplinary analysis. For researchers, the next step is to understand what legal narratives exist in musical theater.

In this paper, I set out to answer questions about legal narratives and how they were communicated in musical theater. Were there legal narratives? If so, what were the prominent legal narratives? What differences existed between Broadway and Off-Broadway legal narratives? How did these narratives change across time? To answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative media analysis of 13 musicals. My selection included six Off-Broadway shows and seven Broadway shows. The aim of this study was to enhance our knowledge of media’s social construction of law and how these legal narratives were framed.

**Theoretical Background**

The current study used social construction theory that borrowed from ethnography, feminist theory, and Marxism (Mercadal, 2014). The term “social construction” was made popular by sociologists Berger and Luckman (1966). As expressed in their book, topics, issues, and constructs that might be considered natural are in fact social products (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Mercadal, 2014). For example, research suggested that concepts such as race or gender

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4 Broadway refers to theaters in midtown Manhattan, specifically theaters that seat five hundred or more people. Off-Broadway are theaters in Manhattan that seat 499 or less.
are socially constructed (Mercadal, 2014). For social scientists, race and gender are not biological. Instead, they are categories that represent socially accepted groupings of individuals and accompanying meaning. As seen in this example, the construction of reality helps define what is normal and inherent in our culture (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999; Barak, 2007; McQueeny, 2014; Menashe & Siegel, 1998).

Our commonsensical notions of race, gender, and other social constructs changes through time and by geographical area (Berger & Luckman’s, 1966; Omi, 2001). Social meanings attach to constructs dependent on time and space (Berger & Luckman’s, 1966; Omi, 2001). Further historical context influences the social construction of our society and how we come to understand the world (Berger & Luckman’s, 1966; Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Kozol, 1995; Omi, 2001; Wheeler, 2009). According to Cavender and Jurik (2012, p. 35) “cultural productions are the product of social interactions located within particular social historical contexts … and that reality … may change with subsequent viewings over time”. For example, Kozol’s (1995) analysis of film suggests that political and historical context impact narratives. In her analysis, she analyzes the messages surrounding domestic abuse. She discovered a more nuanced narrative coincided with feminism and recent legislation (Kozol, 1995). For instance, there was an increase in domestic abuse narratives depicting female empowerment from the 1970s on, coinciding with a national effort to end domestic violence (Kozol, 1995). The construction of these narratives relied especially on cultural and historical change, therefore giving credence to the theory that our media is socially constructed.

Our understandings of things from race to law are developed and learned through social interaction amongst people and institutions such as media (Altheide, 1996; Mercadal, 2014). In fact, according to McQueeny (2014), “mass media plays a leading role” in defining social
problems, such as crime, discrimination, and inequality (p. 298). Mass media frames news stories, providing us commonsensical ways to examine and analyze (legal) issues (Altheide, 2009).

**Framing Legal Narratives**

Framing is a device used by the media, news and entertainment sources alike (Altheide, 1997; Menashe & Siegel, 1998; Schulenberg & Chenier, 2014; Shen et al., 2014). For this study a frame is understood as a way of “packaging and positioning an issue” (Menashe & Siergel, 1998, p. 310), thus determining how it “will be discussed, and … how it will not be discussed” (Altheide, 1997, p. 651). The framing process includes providing definitions, causes, evaluations, and solutions to a problem (Bruggermann, 2014; Menashe & Siegel, 1998). It packages an event or topic so as to define what it is “really about” (Easteal et al., 2015; Menashe & Siegel, 1998; Schulenberg & Chenier, 2014; Shen et al., 2014). In addition, framing an event or social issue helps construct social definitions for numerous topics. The immense power framing holds over the social construction of topics leads researchers to wonder who or what chooses media’s frames (Altheide, 1997; Altheide & Michalowski, 1999; Feinberg, 2010; Menashe & Siegel, 1998; Michalowski, 1999; Tautman, 2004).

A critical variant of social constructionism argues that constructs are framed by individuals in power and usually uphold hegemonic principles (Gamson, Croteau, Hoyes, & Sasson, 1992; Leistyna, 2009). Interest groups, political organizations, and public figures all may affect the framing of narratives (Easteal et al., 2015; Menashe & Siegel, 1998). For instance, after September 11th, the media discussed terrorists as almost exclusively foreigners; yet similar acts committed by the United States government were framed as counter-terrorism (McQueeney, 2014). This construct of terrorism absolved the US of any immoral actions and shaped public
opinion on terrorism (McQueeney, 2014). Politicians in power were able to rely and even further these understandings, ultimately to argue in favor of U.S military involvement in a “War on Terror” (McQueeney, 2014; Mercadal, 2014; Gamson et al., 1992). This construction of reality assists to further the goals of the individuals in power as well as xenophobic and hegemonic constructs.

The theory of symbolic interactionism states that individuals develop meanings for people and objects through socialization (Vejar, 2009). It details how shared cultural meanings develop through social interactions and symbols (Altheide, 1996; Mercadal, 2014; Vejar, 2009). Symbols are understood to be a vital part of our culture as they impact the viewer’s perception of an event or issue (Altheide, 1996; Burbank & Martins, 2009; Cavender & Jurik, 2012). Frames use symbols, images, metaphors, and catchphrases in order to construct certain narratives (Easteal et al., 2015). For example, in regards to the terrorism example above, the symbols “Axis of Evil” and “War on Terror” became popular in the media after 9/11. This fear-inducing war terminology impresses upon its consumers that military intervention was required to deal with a significant foreign threat. In this manner, the public comes to understand issues like terrorism or crime and their resolutions. The framing of others’ actions as terrorism influences audience’s approval of political and military action in foreign countries. Audiences understood this construction as fact, not interpretations or representations (Gamson et al., 1992; Mercadal, 2014). Hegemonic constructs became “dominant language and symbols… in [our] culture”, framing how we discuss current events (Gamson et al., 1992; McQueeney, 2014, p. 298). By documenting the framing of social constructions law-related topics, we can gain a better understanding of our conceptions of law, aka legal narratives.

**Legal Narratives**
Framing of legal narratives is a highly researched topic (Altheide, 1996; 1996; 2009). Generally, legal narratives have been analyzed by researchers from various disciplines, including law (Brisman 2010; Kurkchiyan, n.d.), medicine (Geisler, 2006; Mah et al., 2014), and communications (Altheide, 2011, Shen et al., 2014). Because of this, there are numerous definitions for legal narrative (Shen et al., 2014), beginning with the concept of narrative itself.

For the current study, a narrative includes a plot, characters, and causal relationships (Novogrodsky, 2014; Shen et al., 2014; Watkins, 2011). Another way to think about it is as a representation of an event (Watkins, 2011; Cavender, Gray, & Miller, 2010). According to Surette (2015), who studies representations of crime in particular, narratives are “pre-established mini-social constructions found throughout media” and include “recurring…types and situations” (p. 41). Legal narratives, accordingly, present a representation of a legal event.

Legal or not, narratives follow a common blueprint (Novogrodsky, 2014; Watkins, 2011). They give meaning to events and are “arbiter[s] of social boundaries” (Johnston & Buchanan, p. 11; Kamir, 2006). Structurally, they are each “a story that raises unanswered questions” through the process of crises and resolution (Shen et al., 2014, p.101). The story begins with a climate that represents dominant culture and becomes interrupted by a challenging event. Characters involved must reach a solution. The story then concludes with characters developing a new viewpoint on life (Novogrodsky, 2014; Watkins, 2011). For example, in West Side Story, two gangs, the Sharks and the Jets, are feuding. Their war is strained by racial tensions. To end their feud, the gangs decide to hold a rumble. The characters decide to fight to solve a dispute. The fight leads to the murder of both gangs’ leaders. This harrowing event impacts the characters’ worldviews and leaves the audience to face the repercussions of crime and racism. The main characters then choose love over hate as they plan their future. (Bernstein, Laurents, &
Sondheim, n.d). This example begins in the dominant culture of racial inequality and tensions expressed by many characters. There is then a distressing situation in which the three main characters are killed. Their death has the characters face how their hate and discrimination towards one another bred violence. The show ends with the characters having a new perspective on violence, race, and discrimination. In this manner, (legal) narratives are able to address many different topics within the media.

The media has a long history of portraying narratives concerning crime, law, and justice (Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Dowler, 2007; Surette, 2015). It also has a long history of framing legal narratives in order to control how legal narratives are communicated (Altheide, 1996; 1997; 2009; Altheide, & Grimes, 2005). Since the advent of television in the 1950s, TV executives have produced hundreds of law and justice themed shows (Dowler, 2005; Surette, 2015). For instance, Surette (2015) documents the widely promoted understandings of crime, criminals, and criminal justice professionals in media. Common criminals are often associated as drug addicts, lawyers as cunning and cheats, and cops as lazy or gun-crazed loners (Surette, 2015). These narratives are common frames depicted by mass media. Even non-legal shows such as the “Real Housewives of…” franchise or reality competition shows (i.e, The Voice or American Idol) embed law within their storylines, framing non-legal subjects as judicial processes (Bond, 2012). As past research (Bond, 2012; Surette, 2015) highlights, media plays a significant role in the social construction process by featuring topics and framing them (Altheide, 1996; McQueeney, 2014; Novogrodnovsky, 2014; Surette, 2015). From television to film, newspapers to radio, the media has an affinity for legal narratives (Altheide, 2009; Cavender et al., 2010;
Legal Narratives in the Media

Legal-related topics covered in media range from the mundane to the extravagant, mainstream to counter-culture, but we do not know which legal narratives, with their framing and features of social construction, appear in musical theater. Research of other mediums have documented depictions of issues such as domestic abuse, immigration, civil rights, sexual assault, violence, and crime in general (Altheide, 2009; Borochowitz, 2008; Brisman, 2010; Britto, Hughes, Saltzman, & Stroh, 2007; Cavender, Gray, & Miller, 2010; Easteal et al., 2015; Goiel, Freeman, Procopio, 2006; Liberato & Foster, 2011; Pollack & Kubrin, 2007; Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010; Sankowski, 2002; Sowards & Pineda 2013; Surette, 2015; Weiss & Colyer, 2010).

Narratives on Deviancy. For the current study, deviancy refers to crime as well as stigmatized behavior (i.e., sexuality, counterculture). The media provides its consumers facts about when crime occurs, who commits it, and the like; but in choosing stories and framing their details, the news also socially constructs rationales for criminality that remain inadequate and even inaccurate according to prevailing criminological research (Mitra, 2013; Surette, 2015).

To begin with, in most cases, the specifics of crimes reported are opposite of actually crime statistics (Brisman, 2010; Britto et al., 2007; Freinberg, 2002; Goidel et al., 2006; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007). For instance, in the late 1990s crime decreased dramatically, but the media’s continued to focus on violent crime in its narratives. This framing of crime increased the public’s
misperception of violent crime rates (Goidel et al., 2006; Trautman, 2004). The (inaccurate) story reported is that violent crime goes up, even though data proves otherwise.

The inaccuracy carries over into media’s depiction of criminals themselves. The common criminal is innately evil, predatory, psychologically disturbed, male, and non-white (Cavender et al., 2010; Surette, 2015). Their motivation is usually senseless and irrational (Cavender et al., 2010; Surette, 2015). This depiction pathologizes criminals and paints their actions as stemming from individual deficits (Kozol, 1995; Surette, 2015). This frame ignores any kind of structural reasons for crime, such as culture (i.e., culture of masculinity), socioeconomics, and inequality. An example of this can be observed in media coverage of school shootings. The news usually focuses on the perpetrators’ mental state and their individual experience at school, ignoring the societal structures at play (i.e., culture of masculinity; gun culture) (Klein, 2011). This absolves society of any blame. It further reinforces conservative beliefs on social control, surveillance, and counter-terrorism against individual threats (Altheide, 2009). The framing of criminal deviancy detracts from social causes of crime and instead focuses on the individual.

Because of this inaccuracy, we come to fear what we see on the news, not the reality we experience (Altheide, 1997; 2009; Britto et al., 2007; Feinberg, 2002). Crime becomes framed not as a social illness but, instead, an individual’s sickness; accordingly, a reactionary and strict law-and-order response to criminal behavior is promoted as commonsensical (Goidel et al., 2006; Surette, 2015). Formal deviancy, fuelled by inaccurate portrayals of crime and criminals, is depicted in the media in a way that misrepresents its representations and causes.

The pattern of individualization and inaccuracy extends to informal deviancy, especially deviation from dominant gender roles (Chesney-Lind, 2007). The media constructs how we understand gender, constructing what is good and bad (Chesney-Lind, 2007). It relies on female
stereotypes, archetypes (i.e., seductress, man-hating women), and dichotomous characters (i.e. whore/virgin) (Easteral et al., 2015; Kozol, 1995). This reductionist categorization depicts what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior for women (Easteral et al., 2015; Kozol, 1995). Media therefore polices gender roles in its depiction of female deviancy. This categorization is further complicated by the intersection of race. Women of color are also categorized and portrayed as archetypes, such as “jezebels” or “Sapphires” (Chesney-Lind, 2007; Enck & McDaniel, 2012). These cultural scripts depict minority women as emasculating and promiscuous, therefore deserving of punishment for their unfeminine behavior (Chesney-Lind, 2007; Enck & McDaniel, 2012). For example, when Chris Brown struck his girlfriend Rihanna, the media used the terms “fight” or “altercation” (Enck & McDaniel, 2012). This language has both parties share the blame for the abuse. The news depicted both at fault for Rihanna’s bruises (Enck & McDaniel, 2012). Additionally, public reports described Rihanna as nagging and aggressive during the crime as a confrontation preceded the event. Rihanna asked Brown about a text message from another woman, which was depicted as the reason he lost his temper (Enck & McDaniel, 2012). This example displays media’s ability to police gender, and further categorize women.

Similar to other narratives, female deviancy is individualized (Chesney-Lind, 2007). These narratives are not new and frame gender roles as commonsensical and normal. The frame is rooted in a history of depicting women as their own downfall, absolving patriarchal culture of any blame (Chesney-Lind, 2007). This once again detracts from society when discussing deviancy, avoiding the real issues of inequality, discrimination, and female victimization. For example, the media depicts female informal and formal deviancy as stemming from girls’ innate “meanness” and therefore the way to combat this is to enforce feminine scripts (i.e, tell them to be nice, to make friends) (Chesney-Lind, 2007). In reality, studies show female deviancy as a
result of gender policing and female victimization, not innate characteristics. This inaccurate portrayal diverts the public’s attention away from the true causes of unsafe and dangerous behavior in women (i.e. unprotected sex, truancy) (Chesney-Lind, 2007). This framing of female deviancy perpetuates gender policing and reduces the ability for society to respond appropriately to a societal problem (Chesney-Lind, 2007).

In this manner, we become exposed to unrealistic and erroneous views on crime, deviancy, and responses to it. This is depicted in the discussion of informal deviancy as well as formal deviancy. For example, when we fearfully associate drug use with increasing violence and the like, we legitimate our criminalization and imprisonment of large populations (Alexander, 2011). Not addressing the underlying biological and social conditions of drug addiction, we continue to create more social problems (e.g. poverty) and fail to address crimes that damage our communities (e.g. white collar crime) (Alexander, 2011). Because of this, critical criminologists and their academic peers from various disciplines herald the importance of deconstructing media’s depictions of law (Johnson, & Buchanan, 2001).

**Narratives on inequality.** For the current study, narratives on inequality explore social justice concerns and discrimination, especially inequalities associated with social constructions of populations (e.g. race, gender, class). Media’s legal narratives have addressed social constructs of race, class, and gender as they tie to these topics (Britto, Hughes, Saltzman, & Stroh, 2007; Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Easteal et al., 2015; Enck & McDaniel, 2012; Goidel et al., 2006; Kozol, 1995; Leistyna, 2009; Lenz, 2005; Paguyo & Moses, 2011; Pollack & Kurbin, 2007; Rader, & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010; Trautman, 2004). Media is a “central vehicle” for views of gender, race, and other social identities (Cavender & Jurik, 2012, p. 4). Yet, on the whole, they commonly do not show the structural realities of marginalized groups and thus often
“distract from [reality]” (Leistyna, 2009, p. 105). Instead, they individualize social problems, suggesting issues faced by individuals are caused by poor personal choices and not related to underlying social conditions and inequalities (Kozol, 1995; Leistyna, 2009; Surette, 2015). In this manner, they often advance hegemonic and conservative perspectives on social issues and their resolution (for notable exceptions, see Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Lucia, 1999; Rader, & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010; Sankowski, 2002). The media frames the problem as a threat of individuals and not something fueled by societal pressures (Leistyna, 2009; Surette, 2015). The majority of these narratives simply appear to ignore societal structures as they relate to the lives of racial minorities, the lower class, and females.

Many narratives idealize the middle class lifestyle, depicting it as the “American Dream”, partially to endorse consumerism (Leistyna, 2009). Moreover, the working class is usually pictured as lazy or inefficient (Leistyna, 2009). Any kind of globalization, outsourcing, or unfair practices are seen as stemming from incompetent employees, not greedy employers (Leistyna, 2009). Similarly if one is impoverished, it is due to their lack of ambition. Any kind of social mobility is displayed as individual ingenuity, hard work, and diligence (Leistyna, 2009). Social immobility is a sign that a person lacks these characteristics (Leistyna, 2009). In this matter, dominant narratives on class reinforce dominant beliefs of individualism and consumerism (Leistyna, 2009, Surette, 2015). These narratives also interact with social constructions of race; most depictions of social mobility in media discuss minority families “making it” in society through their own perseverance (Leistyna, 2009, Surette, 2015).

Legal narratives are textured by further notions regarding race (Leistyna, 2009; Paguyo & Moses, 2011). Media has the ability to develop “racial projects”, projects in which race is given a standard meaning (Britto et al., 2007; Goidel, Freeman, Omi, 2001; Procopio, 2006; Paguyo &
Moses, 2011; Pollack & Kurbin, 2007; Trautman, 2004). The meaning of race is contested among scholars, but social scientists generally agree that race and what it symbolizes is socially constructed (Omi, 2001). Social scientists have also found that there is a widespread criminal typification of race (Britto et al., 2007). Blacks and other racial minorities are commonly portrayed as criminals in the news (Alexander, 2011; Britto et al., 2007; Dowler, 2007; Goidel et al., 2006; Pollack & Kurbin, 2007; Trautman, 2004). In such portrayals, racial and ethnic minorities are shown poorly dressed and restrained, and commonly remain unnamed (Britto et al., 2007). Alexander (2011) provides an example in her discussion of mass incarceration. She finds that the media’s common depiction of black men is as “thugs” and “hoodlums.” Being black has become synonymous with being a criminal in US society (Alexander, 2011). On the other hand, racial minorities are underrepresented in the media as victims, police officers, and other sympathetic characters (Britto et al., 2007). White victims are considered as more newsworthy (Pollack & Kubrin, 2007). In this manner, legal narratives reinforce racial stereotypes and justify inequalities and discrimination (Leistyna, 2009), as they do for women.

Legal narratives involving gender reinforce discrimination, gender biases, and patriarchal ideals (Easteral et al., 2015). Sexist and reductionist characterizations (i.e., virgin/whore, jezebel) as discussed above dehumanize female characters and define what a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ victim means (Easteral et al., 2015). A good victim would represent purity and innocence, while a bad victim is held partially at fault for their victimhood (Easteral et al., 2015). On the other hand, offenders of crimes against women are provided more consideration. Their actions are pathologized. This representation absolves perpetrators (and society) of any wrong doing, therefore impact how we view female victims (Britto et al., 2007; Easteal et al. 2015; Kozol, 1995). For example, in films that discuss domestic abuse, the abusers are commonly seen as
psychologically unstable or drug-addicted (i.e., *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *What's Love Got to do with it*) (Kozol, 1995). This pathologizing individualizes the problem of violence against women. Individualization obscures the reality of crimes against women as something inherent in patriarchal culture (Easteal et al., 2015; Kozol, 1995).

This culture is enforced by victim-blaming media, which may be explicit or implicit (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010). For instance, in an analysis of “Law and Order: Special Victims Unit,” researchers (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010) found examples of covert victim blaming. Through the victim and perpetrator’s relationship, the perpetrators are depicted positively (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010). Subsequently, the viewers see the victims as less innocent and even manipulative (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010). Therefore the narratives does not outwardly victim blame, but does depict the crime so the victim is unsympathetic and even disliked (Rader & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010). Gendered perspective carries over to media’s representation of female criminals.

Female offenders are commonly depicted through a gendered lens highlighting “inherent” female characteristics. They are represented as non-threatening and reliant on male accomplices (Dowler, 2007). In addition, these deviant women are usually motivated by revenge, love, greed, or maternal instincts (Dowler, 2007). Similar to female victims, media’s depictions of female offenders reinforce dominant ideas about women as maternal, over-emotional, and subservient to men (Bettman, 2009). Such constructions rely on dominant, patriarchal beliefs, which are further complicated by the intersection of gender and race.

A women’s race affects their depiction in the media (Britto et al., 2007). Overall, white female victims are more likely to be depicted in mainstream media compared to women of color (Aymer, 2010). White women are further more likely to be viewed as innocent and sympathetic
(Britto et al., 2007; Enck & McDaniel, 2012). This framing relies on stereotypes of women of color (see above for examples) and further criminalizes female minorities (Britto et al., 2007; Enck & McDaniel, 2012). By doing so, the media endorses hegemonic patriarchy as well as racism.

**Narratives on the Justice System.** For the current study, narratives on the justice system are defined as those discussing the justice system and procedural justice in the courtroom and in the streets (aka with law enforcement). Many legal narratives in film touch on the idea that our justice system is “flawed, but it is the best we can hope for” (Lucia, 1999, p.14). Most coverage focuses on criminal trials that are shown as fair and impartial (Brisman, 2010; Britto et al., 2007; Siegel, 1990). Judges are dignified, powerful (occasionally corrupt), and noble (Bond, 2012). Lawyers are either honest and committed to their clients (Brisman, 2010) or corrupt and sleazy (Surette, 2015). Narratives that do feature a mishandling of justice usually depict it as an individual’s corruptness, not the system’s (Friedman, 2011; Lucia, 1999). Although law is part of a larger social structure, narratives once again individualize the actions of the characters (Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Kang, 2006; Surette, 2015). The hero character usually conquers over injustice (Bond, 2012) and the “good guys” are acquitted (Brisman, 2010). Thus, the system is romanticized, shown as efficient, procedural, and less complex than actual proceedings (Brisman, 2010; Britto, Hughes, Saltzman, & Stroh, 2007; Friedman, 2011; Siegel, 1990). As a result, law is legitimatized. In reality, this portrayal reinforces the current practices of our legal system that truly require our attention and significant reform (Lucia, 1999, p.14).

Legal narratives that discuss our justice system further explore law enforcement as it relates to crime control and due process. Stories and depictions of the police are very common on television and in newspapers (Feinberg, 2002; Gustafson, 2007; Surette, 2015). Media focuses
on police fighting violent crime and exceptional stories, ignoring the regularities of law enforcement such as traffic or paper work (Feinberg, 2002). Mass media’s police are shown heroically fighting an undercurrent of street crime and violent offenses committed by mostly non-white, male criminals (Feinberg, 2002; Surette, 2015). When police do commit any wrongdoing, it is justified and rationalized (Feinberg, 2002). Their illegal actions are portrayed as required to achieve justice (Feinberg, 2002). Most of the time, the police are simply seen as honest and disciplined (Gustafson, 2007). They become ineffective at their job when they are overburdened by due process and legal requirements (Gustafson, 2007; Surette, 2015). The media will sometimes argue that police fail to uphold due process and hinder justice; however, a world without due process is still juxtaposed as better than one with lawlessness (Gustafson, 2007).

Current Study

My study analyzed legal narratives in musical theater, Broadway and Off-Broadway, specifically looking at how these emergent legal narratives frame law, or social and legal norms (i.e., deviancy, inequality, and justice systems). Previous literature tells us that to fully understand the narratives and themes of media, we must perform an in depth analysis. For the current study, I conducted a qualitative media analysis that compared 13 musicals, six Off-Broadway shows and seven Broadway shows. The different venues allowed for variation in my data, because they differ historically from one another. I further analyzed for any changes over time. This was to assess if any historical or cultural changes influenced the narratives in musical theater. Based on previous musical theater research (Hischak, 2011; Jones, 2003; Knapp, 2005; Patinkin, 2008), we anticipated legal narratives in musical theater to include more counter hegemonic themes (especially Off-Broadway) than other forms of media (i.e., news, television).
This difference exists because musicals remain historically different than other types of media, known for embracing counter-culture and deviancy (Kantor & Maslon, 2004; Knapp, 2005; Patinkin, 2008). Previous researchers have looked at the sociological underpinnings of musical theater (Knapp, 2005), but no researcher has specifically analyzed its legal narratives. Furthermore, past sociological and socio-legal researchers have studied media (Altheide, 1996; 1997; 2009; Altheide, & Grimes, 2005; Bond, 2012; Britto et al., 2007; Cavender, Gray, & Miller, 2010; Cavender, & Jurik, 2012), but have largely neglected the performing arts. Thus the current study embraced a tradition within media studies as well as socio-legal and sociological literature, and seeks to address a gap within them.

**Method**

I examined musical theater in an attempt to understand the legal narratives and themes of law and justice in the musicals. I analyzed musical theater for its interpretation, promotion, and critique of concepts that inform law and justice. I dissected musicals from Broadway as well as Off-Broadway.

I selected shows after they met a number of other conditions. First, shows were assessed for their popularity. I wanted to ensure the shows were seen by many, therefore impacting a large population of viewers. I measured popularity by critical and commercial success and by reactions of lay and critic audiences. I chose shows only if they were well-received, considered commercially successful, and were usually well-known by a lay audience (i.e. cinematic success). My selection included shows that have been seen by many people and are easily recognizable. Second, shows were chosen for their salience in the greater theater community. The shows still had to be produced at the regional, collegiate, and community levels. This would have the added benefit of them being seen by more audiences. I was particularly interested in
musicals that meet this qualification for Off-Broadway shows, because they are usually considerably less well-known. This selection process was completed with the assistance of musical theater professionals/experts and texts.

Using the above criteria, I began my selection with shows from the 1940s because *Oklahoma* marked the beginning of the integrated, modern musical in 1943. I then chose one Broadway musical from each decade, 1940 to 2010: *Oklahoma* (1943), *West Side Story* (1957), *Hair* (1968), *Chicago* (1975), *Les Miserables* (1987), *Rent* (1996), *Wicked* (2003). For Off-Broadway shows I followed the same procedure. I was unable to find any musicals that premiered Off-Broadway in the 1940s. This makes historical sense as during this decade Off-Broadway theaters had a history of doing more experimental and less mainstream theater (Hirschak, 2011). Musicals were still considered the epitome of mainstream entertainment and were therefore absent from Off-Broadway’s seasons during the 1940s (Hirschak, 2011). Consequently, I chose an Off-Broadway musical from each decade, 1950-2010: *The Threepenny Opera* (1954), *The Fantasticks* (1960), *Godspell* (1971), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1982), *Assassins* (1991), *The Wild Party* (2000) (see Appendix A: Table of Shows and Appendix B: Synopses of shows). The scripts and librettos of these resulting 13 shows became my data. Each show and its score/libretto represented a unit of analysis. In many cases, musical revivals vary from original score/libretto; I ensured systematic analysis by always using original sources.

I conducted a qualitative media analysis (as detailed by Altheide, 1996) in order to analyze how each show discusses themes of law, justice, and society. By analyzing documents pertaining to media – in this study, scripts/librettos – the narratives’ significance and meaning can be observed (Altheide, 1996). Continuous development of a protocol helps explore the content under analysis. The protocol allows researchers to examine how narratives are framed
and socially constructed by media (Altheide, 1996). This systematic research reduces experimenter bias while documenting the emergence of themes and patterns (Altheide, 1996). By conducting a qualitative media analysis, developing a protocol, and deciphering themes, researchers can understand narratives’ social construction.

To analyze each show, I began by reading the original scripts and listening to the songs on the original cast recordings. I listened to each song when it was called for in the script. As I read/listened, notes and memos were written on the scripts in order to record themes, narratives, and counter narratives relating to law and justice. My original notes were then used to fill out my developing protocol.

My protocol (See Appendix C: Final Protocol) ended up including sixteen items in total. The protocol was designed to capture each show’s discussion of the law-oriented topics of deviancy, violence, and due process; and concepts that inform law and justice, such as gender, race, class, fairness, and inequality. The protocol also helped me capture other details about the shows: title of show, number of performances, director, cast size. This protocol was constructed through a draft process that was ever evolving as I read and re-read scripts and spoke with mentors. Each substantial change required beginning open coding again with the first script, resulting in four protocol iterations in total. By taking this approach, I was able to ensure I would capture all data needed to address my research questions and more.

I conducted two rounds of final analyses when my protocol became largely standardized. Both included open-coding and the completion of a protocol. Upon the second analysis, I also wrote a short memo for each show, highlighting their principal emergent themes. In my memo, I also discussed temporal patterns across shows and any differences and similarities between
Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals. This process allowed me to formulate, assess, and confirm my findings and conclusions I discuss in this paper.

**Findings**

For my study I set out to answer four questions. My question asked if there are legal narratives within musical theater? My data in fact yielded many legal narratives. The second question asked what were the legal narratives? The narratives fell into three emergent themes: deviancy, inequality, and justice systems, which I discuss below. Third, I asked how narratives compare on and Off-Broadway? Lastly, how do these narratives change over time? I will begin first by describing the emergent themes in Broadway and Off-Broadway shows (See Appendix D for chart of emergent themes)

**What are the legal narratives?**

**Broadway Themes**

**Deviancy**

A universal theme in all Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals is the depiction of deviancy, especially violent crime. For my analysis, deviancy referred to breaking formal (laws) and informal rules (social norms). Every show within the Broadway selection included some narrative that touched on this theme.

Some shows showed explicit examples of crime such as juvenile delinquency, murder, prostitution, and sexual assault (i.e., *Oklahoma*, *West Side Story*, *Hair*, *Chicago*, and *Les Miserables*). In these narratives, there was a focus on violence and criminal actions, though in most cases these actions are enacted by a variety of characters, not just “villains.” Actually it was rare for an antagonist to be responsible for a violent crime. For example in *Oklahoma*, *West Side Story*, and *Chicago* protagonists who murder other characters on stage were not formally
punished for their crime.\textsuperscript{6} In addition, many shows included portrayals of non-violent crimes, such as drug use, prostitution, and gambling. Shows such as \textit{Les Miserables}, \textit{Hair}, and \textit{Rent} all included either drug use or prostitution. In most cases main characters and sympathetic characters were seen doing these illicit activities. Lastly, these narratives discussed informal rule breaking, such as counterculture, sexual deviancy, and active rebellion (i.e., \textit{Hair}, \textit{Les Miserables}, \textit{Rent}, and \textit{Wicked}). Some shows depicted homosexuality, transgender characters, and narratives against gender conformity. The theme of deviancy was the most prevalent in my show selection and appeared in every Broadway musical.

\textbf{Oklahoma (1943\textsuperscript{7})}. Oklahoma portrayed formal deviancy, specifically defining acceptable murder. In the show, Jud sought vengeance and fought Curley, now married to Laurey. This altercation led to Curley murdering the former farmhand. Curely was then charged with murder and “tried” in front of the townspeople. His trial included an abridged version of a criminal trial in which he pleads not guilty because the murder was in self-defense. This crime narrative painted murder as necessary to keep order in the territory. The murder was committed by a protagonist and rationalized by the characters. Jud’s murderous threats end in his death, but Curley’s actions (even though they are in the best interest of the characters) are given very little concern. The majority felt he did nothing wrong and that he should not be charged. When Curley was finally charged the trial was abridged, acquitting Curley of any wrongdoing in the altercation. This was not to say the actions of Curley are ignored, but the informal actions and responses of the characters point to specific narratives concerning murder: If you are a “hero”, murder is tolerable with very few sanctions. This narrative depicted murder, one of the most serious crimes, as appropriate if the person and motivation for said crime is socially sanctioned.

\textsuperscript{6} In \textit{Chicago} Velma and Roxie are arrested and charged, but are both acquitted

\textsuperscript{7} Dates directly after shows are the dates when they opened.
This representation has the audience side with the murderer morally. This was partially also resultant of Jud’s previous behavior as he threatened to kill anyone who stands in his way. Yet, this depiction has the audience discuss what appropriate and inappropriate forms of violence are. Jud represented inappropriate displays of violence, while Curely represented appropriate forms. This positioned formal deviancy as something shaped by the character’s committing the acts, not the acts themselves.

*Oklahoma* further discussed deviance in its depiction of gender. On the one hand, *Oklahoma* overall followed very hegemonic constructs of gender. At one point, a character exclaimed that there are “times when women ain’t got no need for men”, to which Ado Annie responds “Yeow, but who’d want to be dead” (Dialect written in script; Rodgers & Hammerstein, 1943\(^8\), p. 48). Additionally, the two main female characters of Laurey and Ado Annie, fit into the common dichotomy of the ‘virgin’ and the ‘whore’. Laurey, the female protagonist, is considered pure and virginal. Laurey only loved one man and scolds her friend Ado Annie for her flirty behavior with multiple men. In her defense, Ado Annie sung to Laurey “I’m just a girl who can’t say no… I always say come on let’s go, just when I aught to say nix” (Rodgers & Hammerstein, 1943, p. 10). Ado Annie discussed her flirtations and was not faithful to her beau, Will Parker. While these hegemonic, sexist, and reductionist narratives existed, both characters also represented deviant narratives. Ado Annie’s enjoyment of male attention and flirtation with many men countered traditional feminine scripts of purity, chastity, and virginity. Furthermore, while Laurey better represented this gender constraints (i.e., only loves one man), she also portrayed other deviant narratives. Laurey renounced the belief that a woman’s happiness should be dependent on a man in her song “Many a new day”. The concept that a

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\(^8\) Dates in citations reference to script’s publication date. Some scripts did not provide these as they were scripts from paid online databases.
woman’s worth does not depend on male attention is counter hegemonic to ideals of the story’s time. Furthermore, she confronted the men in her life at a time then this is unheard of. Laurey was not taken by Curley’s charms and confronted his cockiness. She later challenged Jud and scolds his barbaric behavior. Her confrontation was usually met with a negative consequence. On the other hand, Ado Annie did not challenge the men in her life and lived happily ever after with her fiancé. Oklahoma’s narrative was not wholly counter to traditional gender norms, reinforcing some gender stereotypes, but did provide some deviant depictions of gender.

West Side Story (1958). West Side Story followed a similar pattern to Oklahoma: a discussion of crime and deviancy from gender norms. Its narratives focused on crime in the form of gang violence and juvenile delinquency culminating in the murders of Riff, Bernardo, and lastly Tony. Similar to other musical plots, the protagonists are the deviants and no formal sanctions for their behavior were shown on stage. It may be interpreted that the fallout from said deaths (i.e. anguish, sadness) is punishment for the gang violence, but this still lacks any formal sanction.

Unlike Oklahoma, West Side Story related issues of race to crime. A large part of the plot detailed the escalation of gang violence between rival gangs, partially fueled by racial tension. In this case race was not synonymous with criminality, but racism was shown as a catalyst for crime. Maria after Tony is killed cries “All of you? We all killed [Tony]; and my brother and Riff. I too. I can kill now because I hate now” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 104). In West Side Story, racism and hatred bred violence and even murder. The plot’s narratives on crime maintained the idea that outside influences are partially responsible for the actions of the characters. This frame, while not absolving criminals of guilt, highlighted social causes for violent crime.
The theme of deviancy continued in the portrayal of the female characters. Similar to *Oklahoma*, there was a dichotomy between Maria and Anita. Maria is the female protagonist. She was naïve, quiet, sweet, and a new immigrant to America. Her first appearance was even in white. Anita, her close friend, was more provocative and exuded sex appeal. She was outgoing, confrontational, boisterous, and even alluded to being sexually active. Maria was pure, while Anita was promiscuous. Consequently, Anita, as well as other female characters (i.e., Anybody, Graziella) represented deviation from traditional gender constructs of purity. Furthermore, characters such as Graziella and Anita were both confrontational and challenged the male characters. Once again, this personality trait is against traditional feminine ideals of docility.

Lastly, *West Side Story* included a character named Anybodys who dressed like one of the male gang members and was told on multiple occasions to dress like a girl. This character, while small, further represented counter narratives on gender. Her dress and manner (i.e., hanging out with the male characters, being involved in gang activity) were unfeminine and criticized by male and female characters alike. Her actions countered traditional gender norms for female behavior and attire, positioning Anybodys as deviant.

In this particular musical, gender constructs were further tied to American culture. Anita tells Bernado, Maria’s older brother, that in America “girls are free to have fun” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 32). Bernado retorts that “back home, women know their place” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 35). Female empowerment and Anita’s behavior (mirrored in other characters) was tied to assimilation and American culture. Anita, Anybodys, and Graziella all have lived in United States for a period of time, while Maria has just immigrated. By portraying the former characters as deviant the narratives depicted American culture as liberating for women. Whether this is depicted as a positive or negative aspect of
American culture is not explored. It may be a critique on foreign cultures, having American women stand out against the sheltered and pure Maria, but this is only supposition. Nonetheless, female deviancy was clearly tied to cultural assimilation. Therefore counter hegemonic narratives on gender were interconnected with American culture. While dichotomous characters once again exist, there continued to be depictions of deviancy in the form of counter narratives on gender.

*Hair (1968).* *Hair* depicted the counterculture of the 1960’s, therefore it naturally included narratives discussing deviancy. Its depiction of crime centered on sexual assault and drug use. In the original script, a character announced “Scene three: Sheila is raped!” (*Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p. 77*). Sheila, one of the primary female characters, was sexually assaulted metaphorically by Berger and literally by Woof. Woof assaulted Sheila and Berger watched, describing his emotions towards her. Berger than achieved physical pleasure from his crime. Woof represented the physically violation, while Berger depicted the emotional degradation. The rape was conceived as public and was punishment for Sheila’s smothering affections towards Berger. This scene was not always included in productions of *Hair*, yet it was a clear depiction of crime in the original script. In addition to sexual assault, drug use was also present in *Hair’s* crime narratives. The song “Walking in space” describes drug use as a celebrated experience and questions its stigmatization. In the lyrics, characters sing “How dare they try to end this beauty” (*Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p. 145*). Their plea described drug use as something positive and that the laws against it only stifle their experiences. This narrative on drug use occurred on stage in full view of audience members. This upfront portrayal of crime depicted topics of debate during the time period. The 1960s heralded more discussion on drug use and violence against women. This discourse has audiences exposed to controversial topics.
For instance, Sheila being sexually assaulted by two men, who she considers friends, challenged mainstream narratives on sexual assault as a crime committed by strangers. Also, the rape resulted from Sheila gifting Berger a shirt, displaying the ridiculousness of the common script that “she was asking for it.” Her actions are innocuous, but Berger blames them for his actions. Furthermore, the portrayal of drug use as celebrated confronts the common depiction of drug users as unhappy or lost. The characters bask in their drug use and consider it beautiful. These depictions, as reflective of counterculture, challenged mainstream narratives on formal deviancy. Additionally, the protagonists are shown openly committing a crime and have no formal sanction within the plot for their illegal actions.

Similar to other shows, main characters are depicted as criminals and are given very little punishment for their illicit behavior. Both crimes in Hair remain unpunished and unacknowledged by formal authorities. Informal critiques against counterculture are voiced by “Mom” and “Dad” characters, who spout common scripts about being a true American and working hard. While these characters may critiqued the counterculture, they still remain useless at punishing it. The only representation of formal authority is a police puppet, who is representative of conformity. This puppet though never punishes the characters for their crimes. Thus, the depictions of deviancy developed a discourse that runs counter to mainstream narratives without any disruption from authority figures.

The free expression of deviancy is further seen in Hair’s depiction of informal deviancy. Specifically, the characters critiqued the societal constructs of gender and sexuality. The songs “Hair” and “My conviction” both discussed the arbitrariness and absurdity of gender roles. In “My conviction”, the character sings “There is a peculiar notion that elegant plumage/And fine feathers are not proper for the man/When actually that is the way things are in most species”
This song described the rarity of our gender roles in the animal kingdom, pointing out that most male species (besides humans) are the ones who are colorful and adorned. Furthermore, the pattern of counter narratives continued in *Hair’s* exploration of sexual deviancy. The song titled “Sodomy” included a list of sexual acts and asked “why do these words sound so nasty” (Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p.10). The lyrics question who decides what is sexually appropriate and what is not. The concept of appropriate sexuality was also questioned in regards to heteronormativity. Two male characters discuss homosexuality as “here to stay”… “until something better comes along” (Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p. 54). This frank discussion on other forms of sexuality countered common portrayals of relationships. *Hair’s* discourses on sexuality are counter to dominant ideals of heteronormativity and prudery, thus deviant. This counterculture-themed musical naturally explored these themes and more in its characters, songs, and narratives.

*Chicago (1976).* *Chicago* overtly depicted deviancy in the form of crime. The plot centered on two murders and their murderesses. Furthermore, on multiple occasions other violent crime is described or shown on stage (i.e., go to hell Kitty). For instance, the ensemble number “Cell Block Tango” described six murders committed by women towards their intimate partners. In addition, the main character, Roxie, kills her boyfriend on stage in the midst of a musical number. Like other Broadway shows, Chicago’ protagonists commit crime. Unlike other shows, these characters were formally punished in that they are all arrested for murder and go through the justice system. Oddly enough though, the female protagonists were both acquitted and go on to be successful performers. It is almost as if they are rewarded for their crimes. Their notoriety allows them to become famous for their talent, achieving Roxie’s dream of becoming a star and reestablishing Velma’s career in vaudeville.
This marked difference as compared to other crime narratives may point to *Chicago*’s discussion of the term “murder.” On multiple occasions, murder is defined by a character. Amos tells the police, when they describe Roxie’s crime as murder, “That’s not murder, shootin’ a burglar. Why just last week, the jury thanked a man” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p. 13). Furthermore, Roxie described murder as “art” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p.45), Mama described it as “a form of entertainment” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p.28), and the murderesses in “Cell Block tango” described their actions as “murder, but not a crime” (Ebb & Kander, p. 17-23). Roxie’s defense included the same sentiment as she exclaims “Oh, I killed him – yes – but I’m not a criminal!” (Ebb & Kander, p.80). This explicit discourse on the definition of murder questions how people define crimes. The fact that the protagonists were acquitted even though they committed murders, may point to the ability of actors within our justice system to frame and reframe crime in order to change our (and a jury’s) opinion of it. This narrative, seen throughout *Chicago*, deepens the musical’s discussion on deviancy.

*Les Miserables (1986)*. *Les Miserables* depicted formal deviancy early on and, similar to *Chicago*, questioned how individuals define crime. The plot followed Jean Valjean, a man convicted of a crime who was later released. Once again we see the protagonist as a criminal, but are asked to not deem him deviant since his crimes are to make a better life for himself and his loved ones. Therefore, crime was depicted as a reflection of the character. Since Valjean was portrayed as right in his decisions, his crimes were viewed less serious and his punishments as unfair. Crime was defined therefore by the characters motivations, not his actions.

A character’s ability to define crime and deviancy was seen in the opening scene with Valjean and Javert. Valjean when handed his ticket-of-leave defended his actions saying he simply “stole a loaf of bread” (Schonberg & Boublil, n.d, p. 2). Javert snapped back “You
robbed a house” (Schonberg & Boublil, n.d, p. 2). To which Valjean responded, “I broke a window pane” (Schonberg & Boublil, n.d, p. 2). This redefining of his crime based on the character’s point of view presented once again how crime may be framed based on a character’s point of view. Valjean, as a prisoner, developed his own narrative, in which he justifies his actions. Javert, an officer of the law, came from a different perspective. He saw Valjean as a guilty criminal, no matter his reasons. This therefore shaped his definition of crime, thus he described Valjean’s crime as more serious and egregious. This narrative positioned two actors in a justice system, the prisoner and law enforcement official, as they discuss their two distinct views on one crime. This mirrored Chicago, in which actors comes from varied perspectives and therefore provide multiple nuanced meanings for the audience. This allows spectators to understand the multifaceted approach to understanding formal deviancy.

Les Miserables discourse on crime is further explored in how characters label criminals. The narrative previously described depicts how the label of criminal can impact one’s perspective on said individual. Javert clearly thinks lowly of convicts; therefore impacting his interactions with them. Valjean further explored this concept. He described his label of criminal likened to murdering a person’s humanity. He describes his arrest and imprisonment singing “They gave me a number and murdered Valjean/ when they chained me up and left me for dead/just for stealing a mouthful of bread” (Schonberg & Boublil, n.d, p. 6). This narrative described dehumanization of prisoners within a justice system. This connects to convict narratives of discrimination, abuse, and maltreatment. Similar to other shows in my selection, Les Miserables’ protagonist are criminals therefore allowing a discourse on how we define crime. Les Miserables goes further though and discussed how these labels may impact the actions and reactions of the characters.
Rent (1996). Rent focused on informal deviancy, with very little discussion on crime.

Similar to Hair, Rent’s stories and characters challenged mainstream consumerism and culture, sexuality, and gender norms.

On multiple occasions, characters voiced their opposition to the dominant culture. Maureen staged a performance piece called “Over the Moon” to protest the evacuation of the homeless from tent city and to critique modern commercialism and monopolization. She described her former friend, Benny, who now works for a corporation, as once having principles, but abandoning them “to live as a lapdog to a wealthy daughter of the revolution” (Larson, 2008, p. 68). Roger and Mark in the song “You’ll see” also described how Benny has lost his “heart” and “ideals”, since he now is part of the mainstream society. This narrative painted mainstream American culture as corrupt and immoral. This discourse is further depicted in “La Vie Boheme”, which described deviant and taboo subjects and critiqued American middle class culture. The characters sing about the need “to express, to communicate, to [go] against the grain” and their dislike for “convention” and “pretention” (Larson, 2008, p. 73). They instead yearn for “anarchy, revolution, justice, screaming for solutions, forcing changes, risk and danger, making noise, and making pleas” (Larson, 2008, p.84). The main characters rejoiced in creativity and deviancy and criticized the pretentious conformity of society.

The same song that critiqued middle class conventionality also discussed deviancy in its references to sexual behaviors. “La Vie Boheme” referenced masturbation, sexual fetishes (i.e., S & M), and homosexuality and repeats the proverb “Let those among us without sin, be the first to condemn” (Larson, 2008, p.85). Rent’s characters portrayed many different sexualities, including heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality within its narratives and characters. These sexualities are described in the lyrics “La Vie Boheme” as well as in the characters’ actions. The
musical depicted romantic relationships as imperfect, but gives equal representation to all relationships within the plot. The show portrayed different sexualities as normal forms of love and affection attempting to remove the deviant label. *Rent* asks for their community to become “an us instead of a them” (Larson, 2008, p.73). It asked the audience to end the isolation of the deviant and non-mainstream and to adopt their teachings of love, activism, and freedom. It questioned what it means to be in the mainstream and hegemonic ideals. This type of critique is further seen in *Rent*’s female characters.

Gender is not the main theme in *Rent*, but it is important to note that its female characters are largely contrary to traditional images of femininity. The characters of Mimi, Maureen, and Angel all represented untraditional female ideals of purity, docility, and biological femininity. Mimi was an exotic dancer, assertive, deviant, and sexually promiscuous. She sings of wanting to “commit a crime” and putting on “a tight skirt and [flirting] with a stranger” (Larsen, 2008, p. 41). Maureen was a lesbian, opinionated, gregarious, and stages performances to protest inequality and discrimination. She exclaims “this diva needs her stage”, when her partner was insecure with her boisterous personality (Larson, 2008, p.104). She literally protests against the mainstream and the “powers that be.” Furthermore, while Angel was biologically male, for about half the show Angel dresses as a woman. This representation of gender was probably the most deviant, as Angel represented femininity in his clothing, mannerism, and voice, but was in fact biologically male. All of these characters provided counter narratives to the traditional female characters that appear in earlier musicals and other forms of media.

**Wicked (2003).** *Wicked*’s construction of deviancy in seen in its portrayal of its protagonists Elphaba and Galinda. The depiction of the two protagonists alongside one another allows a juxtaposition of deviancy and conformity. Elphaba was independent, confrontational, and
challenges the Wizard and his inhuman practices. In her large number “Defying Gravity” she sings “I’m through playing the rules of someone else’s game” (Schwartz & Holzman, n.d., p. 24). Her label as the wicked witch stemmed from her refusal to abide by society’s rules. This refusal was partially connected to ideals of female beauty. Elphaba was not considered beautiful as she was green, dresses matronly, and does not use traditional feminine beauty products (i.e., make-up). Her lack of feminine beauty has her labeled as ugly and abnormal by her peers. The depiction further alienated her and portrayed her counter to dominant culture. The character of Galinda offered a more hegemonic narrative and is labeled Galinda the Good. She was traditional attractive, rich, and worshiped by her peers. Galinda was considered beautiful. In addition, she later became a representative of the wizard and abided by society’s norms. Unfortunately, she was unhappy and unsettled with her apathy towards the government. She was torn between following the rules of Oz and follow Elphaba in her defiance of the Wizard. Therefore, while there appeared to be narratives of conformity, they do not appear to endorse it.

The characters represent the opposites. Elphaba as deviancy, while Galinda as conventionality. Their interaction therefore created a discourse on how we use labels for individuals. Both characters were given a title based on their level of deviancy. This labeling of deviancy was described by the Wizard in his song “Wonderful”. He sings “A man’s called a traitor or liberator. A rich man’s a thief or philanthropist… its all in which label is able to persist” (Schwartz & Holzman, n.d., p. 32). The show’s narratives seem to reflect our society’s. Deviancy was defined based on who is in power and who has control over “labels” that “persist”. If an individual refuses to abide by society’s rules, (even if they are unjust), society will ostracize and demonize them.

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9 Some scripts included were either scripts used for productions or from paid online databases, therefore they had no publishing dates.
Inequality

Broadway shows’ narratives included an emergent theme of inequality as it relates to race and class. For my study, inequality referred to discrimination, systematic oppression, and unfair treatment. Hence, inequality focuses on social justice. Shows in my selection discussed racism and classism within their narratives and discussed the social construction of these inequalities (i.e., West Side Story, Hair, Les Miserables, and Wicked). The musicals depicted how inequalities are developed by social and cultural focuses.

West Side Story (1958). West Side Story’s most explicit theme besides crime, was that of discrimination. A majority of the characters were part of the Sharks, a Puerto Rican gang. They were discriminated against due to their immigration status as well as their race. The white characters, the Jets, in the show blamed immigrants for the Jet’s families’ troubles. One member of the gang felt that the “[Puerto Ricans are] the reason [his] old man’s gone bust” and that immigrants were “ruinin’ free ennaprise” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 4-5). They considered this group as a threat and feel it was important to stand up to the Sharks. The dialogue frame immigrants as a threat to American culture. The Jets considered this new group as the reason for their own personal troubles as well as their families, and signs of worse changes to come. The Sharks themselves also discussed their subordinate status. Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks, protested discrimination exclaiming that Chino, a Shark, makes half of what a “Polack” makes. He further explained that while Tony’s parents may be immigrants Tony was considered American, but they as Puerto Ricans will always be foreigners (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 36). These narratives portrayed discrimination based on race and how race may be framed within cultural norms. Bernardo’s complaints, as well as the Jet’s, both touched on the construction of race and citizenship as it relates to our cultural identity. Bernardo’s
criticism exposes the hypocrisy of a country built on immigration, would discriminate against immigrants. The Jet’s dialogue described how their identity is threatened by the new immigrants. In both narratives characters called attention to discrimination and how it connects to American identity.

This discussion of American identity and how it relates to inequality is further conveyed through Maria and Tony’s romantic relationship. When they are together, Tony told Maria that he is not “one of them”, but Maria countered saying “You are; but to me, you are not, just as I am one of them…” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d. p. 27-28). They admitted to each other that they come from different cultures and foreshadow the tragic end. This concept of “us” and “them” is highlighted in their relationship. Later on in the show, Anita revisited this narrative, telling Maria to love someone of her own race and to “stick to [her] own kind” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 91). This discourse related to once against cultural identity. Part of the reason Tony and Maria’s relationship was frowned upon was because interracial marriage was considered a threat to American identity. This intermingling of culture and race is considered a way in which we may lose our individual identity. The tensions between the gangs and West Side Story’s love story highlighted racial inequality and discrimination, specifically as it relates to identity and the threat of the “other.”

Hair (1968). Hair is another show to depict inequality in regards to race, though not to the same degree of West Side Story. The show called attention to the social construction of race and the language used to describe it. Songs called “I’m black” and “Colored Spade” has characters sing of labels connected to race. “Colored Spade”, in particular has a black character, Hud, listing racial slurs, such as “nigger”, ”coon”, and “cotton picker” (Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p. 8). These scenes were not counter to traditional race narratives, but called
attention to the social construction of race. The response to this narrative is further hindered.
Characters demands civil rights, but are refused. The “Mom” character confronted them saying, “Stop that. You stop that right now. We work hard for a living. Start being an American. Find a job. The trouble with you is you’re not an American. All these Bolshevik ideas. It’s disgusting. Look at yourself” (Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p. 16). This dialogue discussed the social aspect of race in which it describes the language we assign to different races to subjugate and discriminate. Thus the narrative depicted how society develops scripts concerning race and how culture perpetuates them, with any king of criticism met with scorn. Furthermore, with the response calling on common ideals of patriotism, hard work, and anti-communist ideas it portrayed how ingrained inequality is in our culture. The “Mom” character must use common cultural scripts to fight against a call to end racism. The discussion, critique, and response to inequality and civil rights therefore were all a part of Hair’s narratives. This multifaceted depiction of inequality was tied to systematic racism and threat of change.

The themes of race, inequality, and discrimination were further told through depictions of imperialism and colonialism. In Hair, race was part of the discourse on the Vietnam War and the government. One character condemned the war and says “the draft is white people sending black people to make war on yellow people to defend the land they stole from the red people” (Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p. 75). Characters satirically asked “what [the government thinks] is really great? To bomb, lynch, and segregate” (Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p.33). Later on in the show, characters acted out Native Americans and African Americans seeking revenge against cultural figures that oppress them. For instance, a group of actors dressed as Native Americans attack a George Washington figure, a symbol for colonialism and oppression. They chant “White man steal our land. White man must die” (Ragni, Rado, & McDermot, 1969, p.
This narrative not only discussed inequality as a static issue, but one born out of historical contexts. The scenes referenced to colonialism and post-colonialism and the lasting impacts of these past events. This has audiences developing an expansive perspective on current events. This framing positioned the current themes (i.e. Vietnam war; civil rights movement) within contexts and showed these themes as history repeating itself.

**Chicago (1976).** Compared to *Hair*, *Chicago*’s narratives on inequality were far less extensive, but nonetheless were present. A dialogue on class can be observed between the characters of Amos Hart and Billy Flynn. The theme of inequality was especially apparent in other characters’ treatment of these two men. Mechanic Amos and wealthy defense attorney Billy represent two classes, the working class and the upper class (white-collar) respectively. Mama Morton remarked on class inequality in her song “When you’re good to Mama”. She sings “the folks atop the ladder/ are the ones the world adores” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p. 26). As someone at the top of the ladder, Flynn was adored by many, depicted as a champion for the downtrodden. In reality, he was greedy, conniving, and manipulative. Amos was disliked by most people on stage and on more than one occasion is ignored. In his song “Mr. Cellophane” he sings “You can look right through me, walk right by me, and never know I’m there” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p.64). Amos and Flynn represented different classes and the way in which their class impacts how others perceive them. This unequal treatment was partially based on their class status within society. The inequality within their narratives highlighted how others recognize class differences. In many cases lower class and working class individuals are perceived as lazy, distrustful, and no good. Chicago’s class depictions in the two characters of Amos and Billy were opposite. Amos is trustworthy and caring, while Billy was not. This goes against common negative portrayals of working class people, therefore exposing the audience to
different narrative concerning class and inequality. If anything *Chicago* told us to not judge a book by its cover or class status.

*Les Miserables* (1986). *Les Miserables*’s narratives on inequality were directly tied to class, and compared to *Chicago*, were far more explicit. Some explained the plight of the poor. The song “At the End of the Day” described the hopelessness that people can experience in poverty. They sing, “At the end of the day, you’re another day older, and that’s all you can say for the life of the poor. It’s a struggle, it’s a war, and there’s nothing that anyone’s giving. One more day standing about, what is it for” (Boublil, Schonberg & Kretzmer, n.d, p. 7). Similar sentiments were reflected when the beggars sing “look down… see the beggars at your feet… look down and show some mercy if you can” (Boublil, Schonberg & Kretzmer, n.d, p. 32). These lyrics discussed the lack of sympathy for the poor and their invisibility in society.

*Les Miserables*’ discussion on inequality was further emphasized in the second act with the student rebellion. The rebellion stemmed from witnessing inequality and oppression of the impoverished as described above. The students believed a new class order is required. They yearned for a leader of the people and described “a world [they] long to see” (Boublil, Schonberg & Kretzmer, n.d, p. 45). They specifically wanted to dismantle the elite who are in charge and who do nothing to help the lower classes. The students asked others “How long… before [they] cut the fat one’s down to size?” (Boublil, Schonberg & Kretzmer, n.d, p. 34). Furthermore, they sing for equality. They asked, “Do you hear the people sing, singing the song of angry men” and plead for the community to “join in the fight that will give [them] the right to be free” (Boublil, Schonberg & Kretzmer, n.d, p. 45). This violent and vocal revolt provided a voice for the impoverished that they seem to lack. Interestingly though, the rebellion was led by privileged middle class students, not the poor. In actuality the poor do not get involved in the rebellion. So,
while they fight for fairness, the characters fighting for equality are not necessarily the one’s being oppressed. This may relate to the portrayal of the poor as lazy or inefficient. A privilege, middle-class group stands for the voiceless, as the poor are unable to stage their own rebellion. It is also important to note that the student rebellion failed and the majority of the participants are killed by authorities, therefore their progressive actions were for naught. Thus, the plot appeared to critique class structure, but also upheld dominant ideas about the poor. Also the fact that the rebellion was unsuccessful, further goes against a true criticism of class structure. The ambiguous narratives of Les Miserables therefore provided a discussion on class inequality, but offered no radical change to society.

Rent (1996). Rent’s storyline touched on inequality and oppression as it related to class and homelessness. The plot begins with a conversation of the rights of homeless men and women. Benny wants to rid an empty lot of the homeless in order to begin construction on the site. Maureen’s performance (discussed above) protested this eviction. Mark and Roger reflected her sentiment, telling Benny he “can’t quietly wipe out an entire tent city, then watch It’s a Wonderful Life on TV” (Larson, 2008, p.30). They cannot fathom his callousness towards a disenfranchised group. Other characters, such as the police showed discrimination towards the homeless. One police officer planned to hit a sleeping homeless person, but stops himself once he realizes he is being filmed. In addition to portrayals of unfair treatment, the marginalized group themselves vocalized their feelings of despair. In the song “Christmas Bells”, the homeless compared their lives during the holidays to those of the middle and upper class. They sing:

“You’ll be merry/I’ll be merry/ Tho’ merry ain’t in my vocabulary…no sleigh bells/no Santa Clause… no bathrobe/no steuben glass/no cappuccino makers/no pearls, no diamonds/No “chestnuts roasting on an open fire”/Chestnuts roasting on an open fire/No room at the holiday inn” (Larson, 2008, p. 55-63).
This cynical comparison between the lives of the homeless and poor with those of the upper class carried through the first act and highlighted inequalities between groups. This sequence especially focused on the lack of luxuries (i.e., pears, diamonds), but also the lack of comforts (i.e. Santa Clause). The homeless were not only lacking material goods, but cultural goods. This emphasized how our capitalist and consumerist culture not only sell commodities, but culture tied to said commodities. We do not just sell Christmas trees, but the idealized middle class lifestyle tied to owning a Christmas tree. This may relate to the economic structure of our society in which we value money and connect wealth with happiness. The connection between being well-off and having the “jolly” holiday experience is an American experience. Its as if the characters yearned for Norman Rockwell happiness, idealized in our culture, and less the security of monetary gain. Thus, Rent critiqued our identity as tied to mainstream culture, economic structures, and middle-class idealism.

**Wicked (2003).** Inequality and discrimination was a strong theme in Wicked. The shows narratives were more allegorical compared to other shows, but none the less displayed similar themes. In the musical, animals were almost considered a race in Oz. Animals can talk, interact with humans, and be working professionals. For instance, the primary animal character, Dr. Dillamond, was a teacher at Elphaba and Galinda’s school. Dr. Dillamond became an example of animal discrimination. During the first day of class, his chalk board was vandalized with the phrase “animals should be seen, not heard” (Schwartz & Holzman, n.d, p. 10). After this the audience soon learned of systematic plans to oppress the animal population. The government began a campaign to cage animals. They framed this new invention as for the animals “own good” and planned to start caging animals from a young age so they never develop the ability to speak. Many people accept this new view on animals, but Dr. Dillamond warned Elphaba that
“they are not telling [her] the whole story” (Schwartz & Holzman, n.d, p. 17). This storyline depicted how people’s beliefs on race are socially constructed by people in power. The narrative pointed to the greater social construction of race and how we come to view other races. Greatly so, this part of Wicked even depicted how the understanding of race shifts based on cultural factors. Dr. Dillamond actually showed signs of turning back into a goat, since there was a shift in how the animal race is viewed. It is as if his character reflected the changing perceptions as endorsed by the government. This narrative within Wicked can be seen as an allegory for racial discrimination and oppression. In addition, the government was responsible for the discrimination, which legitimizes any oppression mirrored by individuals, and perpetuates the inequality.

Oklahoma. Most Broadway musicals discussed inequality in some way, usually focusing on classism and racism. These –isms are represented as fuels for inequality, discrimination, and oppression. The only show to not include any distinct theme on inequality is Oklahoma. There are a few potential reasons for these differences. Oklahoma is one of the first integrated musicals (Patinkin, 2008). This means that it was one of the first shows to have the songs and dances flow seamlessly from dialogue and to further the plot. After Oklahoma, there was ten years of shows until West Side Story, therefore the progression and subject matters of musical theater may have advanced significantly from the early 1940s. Oklahoma relied heavily on archetypes (i.e. hero, villain, damsel, sage, fool) and common plot devices. That is not to say these disappear in later shows, but the reliance on certain storytelling structures may limit the kind of themes expressed. Furthermore, Oklahoma was produced during wartime in which audiences looked towards entertainment as an escape from the troubles of current events. Wartime was a time period of American pride and prosperity. Income inequality was not a common issue in mainstream media,
and any kind of discussion of civil rights may be considered un-American. The population was looking for a sense of unity and endorsement of state power. Any overt criticism may have been deemed unpatriotic, therefore supporting more hegemonic narratives. The historical context of America and Broadway’s musicals both may be a reason for Oklahoma’s lack of inequality narratives.

**Justice System.**

The last theme observed in Broadway shows concerned institutionalized justice or directly our justice system. These narratives depicted or challenged societal institutions concerned with achieving legal justice. The majority of Broadway musicals in my selection included this theme. Some shows focused on our justice system or law enforcement, its construction, and its legitimacy (i.e., Oklahoma, West Side Story and Chicago). These shows especially targeted our legal system and cynically critique how these systems work or fail. Other shows have a more general critique of societal institutions as it relates to justice (i.e., Hair and Wicked). These musicals discussed the government and societal institutions and their lack of concern for social justice and human welfare. Lastly, other shows included a comparison of social versus procedural justice with characters coming to represent different forms of justice (i.e., Les Miserables and Rent). These characters argued about the appropriate form of justice and created a discussion on stage. The theme of justice was prevalent, but varied greatly in my selection of Broadway musicals.

**Oklahoma (1943).** Oklahoma’s primary theme did not concern justice, but the ending (discussed briefly above) did depict, “frontier justice”. Frontier justice can refer to vigilante justice or it can simply refer to justice without the existence of formal law. For my analysis the latter is discussed. Oklahoma was yet to be a state during the events of the second act. This
territory-status led to confusion as to how to prosecute Curley after he murders Jud. The characters have the town judge hold an abridged trial in which they go through the process of arraignment, trial, and deliberation in a matter of minutes. Curley pleads not guilty, claiming self-defense, and is supported by other characters who act as witnesses and jury members. The Judge accepts the plea and Curley is found not guilty. *Oklahoma’s* depiction of a justice system was a shortened version of our contemporary process. The abridgment of due process was potentially a view into how justice would be carried out in a world without state structures. Since Oklahoma was a territory and not tied to the larger country – like a state would be – its justice system itself was not greatly tied to the larger, more formalized, governmental structure. This depiction of our justice system was unique compared to other musicals in my selection. “Frontier justice” was shown as informal, unstructured, and lacking due process. This was potentially due to the lack of state government in the territory, allowing a glimpse into a justice system without formal structure. *Oklahoma’s* representation of justice and our legal system pointed to the larger structures in place and what occurs when they are absent.

**West Side Story (1958).** *West Side Story*, while discussing juvenile delinquency and gang violence, depicted the justice system as inefficient. In the song “Officer Krupke,” the characters go through different stages of the juvenile justice system including arrest, court, social work programs, and psychiatrists. All these institutions claimed to understand why juvenile delinquents commit crime, but are in fact ineffective. At the end of the song, the characters, unable to be reformed, come to the conclusion that they are just “no good” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d, p. 84). This depiction of the legal system presented an incompetent system. Besides this song, there was little reference to the justice system as being there as a resource. It really was only depicted as useless and bothersome for the characters. Compared to other forms
of media, *West Side Story* was far more pessimistic in its description of law. The negative portrayal of our justice system and legal actors, may illustrate the concept of the pathologized offender. The characters declared themselves as “no good” and a hopeless cause, but discussed social factors that may lead to their delinquent behavior. Thus, this depiction of the justice system painted these gang members as understanding the issues in their lives as fuel for their crime, and our system ignorance of these factors. According to our legal system, they are just “no good”.

This criticism of our justice system carried over to *West Side Story*’s depictions of law enforcement. The police are largely portrayed as antagonists who the characters come to mock. Officer Krupke is the central law enforcement character. He pleads for the gangs to stop the violence, but gives them little resources to do so. Furthermore, Krupke is discriminatory which weakens his authority. While both gangs create problems in his neighborhood he targets Puerto Ricans as the real culprits. This blatant discrimination depicted police as racist, which goes against the usual portrayal of the honorable cop. At one point a police officer confronted the Sharks and states “Sure, it’s a free country and I ain’t got the right. But it’s a country with laws; and I can find the right. I got the badge, you got the skin. It’s tough all over.” (Bernstein, Laurents, & Sondheim, n.d., p. 51). This small speech to the Sharks highlighted this discrimination, but also emphasized the ability for authorities to decide who is criminal and who is not. This depicted our justice systems’ discretionary powers. This further relates to concerns about the criminalization of different races and marginalized groups – such as immigrants. An authority’s ability to define who is bad and good questions the very fabric of our legal system, seen as impartial and unbiased. *West Side Story*’s narratives undermined police authority by
portraying them as inefficient and racist. This portrayal goes against popular narratives of impartiality, fairness, and honor inherent in law enforcement and justice in general.

**Hair (1968).** *Hair* was one of the first musicals within my selection to openly criticize society and its institutions. *Hair* specifically targeted the government and other social structures in its criticism. The dialogue and lyrics depicted institutions as failing and smothering. In the first song “Age of Aquarius,” they sing of “Harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding. No more falsehoods or derisions…the mind’s true liberation” (McDermot, Rado, & Ragni, 1969, p. 5). They want “no more falsehoods or derisions” and want “peace” and “freedom” (McDermot, Rado, & Ragni, 1969, p.5, 34-35). In dialogue and lyrics, the protagonists criticized the government, the “military industrial complex”, religion, and the educational system (McDermot, Rado, & Ragni, 1969, p.110). Schools are compared to concentration camps and our government to totalitarianism and Nazi Germany. The characters claimed the government brainwashes its citizen into trusting the people in power and the institutions in place. For instance, one character tells Claude that he may be against the war but once he goes “he will do exactly what THEY tell [him] to do” (McDermot, Rado, & Ragni, 1969, p. 56, emphasis in the original). This narrative may appear melodramatic, but research suggests how government may influence the average citizen. This narrative remarked on how hegemonic structure, such as the government, has immense power on how we act and think. *Hair*’s marked criticism portrayed institutions as oppressive, unjust, and despotic.

**Chicago (1976).** *Chicago* focused is critical lens on our justice system. It displayed our justice system sardonically and depicted it as a literal show. Billy Flynn described society saying, “It’s a circus… these trials, the whole world… all show business” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p. 75).

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10 The “military industrial complex” refers to a network involved in the production of weapons and military technologies. Usually it is related on political support and increased military spending by the government (Weber, 2014).
In addition, on multiple occasions murder is referred to as “art” and a “form of entertainment” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p. 28). The spectacle of crime and cynicism towards our justice system and the media called our system’s legitimacy into question. In addition, on many occasions the stages of the procedural process are mocked. The press conference was a ventriloquist’s act in which Roxie lied about the crime and was literally told what to say to the public. Furthermore the oath taken before giving testimony was “blah, blah, blah… truth… truth. Selp-you God” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p. 78). This mocking continued as multiple characters describe “truth” and “honesty” as frivolous and unimportant in legal proceedings. Chicago’s cynical discourse on crime, legal proceedings, and their public interest were all efforts to critique our justice system. Our justice system is unique in its adversarial nature and many trials do truly become spectacles. Chicago explicitly brought attention to this quality of legal proceedings and further displayed inherent drawbacks. The unimportance of truth and honesty negates common principles of our justice system. It is not about honesty, but about feigning honesty. For instance, the only reason Roxie was able to be acquitted was by paying a large sum to pay a talented lawyer who could concoct a perfect defense. This cynically depiction pointed to the spectacle aspect of American trials, but also to the built-in dishonesty in our justice system. Only the individuals who can act, get away with murder.

*Les Miserables (1986).* Les Miserables depicted themes of justice in a different way than previous shows. This musical included personifications of justice. Javert and Valjean represented procedural and social justice respectively. Javert is a police officer that follows the laws as written, strictly follows procedure, and dedicates his life to finding Valjean. In one scene, he exclaimed the he “is the law and the law is not mocked” (Boublil, Schonbergm & Kretzmer, n.d., p. 77). Valjean, on the other hand stressed fairness and equality. He listens to both perspectives
when Fantine is threatened with legal actions. He argued that his punishment did not fit his crime as he was only attempting to feed his family. This moral reasoning was seen when Valjean is given the task of killing Javert. Valjean allowed Javert to leave the barricade unscathed, even though he was told to kill him. He tells Javert “you are free, and there are no conditions…” There’s nothing that I blame you for. You’ve done your duty, nothing more” (Boublil, Schonbergm & Kretzmer, n.d, p. 69). Valjean understood that it would be unfair to kill Javert for doing something Javert believes is right. As evidenced by their exchanges, these characters were opposing forces. This created an open discourse on justice and how our justice system may work to achieve its goals. Javert was a more accurate portrayal of our legal system as he is procedural and regulated, but since he was largely inefficient this may be a critique of contemporary justice ideals. The tenets of our justice system endorse fairness, impartiality, and of course justice. The narratives surrounding Javert seem to avoid these concepts, focusing on law, order, rules, and regulations. This focus may point to our justice system’s ignorance of its basic principles. Therefore, it is possible that Javert’s unsuccessful record and eventual suicide displayed the need for antiquated procedural justice to end. On the other hand Valjean, who represented social justice, is able to make a life for himself and makes peace with this past crimes. This characterization displayed the potential good that comes from fairness and compassion, alluding to important considerations when discussing justice. The conflict between their character arcs have the audience exposed to two different forms of justice and created this potential dialogue.

Rent (1996). Rent followed a similar pattern to Les Miserables. Two characters personified procedural and social justice, Joanne and Maureen. Their differing views on how to achieve justice for marginalized people (i.e., homeless, unwed mothers, black mothers) created a dialogue about fairness on stage. Maureen is a performance artist and enjoyed creating spectacles
and shows in order to call attention to social issues. She represented social justice. Conversely Joanne, as a lawyer is concerned with procedural matters and wants to develop scripts for protests that are legally accurate. Other characters reference to her helping oppressed groups such as African Americans and single mothers, in her legal capacity. Joanne represented a legal approach to social issues. The two female characters argued about these approaches and allow the audience to decide what type of justice is most beneficial and efficient. The characterizations of Joanne along with Maureen, suggested multiple forms of justice acting together, alluding to the possibility that procedural and social justice can coexist.

**Wicked (2003).** Wicked, similar to Hair, critiqued the government and its injustices. Similar to the narratives on inequality, this theme was once again almost symbolic as the musical is set in Oz. The narratives referenced the concept that our labels and views on certain things are shaped by individuals in power aka the government. As his song says, the Wizard was a fraud and only achieved power through the label of “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.” Elphaba was shocked by the dishonesty and corruption within Oz’s government. This realization asked the audience to question people in power, consider figures of authority, and the power of labels in our society. The categorization and social construction of labels pointed to the influence of authority and structural entities. This conveyed how individuals have the ability to choose who is in power. We decide who we put in power by whose label we believe. Additionally, since the Wizard was responsible for unfair treatment and harsh practices, the musical displayed an authority’s ability to hinder justice. The narrative has the Wizard actively working against the Animals in Oz, carrying out unjust practices. This type of open cynicism of governmental bodies depicted the potential corruption and injustice that it breeds. Furthermore, it was the most overt
depiction of hegemonic and almost despotic power. Therefore, *Wicked* provided an allegorical critique an authority’s power.

**Off-Broadway Themes**

**Deviancy**

Similar to Broadway musicals, Off-Broadway shows in my selection explore deviancy. These shows depicted informal and formal rule breaking in their narratives. With the exception of *Godspell*, every show followed this theme. Some depicted crime and criminals (i.e., *The Threepenny Opera, The Fantasticks, Little Shop of Horrors, Assassins*, and *The Wild Party*). Other shows specifically portrayed violence against women (i.e., *Little Shop of Horrors and The Wild Party*). Still other musicals included representations of informal deviancy, especially in reference to gender and sexuality (i.e., *The Threepenny Opera and The Wild Party*). Off-Broadway musicals depicted deviancy broadly as an individual problem stemming from poor individual choices. Thus with the exception of *The Threepenny Opera and Assassins*, crime narratives were commonly individualized. This mimics theme in other media, and ignores many societal factors responsible for criminal behavior. In *Threepenny* and *Assassins*, their depiction of deviancy called attention to societal factors, but was commonly discredited by the shows’ narratives. While deviancy narratives were present, they are complicated by how they are framed and communicated within the musicals.

*The Threepenny Opera (1954).* In this Brecht and Wiell’s Marxist musical, the narratives concerning deviancy were everywhere. The portrayal of formal deviancy, or crime, was ever present in *Threepenny*’s storyline. The primary characters are criminals or are consorting with

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11 Certain show titles are shortened within results section for better readability. The Threepenny Opera = Threepenny; Little Shop of Horrors = Little Shop; The Wild Party = Wild Party
12 Marxism refers to the study of class and economic structures as it relates to inequality and other social issues (Duffy, 2006)
them. Macheath, the character who audiences root for, is a career criminal. His anthem “The Ballad of Mack the Knife” lists his rap sheet, including murder and burglary. Macheath, the protagonist, was immediately positioned as a deviant for the audience. This depiction of a sympathetic criminal has audiences rooting for Macheath and the other underworld characters. In the depiction of these characters, structural forces are shown as causes of crime. In the songs “The World is Mean” and “How to Survive” (which I will discuss more fully below) there are references to societal causes of crime. Conversely, other dialogue described crime born out of rational choice. This framework individualized the problem of crime and depicted individual faults or poor decision making as the reason for crime. One character explained that humans can turn “their feelings on and off; they can be callous at will”, thus painting deviant behavior as a willful act (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p. 4). Therefore while the narrative pointed to structural inequality as fuel for deviancy, further dialogue opposed this argument. The depiction of the rational, deliberate deviant constructs crime as an individualized problem. Similar to Broadway musicals, criminals are portrayed as such, but given very little formal sanctions. Macheath has no official rap sheet until the police are paid to arrest him. His lack of criminal record and by the end his pardon from the Queen both point to a lack of formal punishment. This framed crime differently, as something less serious and even socially sanctioned. Threepenny offered a possible glimpse into how individuals define appropriate and inappropriate forms of crime and deviancy.

In addition to critiquing commonsensical views on criminality, Threepenny also tackled gender normality, specifically deviation from gender norms. For instance, when Polly married Macheath, characters sing the “Wedding song”. They critique the institution of marriage, conveying it as artificial and forced, singing, “As they watched the registrar write it down… she
tried to think what was his name” (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p.11). The characters also insert monotone cheers of “hurray” and “yay” during this song as if to describe marriage as cold and apathetic. Furthermore, individual reactions towards Polly’s nuptials described it as “immoral” (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p.21). Her mother considers marriage “sinful” and not getting a divorce as “shameful” (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p.21). This narrative goes against the traditional narrative that stresses the importance of marriage for women.

Within this deviant look at gender roles, *Threepenny* also depicted female sexuality. The display of multiple women choosing to marry whom they want and using their sexuality freely opposed dominant portrayals of women, especially in the 1950s. One of the prostitute characters described her power through sex (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p. 33). This sentiment is reinforced in “Ballad of Dependency” sung by Mrs. Peachum. She described a man who “feels his old dependency” and caves to his weakness for women (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p. 32). This was mirrored by Macheath’s actions. His downfall is his dependency on women, who are the ones who turn him in to the police. This connection between power and sex countered gender norms that stress the importance of purity and subservience. The depictions do not objectify women, but portrayed sexuality as something of strength and displayed men as weak, counter to dominant scripts. *Threepenny*’s narratives do not paint the female characters as docile or submissive, but wielders of their own fate.

*The Fantasticks (1960).* *The Fantasticks* included a unique and fantastical depiction of deviancy. The plot included a staged abduction concocted by the fathers and El Gallo in order to end a pretend feud between their families. The fathers developed the feud so they could tell their children, Matt and Luisa, not to talk to one another. They felt that by telling them no they would fall in love. Their plan worked, but to end the feud they needed a big spectacle. This is when they
entrusted the help of El Gallo. They felt that if Matt saved Luisa from being kidnapped the fathers could “end” the feud and the two teenagers can be together freely.

This display of violence is obviously faked, but nonetheless depicted formal deviancy. This staging, which led to multiple deaths and a heroic victory for the Matt is a pivotal point in the show. Matt fights off three men, “killing” two of them as he saves Luisa. This dramaturgical rendering of crime as well as Luisa’s description of the abduction romanticized violence. Matt’s violent actions are portrayed as heroic. Furthermore, Luisa described her abductor as a “handsome bandit” and confesses to wearing a ribbon on the spot he grabbed her, which she kisses “three times every day” (Jones & Schmidt, n.d. p. 39, p. 55). This depiction of love and romance is partially shaped by gender norms. Matt is masculine, heroic, and saves Luisa who is a damsel in distress. Luisa’s later fixation on El Gallo as well as the actions of Matt and the abductors, followed the common script of a woman being smitten with violent, aggressive, and masculine actions. It does not seem to matter than El Gallo was going to abduct her, she still saw his macho behavior as attractive and romanticizes it.

This romanticization continued when Matt leaves to explore the world. He is disillusioned with his relationship and sets off. Soon after, he is robbed and hurt by others. El Gallo has Luisa watch. Her initial reaction is that of shock. El Gallo tells Luisa, “Just put on your mask – then it’s pretty” (Jones & Schmidt, n.d, p. 58). The mask disguised the violence as something jovial and innocent. For instance, when rioting peasants set Matt’s clothes on fire, Luisa is concerned for his safety, but then sees it as beautiful colors once the mask is on. The mask appeared to represents looking through “rose colored glasses.” This shielding from violence protected Luisa’s sheltered view on the world and allowed her to be apathetic to Matt’s plight. The early narratives romanticized violence and this masking was reflected in the later
scenes with El Gallo and Luisa. *The Fantasticks* depiction of crime mirrored its namestake, it was fantastical.

**Little Shop of Horrors (1982).** *Little shop’s* deviancy narratives revolved around crime, specifically murder and intimate partner violence. The plot has Seymour, a bookish and shy shopkeeper, feeding his exotic plant the body parts of murdered characters. In every case Seymour does not actively kill the characters; he “leads” them to their death. For instance, he has Mr. Mushnik reach into the plant allowing Audrey Two to eat him. Seymour does not kill Orin, but does not help him when he suffocates on laughing gas. Seymour’s deeds are thus perceived less deviant because he lacked a malicious intent. Furthermore, Seymour murders two characters that are unlikable, also increasing the ability for one to justify Seymour’s actions and believe in his innocence. *Little Shop’s* representation requires thought and has the audience question the definition of murder. Are Seymour’s actions still murder if he never physically holds a weapon and he never lays a hand on another character? The fact that his criminal actions have a degree of separation, the audience then must consider if his deeds are really murder. In this depiction the protagonist once again is the deviant individual, requiring the audience to make sense of why a “good” person would commit a crime. The depiction of murder, who is murdered, and Seymour’s intent assures audiences of his innocence, even while he is committing a crime. Therefore, this narrative represented murder as a complex crime defined by many factors (i.e., motivation, victims, modus operandi).

Violence against women was portrayed in a less complex way and in reality followed common scripts. *Little Shop of Horrors* depicted intimate partner violence between Audrey and her boyfriend Orin. Orin was mercilessly mean and physically and verbally abuses her. Audrey was seen with a black eye and her arm in a cast. While Audrey understood that this treatment
was wrong, she felt she cannot leave him since “he makes good money. And… he’s the only fella [she] got” (Menken & Ashman, 1982, p.25). Orin himself claimed very little fault. He declared he is no monster. He says he has always been this way since he was a child and that his sadism was due to “natural tendencies” (Menken & Ashman, 1982, p. 41). He also normalized his abusive behavior telling Seymour that “[he’s] gotta train [women]” (Menken & Ashman, 1982, p.44). Orin’s one line above illustrated how patriarchal structures normalize abusive behaviors, but this is where any kind of criticism ends. Largely, the narratives surrounding intimate partner violence focused on the pathologization of Orin and on Audrey’s refusal to leave him, refraining from discussing structural causes. While *Little Shop* depicted violence against women as morally wrong, the focus remained on individual reasons for the crimes. This focus individualized the problem of intimate partner violence and separates it from larger structural factors.

*Assassins (1990).* *Assassins*, loyal to its name, describes the actions of presidential assassins. This narrative therefore depicted numerous examples of formal deviance in the form of murder. All assassinations occurred on stage, but were usually imaginatively done. For instance, Hinckley’s assassination attempt included him firing at a photo of Reagan, as the audience hears quotes from the former president. This musical differed from others in my selection as many of the characters are formally punished for their crimes. Some assassins, such as Zangara and Guiteau, are executed on stage to music. This is one of the only musicals in my selection to have show some kind of formal punishment for deviancy.

*Assassins* also discussed how we as a society socially construct crime. On many occasions the characters refer to ostracism from American culture, and our cultural identity itself, as what motivates their criminal actions. For instance, in “Another national Anthem” they used
cultural symbols (i.e., baseball, national anthem) to talk about their exclusion. They sing “We’re the other national anthem/the ones who can’t get in to the ballpark/spread the word’ there’s another national anthem, folks, for those who never win/for the suckers, for the pikers, for the ones who might have been” (Weldman & Sondheim, 1991, p. 85.) They further discussed being “expatriates in [their] own country” (Weldman & Sondheim, 1991, p. 100). Additionally, they referred to their crime as a way to connect to America, to their country. They partially blame our country’s ideals (i.e., “The American Dream, wealth, community) and identity for why they turn towards crime. The country promises success and community and when it reneges on its promises, the assassins see crime as the only option. They believed their notorious acts will help them connect to a country that excludes them.

This critique of culture was unique to Assassins, but its delivery discredits it. All of the main characters are highly pathologized. Hinckley described his obsession with Jodie Foster. Fromme raved about “helter skelter” and Charlie Manson. Guiteau’s ranted about being Ambassador to France. Zangara complained of psychosomatic stomach pains while on stage. They were abnormal (i.e. eccentric, insane, criminal) as defined by current conceptions of normality. This pathologization of the majority of the characters harmed their discussion of America, especially since they are already vilified historical figures to the audience. The audience may be interested in their view of the country, but considered it a viewpoint from someone who is mentally different than the average person. Thus, the critique of culture and society is suspect to the viewer, reducing its impact. This vocal critique combined with pathologization complicated Assassins’s narratives on deviancy.

Assassins further expanded its discussion on deviancy by questioning how we define murder. In the penultimate scene, John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald talked before
Oswald decided to kill John F. Kennedy. Oswald exclaimed that he is not a murderer. Booth assuaged him, saying he is not a murderer, but an assassin. Booth explained that murder was “a tawdry little crime; it’s born of greed, or lust, or liquor. Adulterers and shopkeepers get murdered. But when a president gets killed … he was assassinated (Weldman & Sondheim, 1991, p. 95). Thus, Oswald will be an assassin, not a murderer. In past shows, it was the characterization of the murderer that impacted how one defined the crime, while in Assassins it was the victim. A victim of authority and power, such as the president, changed the term and subsequently our perception of the crime. This was a vast difference from past narratives and their exploration of murder’s definition.

*The Wild Party (2000).* Similar to other shows, *Wild Party* depicted crime with its discussion of murder and violence against women. Burrs and Black fought over a gun after Burrs threatens to kill Black, Queenie, and himself. In the struggle Black accidently kills Burrs. This murder mirrors *Oklahoma*: two men fighting over a woman that ends in an accidental death of the more violent character. The difference here though was that there is no happy ending. The party is literally over. This murder was depicted as justified, as Black was trying to save his and Queenie’s life. Yet, Queenie still tells Black to leave since he will be charged. While there are no formal sanctions, the ending was cold, dark, and heartbreaking. There was no happy ending and Burrs death did not solve any of the characters’ turmoils. Black and Queenie were unable to be together and Queenie left the apartment defeated. The two characters parted and the show ends. This appears as an informal punishment as they are unable to be together even though they truly care for one another. So while the murderer’s actions were understandable there was no reward (aka happy ending) for the protagonists. This depiction was far bleaker as compared to other musicals and portrayed realities of killing another person.
The *The Wild Party* further depicted the bleak and graphic reality of deviancy, particularly intimate partner violence and rape. The narratives began shortly after the first song. Burrs verbally abuses Queenie, physical attacks her, and sexually assaults her. The shows depictions of rape and abuse were graphic, beginning early on and continuing throughout the show. The audience is not shielded from the abuse. Queenie reflected on the abuse and her relationship to Black. When asked why she stays Queenie questioned her own motives and says “Maybe I like it this way.” She sings, “If I could change/ If I could grow…then through that door I’ll go …Why do I stay... Maybe he loves me/ Maybe I like it this way” (Lippa, n.d., p. 66-67). Immediately after Queenie’s song, Burrs begins to ponder his own behavior asking “What it is about her?” He wondered what she does that makes him act out in such a way. Burrs described Queenie as tearing him down and breaking him apart, partially blaming her confrontational personality for his anger. This narrative focused on the victim’s behaviors and not the abuser’s. Similar to *Little Shop*, this individualized the problem of violence against women.

*The Wild Party* further addressed informal deviancy in its depiction of gender and sexuality. The main female characters of Queenie and Kate represented counter narratives of hegemonic femininity. This was evident in their greeting to one another: “no limits, no boundaries, no compromise” (Lippa, n.d, p. 32). They do not believe in limiting their lives based on any kind of boundary, including traditional gender norms. Queenie was introduced to the audience as sexually promiscuous, independent, and powerful. She has immense power over men and “drives them mad” (Lippa, n.d., p. 2). Similar to *Threepenny*, there was a connection between sexuality and power. Furthermore, Queenie was confrontational towards her partner. When Burrs was violent she refused to back down even though she appears frightened. After he attacked, she responds, “You touch me again, I’ll kill you. Filthy bastard” (Lippa, n.d., p.15).
Queenie’s personality goes against the usually feminine narrative of domesticity, docility, and purity. Kate, the other lead female character, also represented a counter narrative on femininity. Kate was an unashamed prostitute, who has turned her “whoring…into art” (Lippa, n.d., p. 73). She sings about being the “Life of the party,” enjoying attention and being in control of her life. She was also sexually promiscuous and pursues Burrs through most of the party. The character of Kate, similar to Queenie, refused to conform to gender norms of subservience and virginity. By having the primary female character representations against traditional femininity, it provided narratives on deviation from gender norms

*Godspell.* The only show to not include substantial narratives on deviancy is *Godspell.* That is not to say deviancy does not come up within the plotline, but it was not a central theme. *Godspell* is based on the Bible’s Gospel of Matthew; in turn there were numerous references to morality. There were occasionally depictions to crime and other deviant behavior (i.e., sexuality), but this exploration focused on how to be good. The characters themselves do not come to represent deviancy. They may act the part of a criminal, but in order to convey the lesson of the parable. Even Judas, after betraying Jesus, is forgiven. This focus on morality and goodness reflects the narratives within *Godspell’s* source material. This may account for the lack of central themes on deviancy.

**Inequality**

Narratives depicting inequality occurred in Off-Broadway musicals. In these shows the focus remained on class. Inequality was connected in particular to class structure, and discrimination (i.e, *The Threepenny Opera, Little Shop of Horrors,* and *Assassins*). Many narratives discussed how class structure was perpetuated by an elite group or cultural structures, which then perpetuates inequality (i.e., *The Threepenny Opera* and *Assassins*). In connection
with the social construction of class, inequality was further discussed in reference to lack of opportunity and class immobility (i.e., *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Assassins*).

**The Threepenny Opera (1954)**. *Threepenny* discussed inequality within class structures. The show was set during the 19th century in London and it portrayed class as a social construct. One character exclaims that the “powerful of the earth can create poverty, but they can’t bear to look at it” (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p. 49). The dialogue described class inequality as something developed by the elite. According to *Threepenny*, the class structure was partially due to a lack of resources, which then perpetuates inequality. The songs “How to survive”, and “the world is mean” both touched on this narrative. For instance, in “How to Survive” Mrs. Peachum sings, “Whatever you may do, wherever you aspire, first feed the face, and then talk right and wrong. For even saintly folk may act like sinners, unless they’ve had their customary dinners” (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p.46). These lyrics constructed inequality as a lack of nourishment which leads people down the wrong path, only perpetuating class structure. The upper class, due to their status and resources, continue to rise. The poor must turn to crime and deviancy to survive, cementing their place in the social hierarchy. This showed the power of money and class differences which bred inequality.

*Threepenny*’s narratives on inequality portrayed class structure as socially constructed, but similar to its narratives on deviancy, strayed from this theme with certain dialogue. For instance, Mr. Peachum and a beggar both agree that people are the “sad victims of their own instincts” (Weill & Brecht, 1954, p.5). Therefore the narrative was both individualistic (in which people are of the lower class due to their individual actions) and structural (lack of resources perpetuating class hierarchy and inequality). This may be due to the satirical and cynical quality of Brechtian theater, in which the playwright intended to alienate the audience in order for them
to reflect on the shows themes. It may also be a device to display the hypocrisy of society’s inequality or the acceptance of inequality, even when one understands the unfairness of it. *The Threepenny Opera* described the origins and repercussions of inequality in a complex way, potentially as a way to alienate the audience and have them question their own class structure.

**Little Shop of Horrors (1986).** *Little Shop of Horrors* was another Off-Broadway show to discuss class inequality. *Little Shop* is set in a poor neighborhood of an unnamed city. A song called “Skid Row” described the characters sense of helplessness and hopelessness. The characters hopelessness stemmed from the inescapability of Skid Row and their lack of opportunity. One character retorts to Mr. Mushnik, “Better ourselves? Mister when you from Skid Row, ain’t no such thing” (Menken & Ashman, 1982, p.17). This theme drove most of the plot. The characters class status and their want to escape it shaped their actions. For instance, Seymour agreed to feed Audrey Two human remains for financial gain. Audrey’s decided to stay in an abusive relationship because she sees her middle-class boyfriend as a way out of “skid row.” Mr. Mushnik offered to adopt Seymour so to sustain his shop’s success. This prevalent narrative discussed how inequality and lack of legitimate opportunity impacts actions. The fact that an alien life form (Audrey Two) is needed to actually help these characters out of their lower class position points to the difficulty of social mobility. While this narrative exists, attention to structural inequalities was relatively covert. The unnamed city setting and fantastical plot disconnect *Little Shop*’s narratives from larger society, therefore reducing the criticism against structural causes of inequality.

**Assassins (1990).** *Assassins* was the most contemporary Off-Broadway show to include narratives on inequality. Similar to *Little Shop*, many characters expressed their anger and frustration over the inequality within their society. Both Zangara and Czolgosz describe their
second-class status when discussing their motivations for wanting to kill the president. Zangara sings, “Men with the money, they control everything… I no care who I kill, as long as its king” (Sondheim & Weidman, 1991, p. 32). He targets a person with power, money, and prestige since Zangara sees Roosevelt as the root of his problem. Czolgosz, a socialist, sees inequality and lack of opportunity in America. It is sung in the “Ballad of Czolgosz” that “some men have everything and some have none” (Sondheim & Weidman, 1991, p. 51). Zangara and Czolgosz saw their crime as the only opportunity to have their voices heard because there are subjugated and oppressed.

As compared to the other shows, *Assassins* was more direct in connecting the American culture to systematic inequality. Czolgolz tells the other assassins about the lack of opportunity afforded to most and the frustration inherent in the working class. This character believes he cannot achieve the American Dream, even though that is what his culture promises. Similar to past narratives in other shows, *Assassins* used cultural symbols to depict the themes of inequality. For instance, the Balladeer discusses the opportunity in the United States and the ability for anyone to “work their way to the head of the line” (Sondheim & Weidman, 1991, p. 51). This image that anyone no matter where they come from can work their way up and be something greater is common in American culture. We describe the United States as a place where anyone “can grow up to become the president” (Sondheim & Weidman, 1991, p. 98). Because he perceived America’s as built on inequality, Czolgosz felt unable to achieve this idealized goal. Instead he worked his way to the head of line to meet the president, then killing McKinley. While this critique of American culture exists, the pathologization of the characters reduced the credibility of this criticism. As described above the characters are not only vilified in popular culture, but are portrayed as eccentric and abnormal. The characters asked why certain
people are given opportunity and others are not, but since the characters are depicted as deviant their narratives are given less credence.

**The Fantasticks, Godspell, and The Wild Party.** Narratives on inequality were lacking in *The Fantasticks, Godspell, and The Wild Party*. Many potential reasons point to why this is true. First, the structure of these three musicals may explain why. *Godspell’s* source material forces it to be essentially a series of parables with the overarching theme of community unity. Therefore, there was rare exploration of any one specific topic. *Godspell’s* storylines were constricted by the source material. They were chiefly based on parables of the Bible’s Gospel of Mathew, thus there was a limited range of possible topics. *The Fantasticks* were also impeded by the narrative structure. Structurally, the musical is simplistic (i.e., very little set, very little scene changing, minimal costumes, small cast). This carries over to the setting. There was very little reference to an outside world. Luisa even admits to not seeing anything when she looks beyond her house and her neighbors. This static and simplistic setting restricted what type of themes or social structures can be expressed. Furthermore, the number of characters (five main characters and very little ensemble) reduced the viewpoints the audience are exposed to. In addition, the structure of *The Wild Party*’s plot may explain why there is a lack of an inequality narrative. The events of *The Wild Party* occurred in a limited space and a short period of time. Ninety percent of the show occurs in Queenie and Burrs apartment during the night. This limited time and space therefore only allowed for certain narratives to be expressed. Also the majority of characters, except for Queenie, Burrs, Kate, and Black, were not fully realized. This reduced the amount of individual inequality that can occur on stage within the storyline. These structural limits, such as source material, simplistic settings, and limited storylines, potentially explain the lack of narratives on inequality.
Justice System

Some Off-Broadway musicals depict institutionalized justice or a legal system within its narratives. The three musicals include vary drastically from one another. *The Threepenny Opera* specifically present a critique on a justice system, portraying it as flawed, illegitimate, and ineffectual. *Godspell* ties the justice system to the importance of morality and goodness, creating an analogy with religious institutions. *Assassins* depicts societal institutions, particularly the government perpetuating injustice. The representation of institutionalized justice differs greatly by musical.

*The Threepenny Opera (1954).* *The Threepenny Opera* followed Macheath’s criminal exploits and the Peachum’s attempts to arrest him. Macheath’s interaction with the law and justice system was largely pessimistic. The audience learns early on that while guilty of numerous crimes, Macheath has no criminal record. He was only hunted down by the police when they are paid to do so. Part of the reason he has never been arrested was because he was good friends with the Police Commissioner. In one scene the commissioner walks in on Macheath with stolen goods and shows little concern. This type of alliance between criminal and cop delegitimized law enforcement and presents an ineffectual justice system: even if one is guilty of every crime he will not be prosecuted if he has the right connections. This association is reflected in Macheath’s song “Ballad of the Easy life” in which he bribes police officers for his release. He sings, “While still a child, I heard it with misgiving, the bulging pocket makes the easy life” (Brecht & Weill, 1954, p. 38). This concept that money will acquire freedom and happiness, depicted the ability for money to corrupt our justice system. Also it countered the common beliefs that everyone is treated equally in the eyes of the law. Macheath’s interaction
with police painted a picture of police corruption, undermining the legal system and its principles.

The ending narratives of *Threepenny* further created a dialogue on justice. The portrayal of Macheath’s capture and interrupted execution criticizes the justice system. In this narrative, he is arrested by police, refused a trial, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Upon being placed in the noose, he is pardoned by the Queen and given a title. This condensation of due process, or really lack thereof, followed by his pardon, is melodramatic and fantastical. This storyline depicted the musical’s cynical view on legal proceedings as it displayed a lack of due process. Earlier in the musical, a character sings “You’re rights are guaranteed, but never granted” (Brecht & Weill, 1954, p. 24). The lack of a trial was due to discretionary powers and unfair practices, dispelling the right of a fair trial for all. Furthermore, the interruption and pardon displayed the almost absurdity of proceedings in which powerful figures have absolute control. This harkens back to the connection between wealth and justice. A person with power is able to skew justice and its proceedings, undermining the system in place. This was an especially interesting narrative as the monarchy represents something different from our own justice system. The figure of elite and absolute power has the audience inquire about who within our society has that power and whether or not it is fair and just. While our legal proceedings promise impartiality, there may still be certain ways in which our system can be undermined. The narrative implored the audience to “pursue… injustice/track down injustice” as “it hounds us, but it will perish in its own great cold” (Brecht & Weill, 1954, p. 61). The musical appeared to convey different forms of injustice, ones within law enforcement and some within due process, and asks the audience to learn from these situations.
**Godspell (1971).** *Godspell* included numerous parables from the Gospel that discussed justice systems and their connection to law abiding behavior. The musical especially related the concepts of morality and obeying the law. There were few mentions of skepticism from other philosophers during the song “Tower of Babble,” but it ends once the Gospel narratives take over. For instance, when teaching the importance of morality and goodness, Jesus tells the others to “obey the law and have a place in heaven” (Schwartz & Tebelak, n.d., p. 12. He continues later on saying “Obey the law otherwise you will answer for your crimes in court, but if you have negative thoughts towards loved ones you will be punished in hell (Schwartz & Tebelak, n.d., p.17). This created an analogy between legal wrongdoing and moral wrongdoing, as both lead to some kind of judgment and punishment. This potential analogy was reflected in the song “Learn your lessons well’ in which one of the characters describes rule following behavior singing, “First you got to read ‘em, then you gotta heed ‘em, you never know when you’re gonna need ‘em … you better start to learn your lessons well” (Schwartz & Tebelak, n.d., p. 38). This is describing God’s rules, but can easily be transposed to obeying legal rules. This analogy depicted our legal system as morally right, with little discussion on possible faults and imperfections. The idealization within *Godspells*’s lyrics and dialogue provide a very different stance as compared to the other musicals. This depiction is directly related to morality and a sense of righteousness. For example, the punishments described take the form of formal and informal sanctions. Therefore, characters are told that one may answer for their crime in court or against a higher power. This heightens the belief in law’s overall integrity and something that does not need to be questioned.
**Assassins (1990).** *Assassins* described generally “institutionalized justice”, specifically systematically given rights.¹³ Similar to Assassins’s other narratives, American culture was seen as a lens in which to discuss justice. In this case, rights based on US law were specifically referenced to. Our culture and understanding of rights are based greatly on symbolic language from specific documents (i.e., Bill of rights; Declaration of Independence). The song “Everybody’s got the right” focuses on the American conception of individual rights. *Assassins* asks its audience to question whether everyone is afforded the same rights within our culture. Since these rights are lawfully given to achieve justice for all, these depictions may allude to injustice. One character sings how “everybody’s got the right to be happy” and that “everybody’s got the right to their dreams” (Sondheim, & Weidman, 1991, p. 13). This statement was repeated on many occasions and appeared to refer to our legally-prescribed rights as American citizens (i.e. pursuit of happiness). The assassins were afforded rights according to our constitution and the governmental system in place, but feel that these rights are not given to them. This narrative argued that the system in place to ensure rights and justice fails to so for those in need of it protection (i.e., immigrants, lower class). This further relation to American culture highlighted the US in particular, forcing us to face our systems imperfections.

**The Fantasticks, Little Shop of Horrors, and The Wild Party.** The theme concerning justice systems was lacking from the narratives of *The Fantasticks, Little Shop of Horrors,* and *The Wild Party.* Similar to the last theme, this difference may be due to the structural aspects of the plot. Each show’s setting was restricted. *The Fantasticks* and *Little Shop* has no mentioned of where the characters live and the settings do not differ drastically for difference scenes. *The Wild Party* occurs in one setting, and while it’s alluded to take place in New York City, little is

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¹³ For my study institutionalized justice refers to rights and/or privileges provided by institutions to achieve justice. An example may be the bill of rights.
discussed about its location. In addition to the stationary settings, each musical refrained generally from overt discussion of society. The narratives focused on the characters in the story and themes are greatly individualized or covert. This pattern may carry over and therefore negate any kind of mention of the justice system, since this would acknowledge societal structures as it related to the characters’ deviant actions. Similar to other forms of media, there was commonly little criticism of justice systems. These shows avoided this overt depiction of our justice system in order to avoid the difficulty of portraying imperfections, while idealizing it.

**How do narratives compare on and Off-Broadway?**

My second research questioned asked whether or not narratives differed based on their venue. Upon my first analysis, there appeared to be very similar themes and narratives within Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals. But on a closer look, there were difference in the amount of narratives and how narratives are framed. This may be explained by a number of factors, ranging from Broadway and Off-Broadway’s economic capabilities, source material, historical context, and commercial interests.

Both Broadway and Off-Broadway included narratives on deviancy, formal and informal. Protagonists commonly committed deviant acts in the narratives, framing crime and informal deviancy in a different light. In most forms of media, a criminal was constructed as a “bad guy”, not a sympathetic character. This specific depiction may be an attempt to humanize deviants, challenging social constructions of deviancy, and to fully explore crime. If deviancy was only committed by villains there would be less discussion on what deviancy is, what it means to us as a culture, and why people turn to it. By having protagonist as the deviant individuals, we are able to decipher how the framing of narratives highlights the social construction of crime. Crime is largely developed based on how the media frames it. Broadway
and Off-Broadway musicals in my selection framed serious crimes in many cases as justifiable and understandable when the character’s motivations are clear. These types of narratives would not be explored if the protagonists were not the deviant individuals. We would turn to a villain’s “badness” as explanation for his/her deviation from society, stifling our depiction of deviancy.

The only times the deviant individual was an antagonist is in the case of violence against women. The characters of Burrs and Orin from *The Wild Party* and *Little Shop*, while given exposition, were “bad guys” in their respective musicals. Both were violent and harm likable and sympathetic characters. Their actions were not depicted as reasonable or justifiable, and in both cases the characters were actually killed on stage. This pattern differed from the other formal deviancy narratives in which main characters deviancy was framed in a more positive light.

Another important distinction as compared to Broadway musicals was that violence against women is largely explored in Off-Broadway narratives. Even though sexual assault was shown in the Broadway show *Hair*, after it occurs it was then ignored for the rest of the show. The protagonists were separated from the sexual act through the staging. As compared to Broadway, Off-Broadway paid more attention to violence against women and stigmatized the behavior. Yet, the actions of the characters were individualized and follow common scripts. In a manner similar to other forms of media, the storylines focused on the victim’s reasons for staying and pathologize the offender. This combination of stigmatization and individualization was seen in other forms and is a technique in which the media can declare their dislike for violence, but not challenge any culturally held belief (Kozol, 1995). This occurred in both *Little Shop of Horrors* and *The Wild Party*. Therefore, while there was stigmatization of the behavior, especially compared to Broadway’s narratives, there was still little blame placed on society. In actuality, Off-Broadway followed framing techniques of mass media.
The ability for Off-Broadway shows to discuss intimate partner violence more explicitly than Broadway musicals may be related to historical differences. Off-Broadway began as an alternative form of theater, whose focus was on social justice and current events (Hischak, 2011). This has now expanded to Broadway also (Jones, 2003; Knapp, 2005), but this early history of counter narratives may have set the stage for a more open portrayal of violence against women as compared to mainstream musical theater. Off-Broadways musicals’ individualization may be reflective of experiences of women and perpetrators in abusive relationships. Women commonly blame themselves and perpetrators see their partner at equal fault or point to their emotions as out of their control (Boonzaier, 2008). These narratives were mirrored in the dialogue of the characters. This similarity could be the writers’ way to incorporate realism and explain the experiences of individual in abusive intimate relationships. Thus, Off-Broadway compared to Broadway musicals, appeared to provide more exploration of intimate partner violence due to its history and a goal of authenticity.

The largest difference between Broadway and Off-Broadway deviancy narratives was that Broadway describes the social construction of deviancy, while Off-Broadway covertly discussed deviancy at the individual level. In fact, Off-Broadway included very little overt discussion of how we define deviancy, except for Threepenny and Assassins (whose narratives are ambiguous at times). Broadway musicals have the audience question how they understand certain crimes, including murder. This overt analysis of deviance in society was unique and is counterintuitive. It would be expected that Broadway narratives, being more mainstream, would avoid direct criticism of society. Mainstream media usually refrains from overt criticism and depicts more dominant narratives (Surette, 2015). Broadway musicals, while a form of mainstream media, did not follow this mold. Most of its deviancy narratives pointed to outside
influences in how we define crime. Furthermore, narratives seen in *Oklahoma*, *West Side Story*, and *Chicago* featured likable protagonists who commit heinous acts. This required viewers to question the construction of the criminal, even the murderer. Past research on depictions of criminals rely on typification and pathologization (Surette, 2015), but comparatively Broadway musicals did not follow mass media. Many deviants and criminals were not pathologized or one-dimensional but are fully explored. Off-Broadway musicals also had criminal protagonists, however they rarely have an audience question how we define the crime. When there is exploration into this topic the messages were ambiguous (i.e., *The Threepenny Opera; Assassins*). For example in *Threepenny*, characters contradicted each other pointing to structural and individual causes of crime. In addition, in *Assassins*, the characters pathologization and vilification discredited most structural criticism. This may point to Off-Broadway’s narratives focusing on individualization when discussing social issues. By weakening the arguments for societal causes of deviancy the previous shows avoided these topics in their discourse on deviancy or even inequality. Off-Broadway’s covert themes and individualization continues as we delve into the greater differences between Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals.

Both venues included narratives on inequality. Broadway had far more, having inequality narratives in every show except *Oklahoma*. When compared to Off-Broadway, this was a marked difference. Only half of the Off-Broadway shows in my selection included inequality narratives. In addition, Broadway’s narratives discussed social construction of class and race and the repercussions of it. Off-Broadway’s inequality narratives, similar to others, had ambiguous messages on class and its social construction. Another distinct difference was the lack of racial narratives within Off-Broadway shows. Broadway shows had far more comparatively. The
dissimilarities between the presence of inequality narratives, the focus, and framing of such narratives all point to differences between the two venues.

Broadway musicals, in particular West Side Story, Hair, Les Miserables, and Wicked, discuss the social construction of inequality. These narratives point to the government and other positions of power as creating groups and then marginalizing them based on their race or class. This occurred in some Off-Broadway shows, but, as explained previously, these sentiments were usually refuted by characters. For instance, in Threepenny one character describes how poverty is developed by the elite, but exclaims that the poor are poor because of their own actions. Therefore you have a discussion of social construction, but the rebuttal also, confusing the overall message. Conversely, Broadway’s narratives tended to be more direct and clearer. This was unexpected since Broadway is mainstream entertainment. It would be anticipated that as popular entertainment that there would be less overt critique of society as seen in other forms of media (Surette, 2015). At the same time, it was expected if one thinks about Broadway musical theater’s history. Musical theater has attempted to discuss controversial topics in the past. The musicals’ explicit depiction of inequality may point to a history of socially conscious narratives. Broadway’s approach to inequality may allude to historical differences, while Off-Broadway’s approach may point to structural differences.

Off-Broadways lack of inequality narratives and its ambiguous narratives may allude to physical and economic capabilities of each venue. Off-Broadway shows are significantly shown in smaller houses, less than 500 seats to be exact (Hischak, 2011). This is much smaller than the majority of Broadway houses. Their budget also remains smaller (Hischak, 2011). This intimate setting and lack of funding may explain why there is less overt criticism. With smaller budgets and profit margins there is a greater risk in mounting an Off-Broadway musical (Donahue &
Peterson, 2010). Any challenge of structural forces may not be well received, therefore the narratives avoid this. This structural limitation carries over to the physical space of the theater. Many of these narratives in Broadway shows come to fruition during large numbers (i.e. “One Day more”, “At the end of the day”, and “The Rumble”). These numbers require space, large number of actors, and a sense of grandness. They would rarely be performed on a small stage. Since Off-Broadway is physically unable to display these type of scenes it may limit how they frame narratives on inequality or justice systems. This physical limitation can also explain the individualization of certain narratives. Their more covert and individualized approach may be resultant of their small and intimate setting. They appeal to audiences’ empathy and emotions in discussing inequality and less about displaying grand scenes of rebellion. In reality, Off-Broadway’s approach, while less overt, may impact audiences at a greater emotional level (Hischak, 2011). Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals approached inequality very differently, but these differences may point to ways to impact the audience within the scope of their venue.

Both Broadway and Off-Broadway shows depicted the justice system or justice-affiliated institutions (i.e., government). There was a vast different in the prevalence of these themes. All Broadway shows included narratives on the justice system, compared to only half of Off-Broadway shows. As referenced above, this difference may point to structural differences as it relates to physical and economic capabilities. Furthermore, since Off-Broadway’s history focuses on alternative structures and narratives, the focus may not be on procedural justice concerns. The focus may remain on social justice outside of legal proceedings. In Godspell and Assassins the discussion on justice remained broad. Their descriptions of institutionalized justice focused on the larger concepts of rights and morality with little direct reference to a greater system. Comparatively Broadway musicals concentrated on law enforcement, governmental bodies, and
the justice system (with the exception of the personifications of justice), therefore procedural justice. Broadway’s overt discussion of our justice system depicted them as ineffective and unhelpful to the people who need it most. This pessimistic viewpoint was only also seen in *Threepenny*. Broadway may be better situated to discuss structures such as our justice system. As mainstream entertainment, Broadway musicals can describe potential flaws in our legal system without calling for any kind of radical change. On the other hand, Off-Broadway, with its history of alternative shows, may be better poised to discuss social justice concerns outside of formal systems.

Off-Broadway uniqueness further relates to its theme of individualization. Similar to the other themes, Off-Broadway’s musicals did not address societal structures. *Threepenny* may be considered an exception, but, along with its ambiguous messages, there was a sense of foreignness to the show. The musical was originally produced in Germany, is set in London, and in a different time period. These degrees of separation may reduce US audience’s ability to apply the criticism of law enforcement and of law in general. This type of separation from US culture and society assures audiences that the problems inherent in Macheath’s world are not in their world. *Assassins* disconnected its criticism from society through the pathologization of the characters. *Godspell* does the same occurring in a non-disclosed location, applying its concepts to morality and religion, a different system all together. This individualization and disconnection may once again be a technique to create an intimate account of individuals’ stories (as described previously). This more covert discussion of justice and the law may further allow audiences to better reflect on the themes if they are not applied directly to their life. Off-Broadway narrative, while not as overt as Broadway’s, may greatly impact its audiences’ opinions subconsciously. Previous research shows the influence of melody on audiences and their attitudes (Heide et al.,
By not challenging commonsensical notions in its lyrics a viewer may be more likely to be influenced by the musicals melodies and reflect on the narratives.

While Broadway musicals appeared to overtly challenge society, as compared to Off-Broadway, they still did not fully challenge structural hegemony. One of the primary differences between Broadway and Off-Broadway was the focus on structural versus individual concerns. Broadway narratives explicitly criticized society and its institutions. This criticism was overt but there is little call for reform or change of the system. There was a call to attention, not a call to action. In most cases, the characters solved their problems within the constraints of a society that they admit is flawed. This was seen in Hair, Wicked, and Rent. For instance in Hair, they criticized the establishment and the societal structures; yet Claude still goes to Vietnam in the end. In Wicked, Elphaba shamed the Wizard and exposed injustice, however she was labeled deviant and must fake her death to live happily. While Broadway narratives appeared to surpass Off-Broadway’s in criticizing societal structures, they only do so much. This may point to musical theater’s limitations. It may include counter-hegemonic narratives, but there are unable to actively ask for radical change. While counter narratives are present in my selection and historical have been on stage (Patinkin, 2008, Knapp, 2005), hegemonic constructs are still held intact in order to reduce the condemnation of society’s structures. This is done by including an overt structural criticism, but not radical change to the dominant culture.

Off-Broadway, on the other hand, included largely covert and sometimes ambiguous counter-hegemonic narratives. The focus remained on the individual experience and reduced society’s blameworthiness in the narrative. This reduced structural factors culpability in certain social issues. There was no direct criticism of our culture in most of the Off-Broadway shows. In fact, any kind of criticism was unclear. Nonetheless, Off-Broadway’s musicals did depict radical
change in some way. *Threepenny* included a new monarch at the end who pardons Macheath. *Godspell*’s characters created a community with Jesus and end the show with the goal to make the world a better place in his name. *Little Shop* ends in the destruction of the human race and the emergence of a new species. *Assassins* discussed how certain crimes, like the assassination of the president, cause ripple effects all over the world. While the narratives covertly criticized structures, they did portray social change. This shift may be for the better or worse, but it is a change nonetheless. This depiction of change points to counter narratives, as mass media focuses on the dominant culture as unchangeable or already sufficient (Surette, 2015). The fact that Off-Broadway’s musicals included a change within them point to shift in dominant culture and therefore a somewhat anti-hegemonic narrative.

**How do the narratives change over time?**

My last research question tackled whether or not Broadway and Off-Broadway’s narratives change over time. A few temporal themes emerged from each venue. Within my selection, Broadway shows subject matter shifted and its depiction of women changed from *Oklahoma* to *Wicked*. In Off-Broadway musicals, the depiction of women followed an irregular pattern over time. Its portrayal of violence followed a linear pattern. Lastly, *The Fantasticks* as the longest running show in the selection provided a unique look into individual changes over time within one show. These patterns are explored more below.

**Broadway.** In my selection, Broadway’s narratives that change over time related to all two themes. They focused on the topics of anti-establishmentarianism and female representations.

A strong pattern occurred from the 1960s on. Within my selection, after *Hair* (1960s), there was increased criticism of societal institutions. The focus remained on inequality and
injustice. *Hair, Chicago, Les Miserable, Rent,* and *Wicked* all condemned institutions for perpetrating inequality (based on race and class) and injustice. The change over time is reflective of the time period in which the shows opened. The 1960s were a decade of political, social, and cultural upheaval and 1968, the year of *Hair*’s debut, was especially tumultuous. The emergence of the civil rights movement and the second wave of feminism both grew in the 1960s. Furthermore, political actions, such as the Vietnam War and later Watergate, increased skepticism and cynicism towards the government. The government was no longer idealized. People began to question the government and their actions and become more distrustful of authority. These drastic societal changes impacted society and potentially musical theater’s narratives.

This type of historical context may further account for contemporary changes. *Rent* was partially a reaction to society’s response to the AIDS epidemic and was written largely to give voice to Jonathan Larson’s experiences. *Wicked* could be considered a response to post 9/11 America. After the terrorist attacks, Broadway musicals focused on positive narratives and stayed clear of controversy (i.e., *Thoroughly modern Millie*) (Patinkin, 2008). For instance, the producers of *Assassins* planned on opening in 2001, but postponed the show’s opening to 2004 since it was considered too un-American at a time in which patriotism was at an all time high. *Wicked*’s overt criticism of government and justice may explain its popularity and the reason why it was mounted. A common discourse in mainstream media criticized authority and the government’s involvement in the Middle East and the “War on Terror.” Journalism and mainstream counter narratives shifted the public’s views (Bonds, 2009). This shift may explain *Wicked*’s narratives. The way they were framed to confront unjust governmental action, without calling for reform and in an allegorical fashion, may be to avoid controversy. By separating the
story from our own culture and country, audiences’ may not interpret it as unpatriotic. The contemporary Broadway musicals in my selection appeared to follow historical and social events.

Another temporal change related to the portrayal of female characters. Many Broadway musicals depicted deviant gender norms. Even with this in mind, there remained a lack of autonomy for most female characters until the 1990s. Every show, up until Rent, included female characters as stereotypes and latter as dependent on male characters’ actions. For instance, in Oklahoma and West Side Story there were common female archetypes (i.e., virgin/whore). The characters of Laurey/Ado Annie and Maria/Anita represented the virgin/whore dichotomy. This use of stereotypes stops after the 1950s in my selection, possibly because of the increased attention on the feminist movement of the 1960s. The archetypal portrayal ends after West Side Story, but female characters continued to be nuanced as the time goes on.

Even within this societal shift on gender roles, female autonomy was lacking in Broadway narratives. This pattern is seen in Hair, Chicago, and Les Miserables. The female characters are more well-developed, but have very little agency and are acted upon by the male characters. For example, in Chicago, Roxie and Velma are at the whim of Billy Flynn. This new fully dimensional characterization of women in musicals was probably the result of cultural changes, yet the lack of agency reflected the limits of social change. During the 1990s, as a reaction to the political conservatism of the 1980s and new legislation, there was a resurge of feminism (Kozol, 1995). Rent followed this new trend and was the first show in which female characters have a sense of individuality and development as seen in Angel, Maureen, and Mimi. This was continued in Wicked’s two main characters. In Wicked, both female characters made
independent decisions and wielded their own fate, good or bad. These shows mirror the changes occurring outside of the theater as reference to feminism and female representation.

**Off-Broadway.** There were far less changes over time in Off-Broadway’s narratives as compared to Broadway shows. This was partially due to the fact that there are simply less overarching themes to begin with. The one theme that was seen in almost every show is that of deviancy. How deviancy was framed does change over time.

With each new decade, Off-Broadway shows portrayed more graphic scenes of violence and deviance. For instance, the violence that is discussed in *Threepenny Opera* was often off-stage. Later on in *The Fantasticks* or *Little Shop of Horrors*, there was more explicit portrayals of violence, yet they are usually comical or staged. In *Assassins*, the violence shown was metaphorical or artistic; however the executions of the assassins are more striking. For instance, Zangara is electrocuted on stage in full view of the audience. In *The Wild Party*, the most current show, there were explicit portrayals of violence. The second scene included a graphic sexual assault and domestic abuse between the main characters. This increase in the vivid portrayal of violence and deviancy may reflect changing patterns in the media. Media has become more graphic and explicit. Even news sources have become more violent (Tautman, 2004). Not only does this increase an audience’s exposure, but may increase desensitization and tolerance for violence. This then has audiences looking for more graphic depictions of crime in order to be entertained (Tautman, 2004).

Interestingly enough, the graphic portrayals of violence related almost exclusively to intimate partner violence and sexual assault. For instance, in *Little Shop*, Seymour’s murders were comical, but Audrey’s experience with abuse was far more serious. Furthermore, *The Wild Party*’s violence was primarily intimate partner violence, with the exception of Burrs’s death.
While you see an increase of graphic violence on stage, the majority of this violence was against women. This was apparent in my selection of shows, so it cannot be generalized to all Off-Broadway musicals, but nonetheless it was an intriguing pattern connected to changes over time. The musicals’ writers may feel it is important to show a social problem as serious as violence against women in order to increase its salience in the public’s mind. The more graphic the portrayal the more serious the social problem may be perceived. This pattern is trickier to decipher within the larger pattern of violence on Off-Broadway’s stage since it is such a small percentage of my selection that includes these depictions.

Off-Broadway’s portrayal of women, aside from violence against them, also varied over time. Compared to Broadway, Off-Broadway’s narratives include much more autonomous female characters early on. These themes were seen first in The Threepenny Opera with Jenny, a prostitute, and Polly, who helps run Macheath’s criminal enterprise in his absence. While female autonomy begins early in Off-Broadway musicals it does not last. The Fantasticks, Godspell, and Little Shop include female characters who were shaped greatly by the male characters in their storylines. In The Fantasticks, Luisa is a love interest and is controlled by Matt and her father’s actions. In Godspell, there are a few female characters and they are there to learn from Jesus and to act out his lessons. And in little Shop, Audrey based her worth on a man and even sacrifices herself to Audrey two to be with Seymour forever. Female deviancy and autonomy was depicted again in Assassins and The Wild Party. This strange longitudinal pattern involving female autonomy is difficult to decipher and it does not follow any historical or social changes. It is possibly due to the musicals’ source material. Older source materials are the basis for the plots of The Fantasticks, Godspell and Little Shop, therefore their narratives may be less progressive.

Godspell is based on the Bible (Schwartz, & Tebelak, 1971). Little Shop of Horrors is based on
an older 1960 film of the same title (Hischak, 2007). And The Fantasticks is based loosely on a 19\textsuperscript{th} century play The Romancers by Edmund Rostand (Jones & Schmidt, 1973). The source material for The Threepenny Opera and The Wild Party while not necessarily more contemporary, do include progressive themes. Lastly, Assassins is a completely original musical. The odd pattern of female character representation and their autonomy, may point to temporal changes, but the source of this pattern was still unclear.

While unrelated to overall patterns, The Fantasticks did present us with an opportunity to look at changes over time. The Fantasticks is the longest running Off-Broadway musical and just recently closed, therefore it was interesting to see if its narratives have changed since 1960. One interesting pattern with the play is the differing representations of the word ‘rape.’ In the song “Depends on what you pay” the word rape was used to discuss a staged abduction. For example, the character of El Gallo sings:

You can get the rape emphatic.
You can get the rape polite.
You can get the rape with Indians:
A very charming sight!
You can get the rape on horseback,
They all say it’s distingue!
So you see the sort of rape
Depends on what you pay (Jones & Schmidt, 1960, p. 21).

In this song none of the characters involved are actually planning to sexual assault a woman. Their use of term rape was a stand in word for abduction. El Gallo explains to the men, “I know you prefer abduction, but the proper word is rape” (Jones & Schmidt, 1960, p. 19). This song was actually removed from the show when the word was no longer considered appropriate, potentially as the word took on different social meanings (Hischak, 2007). The song was later replaced with a song entitled “Abduction.” This shift in language could be due to the changing understanding of rape and sexual assault. The Fantasticks opened in 1960, and the large majority
of legislation against violence against women did not gain momentum until the 1970s (Kozol, 1995). This societal change in how society viewed and discussed rape may have called for a order to the musicals number “Depends on what you pay.” Since *The Fantasticks* is the longest running Off-Broadway show, it offers a unique glimpse into a changing narrative as it is shaped by an ever-evolving changing society.

**Discussion**

Narratives on deviancy, inequality, and our justice system appear in some fashion in Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals in my selection. Some themes, such as deviancy are almost universal, seen in almost all shows. Other themes were more sporadically found within the data. These differences are even more pronounced after analysis.

Every Broadway show portrayed deviancy and institutionalized justice in some fashion. With the exception of *Oklahoma*, each one discussed inequality. These musicals greatly discuss these themes in an overt fashion, criticizing the structural concerns connected to the themes. Yet, the shows do not call for any kind of reform or change while there narratives are deviant and counter hegemonic, there is no radical change to the society on stage. A happy ending always occurs within the established structure. This limits Broadway’s deviant nature and is unique to this venue.

Off-Broadway narratives tackle deviancy, inequality, and justice in a very different way. Their confrontation of social justice concerns is far more covert and individualized. Even in narratives in which there is more explicit criticism of society’s construction of injustice and inequality, the message is ambiguous. The characters or the storyline contradicts itself. Different from Broadway, change often occurs in the musical’s society. However, the change is not always
directly related to the show’s principle themes. In its own way, Off-Broadway, Like Broadway, approached but fails to be a purely deviant form of art.

The narratives, themes, and limits of each venue point to similarities with other forms of media. When discussing our justice system, media usually focus on the positive, idealizing our procedures (Brisman, 2010; Britto, Hughes, Saltzman, & Stroh, 2007; Friedman, 2011; Siegel, 1990). Commonly our legal system is framed as “it is the best we can hope for” (Lucia, 1999). Broadway musicals lack of reform and radical change to justice institutions in its narratives may reflect the concept that our system is “best we can hope for.” Musicals do not go as far as to idealize the justice system, and in fact show how it is flawed. While this criticism exists, there is no change by the end of the show. This is a potential technique of musicals to explore themes of justice and even inequality, without making an audience feel uncomfortable or guilty. This framing therefore points to similarities in the narratives of musicals and popular media, yet distinct approaches between the forms.

Another similarity between musical theater and other media is their depiction of crime. The theme of crime and deviancy traversed almost all musicals. Every musical within my selection portrayed some kind of deviancy, from the criminal (i.e., murder, prostitution, drug use) to the counterculture (i.e, rebellion, revolution, gender non-conformity). Similar to popular media (Surette, 2015), according to my findings there is an overrepresentation of violent crime in musical theater. Musical theater, similar to news reports or film, caters to the public’s fascination with violence (Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Tautman, 2004). This sentiment is reflected in the opening of Chicago: “You’re about to hear a story of murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery, and treachery – all those things we all hold near and dear to our hearts” (Ebb & Kander, 1975, p. 9). My data’s overrepresentation of crime and violence may relate to
this fascination as reflect in Chicago’s opening line. This may explain what’s behind this universal narrative in musical theater (Surette, 2015). Greater culture thus appears to greatly impact the narratives in musical theater, as it does other forms of media.

Compared to popular media, Broadway and Off-Broadway’s narratives share similarities in their exploration of criminals. In most forms of media, criminals are pathologized (Cavender et al., 2010; Surette, 2015). They are depicted as having something psychologically wrong with them or being inherently bad (Cavender et al., 2010; Surette, 2015). In musicals, this is largely absent from criminal and deviant characters. When it occurs, this type of pathologization is done for male abusers in particular (i.e, Orin or Burrs). In many cases, the narrative paints them as “madmen” and” inherently bad.” This is also seen in Assassins. Here the characters are eccentric, raving, and incorrigibly angry. This similarity ends with these specific characters though, with many criminals acting as protagonists.

Many main characters commit some kind of crime, even murder (i.e., Curely, Seymour, Macheath, Tony). While these characters are not pathologized, their depiction still reflects society’s perception of crime. The media and greater culture determine what forms of violence are socially acceptable and unacceptable (Kellner, 2013). For instance, culture accepts violence committed during war or by police (Kellner, 2013). Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals’ common display of a story’s hero committing crime relate to our cultural classification of violence (Feinberg, 2002; Surette, 2015). This is simply another way we position certain crimes as socially acceptable and other forms as deviant. The crimes within these narratives are largely appropriate because they conform to society’s understanding of unacceptable and unacceptable ideas about violence. Musicals may present a view on violence in society and our commonsensical ideas about what kind of crime is morally right or wrong.
Another point of view presented in musical theater, in particular Off-Broadway musicals, is the subject of violence against women. Off-Broadway’s depicts intimate partner violence and rape. Other forms of media (fiction and nonfiction) have the tendency to frame violence against women within certain narratives. The focus usually remains on the victim, asking questions about “why a woman stays” and “what she did to instigate the abuse” (Enck & McDaniel, 2012; Kozol, 1995). The victim is commonly blamed for the violence or given equal responsibility (Britto et al.; Easteal et al., 2015; Kozol, 1995). This may be depicted in the language, describing the abuse as a fight or altercation, not intimate partner violence (Enck & McDaniel, 2012). More contemporary portrayals of domestic abuse stigmatize the behavior, but continue to separate it from patriarchal structures (Kozol, 1995). The narratives within Little Shop of Horrors and The Wild Party frame gender violence in a similar manner to other mediums. Both stigmatize the behavior with graphic portrayals, but separate the character’s actions from the greater culture. This portrayal reflects the strength of common media frames. Even in “deviant” art forms, patriarchal structures still impact the messages of stories.

It appears that patriarchal influences also impact the depiction of female characters. Both Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals include deviant portrayals of gender. Yet there are still numerous shows in which this is lacking. In other forms of media, there is a reliance on stereotypes and archetypes in depicting women (Enck & McDaniel, 2012). The whore/virgin dichotomy and racial archetypes are both used (Britto et al., 2007; Easteral et al., 2015; Kozol, 1995). Early musicals are especially guilty of this framing device. Oklahoma and West Side Story both include characters that fall within these categories. Furthermore, many musicals lack autonomous female characters, mirroring patterns in mass media. There are more progressive portrayals in modern musicals (i.e., Rent, Wicked, and The Wild Party), but the lack of attention
to female characters is shocking. Similar to previous discussion, it is clear that even deviant media is shaped by greater culture. The emergence of autonomous and more deviant female characters may allude to theater’s ability to divert from mass media’s patterns, or may reflect greater change in the portrayal of female characters. This hints at the potential of mass media and musical theater’s narratives.

Mass media, while greatly hegemonic, does include counter narratives (Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Lucia, 1999; Rader, & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2010; Sankowski, 2002). According to my findings, this may be true of musical theater as well. Media may use “stories from the bottom” to educate on a different perspective and encourage activism (Altheide, 2011; Altheide & Grimes, 2005; Goidel et al., 2006; Bonds, 2009). In particular, journalism highlights social movements and alternative narratives (Altheide & Grimes, 2005; Bonds, 2009). Journalists in the past have created a growth of activism (Altheide & Grimes, 2005; Bonds, 2009). There is no research on whether musical theater may have a similar impact, but there is clear evidence of activism in its narratives. The best example of activism is the hippie counterculture in Hair. Rent also depicts dissimilar narratives against mainstream culture. Similar to other forms of media, musicals do include “stories from the bottom.” The inequality and deviancy themes highlight counter narratives from marginalized groups’ voices. These groups include different races, sexes, sexualities, and immigration status. Media has the ability to highlight these stories, as does musical theater. In actuality musical theater is probably more well-known for including this counterculture-centered narrative. This similarity and spotlight on including counter narratives, especially as early as the 1950s with West Side Story, speaks to Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals uniqueness among media types.
Broadways and Off-Broadways “stories from the bottom” further emphasizes similarities and differences between musical theater and mass media. According to my findings, musical theater, primarily Broadway shows, are likely to point to structural and systematic forces in perpetuating class and racial inequality. Many shows in both venues discuss the social construction of different class and racial groups (i.e., *West Side Story, Hair, Les Miserables, Rent,* and *Wicked*). On the other hand, mass media very rarely depicts structural forces fueling inequality (Leistyna, 2009). This is more apparent in Off-Broadways musicals. In the media, inequality is framed as the fault of groups of people. For instance, the impoverishment of minorities is usually connected to their own poor choices, not systematic racism (Leistyna, 2009, Surette, 2015). Off-Broadway is more likely to follow this pattern of individualization. The dialogue of *Threepenny* and *Assassins* both follow this theme. Comparatively, Broadway’s narratives rarely frame inequality in this fashion.

This shift in blame is further seen in musical theater’s depiction of crime in connection to race. In particular, *West Side Story* tackles the topic of race and crime. Most forms of media connect race and crime, displaying certain races as more likely to commit crime (Alexander, 2011; Britto et al., 2007; Goidel et al., 2006; Pollack & Kurbin, 2007; Trautman, 2004). This is known as “racial criminal typification” (Alexander, 2011; Britto et al., 2007; Goidel et al., 2006; Pollack & Kurbin, 2007; Trautman, 2004). The term criminal becomes synonymous with black (Alexander, 2011; Britto et al., 2007). In musical theater, narratives on race avoid this racist narrative device. For instance, in *West Side Story*, the Puerto Rican characters and the white characters are both criminal. In *Hair*, the black characters are as deviant as their white counterparts. Conversely, in these narratives, racism is tied to the increase of crime and violence. Hatred is voiced as the fuel of all the violence and the hatred for the characters are born out of
racism and prejudice. This vast difference between musical theater and other media may once again allude to musical theater different background and history of varied narrative. Therefore, instead of saying certain races lead to crime, the narratives say typifying certain races leads to crime.

Related counter hegemonic narratives continue into the discussion on law enforcement. The majority of law enforcement depictions are positive in the mass media (Feinberg, 2002; Gustafson, 2007; Surette, 2015). This is even more apparent when compared to musical theater’s presentation of the police. *The Threepenny Opera, West Side Story, Hair, Les Miserables, Rent,* and *Wicked* portray police as a negative and corrupt force. Of course, other forms of media have portrayed corrupt cops (Gustafson, 2007, Surette, 2015). Films especially depict corrupt police (Gustafson, 2007; Surette, 2015). While these narratives exist, most of the media focus on the positive actions of the police, usually presenting them as heroes and crime fighters (Feinberg, 2002, Surette, 2015). Yet, Musical theater depicts police as inefficient, corrupt, unjust, and unhelpful. In some shows they are even antagonists. The characters of Officer Krupke in *West Side Story* or the police puppet in *Hair* are antagonists and bothersome to the characters. This marked difference point to musical theater’s ability to present narratives that deviate from mass media.

More broadly, musical theater has a more critical and jaded view on our legal system. Its narratives do not advocate change or reform, but the focus remains on the inefficiency and corruption of the justice system. Conversely other forms of media portray the justice system as efficient, ideal, and successful (Lucia, 1999). Narratives in *West Side Story, Chicago, Hair,* and *Threepenny* all depict a suspicious, confusing, ineffectual, or powerless system. This is drastically different from films, television, and news sources. Within musicals some kind of
figure represents the drawbacks of our legal system and alludes to these imperfections (i.e. Flynn, Commissioner Brown, and Krupke). Comparatively, usually justice figures in the media represent an exception, not the rule (Friedman, 2011; Lucia, 1999). Any kind of corruption or injustice is usually connected to an individual, not the larger system (Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Kang, 2006; Surette, 2015). In comparison, the characters in musicals represent the true face of our legal system. Therefore, musicals do not point to individuals as sources of corruption, but the system itself as being imperfect. This structural view drastically differs from other forms of media and highlights the unique contributions of theater.

There are many potential contributions of musical theater to the current socio-legal literature. Within the scope of my research there are a few implications. Research has begun to explore the messages of musical theater and the potential impact on audiences’ beliefs (Heide, Porter, & Saito, 2012; Jones, 2005; Knapp, 2005). Media in general has proven to impact attitudes, moral reasoning, legal reasoning, and potentially consumers’ behavior (Altheide, 2011; Brisman, 2010; Lemal & Van den Bulck, 2009; Lindahl, 2007; Shen et al., 2014). Scholars theorize that musicals may have an even greater impact than other forms of media (Heide, Porter, & Saito, 2012). The use of music, melody, creates a more salient memory and a stronger emotional response (Heide et al., 2012). Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in exposure to musicals. While Broadway – and Off-Broadway shows – remains unavailable to a large part of the population, musicals have become a part of popular culture again. The popularity of films like “Pitch Perfect”, “Glee”, and musicals such as Chicago, Rent, Les Miserables, and Into the Woods suggests a renewed interest (Wollman & Sternfeld, 2011). More people are now watching musical theater, even in their living room. This is perpetuated with increased use of social media to film bootlegs of musicals on stage. The distinct impact of music
combined to the increased popularity of musicals points to the importance of my research into legal narratives in musical theater.

Thus, melodies can be understood to affect public views on law and justice. The findings in this study provide essential information to understanding public perceptions. The study further expands on previous research on framing, legal narratives, and how musicals shaped out views on law. This vast impact therefore raises the question of what exactly these narratives say about of social construction of law. The findings display the overall power hegemonic constructs have over messages in the media. Musical theater, even as a historically deviant art, is impacted by dominant culture. While Broadway and Off-Broadway’s narratives do follow this pattern, the counter-hegemonic themes differ from other forms of media. This nuance conveys the possibility to have deviant themes and overt criticism, without it being completely counter-hegemonic.

Hegemony by definition has its audience believe that certain scripts are accepted and inherent to culture (Lull, 1995). Media frames and develops narratives that appear commonsensical and accurate, even when they are not (Surette, 2015). A narrative that truly asks for change may be uncomfortable for audiences since it challenges these assumptions and cultural beliefs (Kozol, 1995). Legal narratives appear to fall along a spectrum in musical theater, between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. In previous research, media showed an attempt to complement the opposing forces of our hegemonic culture and progressive narratives with no avail (Kozol, 1995). This appears to be occurring with Broadway shows. A possible explanation may relate to commercial interests. Similar to other forms of media (McChesney, 1999), musical theater is influenced by economic concerns (Donahue & Patterson, 2010). Broadway and Off-Broadway attempts to appease dominant culture, may be the musical theater ensuring its commercial viability. This quality may not be unique to musical theater and may
carry into other forms of art. To confront these types of questions, more critical research needs to be conducted.

In addition to more knowledge on framing, the current study provides a greater look at legal narratives in general. As described earlier, legal narratives have a great impact on audiences, how they understand law, and how they consider legal and social norms (Altheide, 2011; Brisman, 2010; Lemal & Van den Bulck, 2009; Lindahl, 2007; Shen et al., 2014). Research has shown the potential negative implications of legal narrative framing. For instance, we continue to create more social problems (e.g. poverty) and fail to address crimes that damage our communities (e.g. white collar crime) (Alexander, 2011) by individualizing causes of deviancy. If we depict crime, inequality, or justice inaccurately or inadequately we are misinforming audiences and greatly misshaping their worldviews. Therefore, critical criminologists herald the importance of deconstructing media’s depictions of law (Altheide, 2009). My study provides another venue in which to do this. In my selection of shows, musical theater, while not completely hegemonic, does individualize problems and follow dominant constructs. This may negatively impact audiences’ legal consciousness. But with the counter-hegemonic themes also apparent, this impact may be limited. This conclusion is even more important since the expectation when watching musical theater is to see narratives that critique and confront social issues and other legal topics (Jones, 2005; Knapp, 2005). If this is affected by hegemonic constructs, individualization, or a lack of reform, the narratives may provide opposite messages then intended. Capturing this nuanced view of legal narratives provides unique perspectives to the field of socio-legal, media, and critical studies.

Legal narratives commonly are grouped as hegemonic or anti-hegemonic, both being present in the media (Cavender & Jurik, 2012). They uphold dominant culture, provide
alternative viewpoints, or criticize it (Surette, 2015). Musical theater’s narratives cover these three frames, sometimes all within the same storyline. For instance, the plotline of *Wicked* included depictions of deviancy, conformity, and overt criticism of the government, and yet no structural changes. This is not to say this does not occur in any other type of media, but this characteristic of musical theater in particular tells us something more about how we, and others, construct legal narratives.

People in power hold much sway over how narratives are constructed (Gamson, Croteau, Hoyes, & Sasson, 1992; Leistyna, 2009). How musical theater constructs and frames these stories may tell us something more about dominant culture and American culture. As seen in past research, as well as in the findings, musical theater is greatly connected to social and cultural contexts (Jones, 2005; Knapp, 2005). Broadway and Off-Broadway shows therefore may provide a different perspective on American culture, since it depicts unique legal narratives. These nuanced narratives can inform audiences of culture and in many cases challenge commonsensical notions and norms reinforced by culture.

This study is one of the first of its kind and provides a starting off point for future studies on legal narratives. This type of research may enlighten further research into not only musical theater, but other forms of music and media. The renewed popularity of musicals and music-centered programs (i.e., Glee) increases the need for this scholarship. My study provides a starting point for future research into musical theater’s legal narratives and generally media, framing, and music’s depiction of legal narratives.

**Limitations and Future Research**

A significant limitation of the study is the selection of musicals. There are hundreds of Broadway, Off-Broadway, Off-Off Broadway, and regional shows. My selection of shows is
restricted and includes a small subsection of musical theater with which to analyze. My selection may have impacted the themes and patterns that emerged from my data. Inclusion of other shows that explicitly discussed race or legal systems (i.e., *The Color Purple*, *Ragtime*, and *Parade*) may have shaped the themes differently. Shows, such as these, were excluded because they are less well-known by lay audiences. Furthermore, my selection leads to less generalizability. This constraint reduces my ability to make conclusions about all Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals. In future research, there is a need to expand the selection to include other types of shows to better analyze for different themes. While my data is not generalizable my selection process was based on fixed criteria and systematically reduced the risk of bias and ensured my selection was an appropriate representation of shows. This concern reduces the data generalizability, but there is confidence in the findings due to the methods used of analysis.

In addition to selection and experimenter bias, there are further limitations within my selection. I selected shows based on whether they performed on Broadway or Off-Broadway during certain decades. Many of the shows (i.e., *Hair*, *Rent*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Godspell*, and *Assassins*) have been in some way on Broadway and Off-Broadway. This cross pollination reduces the confidence in comparative findings. Since a majority of the shows are not a hundred percent representative of one venue or the other, future research may plan to correct this. Future studies may only select shows that have appeared on Broadway or Off-Broadway, and reduce the familiarity of the selected shows for a higher confidence in results.

Another limitation involves experimenter biases. While a level of risk always remains, my methodology attempted to reduce this. The development of multiple draft protocols and repeated analyses corrected for experimenter bias. My approach was systematic and was most appropriate for my research goals. While these steps were taken to correct for my own biases,
there is still a risk inherent in qualitative analyses. A potential future step may be to develop an empirical methodology to observe themes within musicals’ narratives. This may include more codes to analyze with, using linguistic software to find keywords, uses inter-rater reliability to ensure unbiased findings, or the use of statistical programs to analyze data.

A limitation, not in reference to the selection, relates to the interpretive aspect of musical theater. My analysis focused specifically on the original scripts, but theater includes interpretation and artistic liberties. Directors have some flexibility in how they communicate the storylines in the musicals. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be accurate for every production of a musical. Future research would analysis actual productions in order to correct for this limitation.

**Conclusion**

Research on media has expanded in the past decades, as has studies on musical theater (Heide, Porter, & Saito, 2012; Knapp, 2003; Jones, 2005; Manukonda, 2013; Nag, 2013). With this exploration into new forms of media there comes more questions concerning media’s legal narratives and framing devices. Musical theater is a unique art form and one with a long history in American popular and deviant culture. My research provides a glimpse of a small part of this medium and its scholarly potential. We go to the theater for many reasons. To be entertained, informed, or just swept away. This new information on musical theater provide as with another reason to go to the theater, to actually expose oneself to its legal narratives. Broadway and Off-Broadways shows display a contention between musical theater’s history and the hegemonic messages inherent in media. This new knowledge expands socio-legal research and point to live performance as a new venture of study. My study expands on this research and develops a new appreciation for law, justice, and all that jazz.
References


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Sankowski, E. (2002). Film, crime, and state legitimacy: Political education or mis-education?, *Journal of Aesthetic Education, 36* (1), 1-15


APPENDICES
## APPENDIX A: TABLE OF SHOWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Opening Date</th>
<th>Composer, lyricist, Book writer</th>
<th>Theater</th>
<th>How many performances?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>March 31, 1943</td>
<td>Richard Rodgers &amp; Oscar Hammerstein</td>
<td>St. James Theater</td>
<td>2,212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Side Story</td>
<td>September 26, 1957</td>
<td>Leonard Bernstein, Steven Sondheim, &amp; Arthur Laurents</td>
<td>Winter Garden Theater</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>April 29, 1968</td>
<td>Galt McDermot, James Rado, &amp; Gerome Ragni</td>
<td>Biltmore Theater</td>
<td>1,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>June 3, 1975</td>
<td>John Kander &amp; Fred Ebb</td>
<td>46th Street Theater</td>
<td>936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les Miserables</td>
<td>March 12, 1987</td>
<td>Alain Boublil, John-Marc Natel, Herbert Kretzmer, Claude Michel Schonberg, &amp; Alain Boublil</td>
<td>The Broadway Theater</td>
<td>6,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>April 29, 1996</td>
<td>Jonathan Larson</td>
<td>Nederlander Theater</td>
<td>5,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicked</td>
<td>October 30, 2003</td>
<td>Stephen Schwartz &amp; Winnie Holman</td>
<td>Gershwin Theater</td>
<td>Currently running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Opening Date</td>
<td>Composer, lyricist, Book writer</td>
<td>Theater</td>
<td># of performances?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threepenny Opera</td>
<td>March 10, 1954</td>
<td>Bertolt Brecht (Translation from Marc Blitzstein) Kurt Weill</td>
<td>Theater De Lys</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fantasticks</td>
<td>May 3, 1960</td>
<td>Harvey Schmidt Tom Jones</td>
<td>Sullivan Street Playhouse</td>
<td>17,162</td>
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<tr>
<td>Godspell</td>
<td>May 17, 1971</td>
<td>Stephen Schwartz John-Michael Tebelak</td>
<td>Cherry Lane Theater</td>
<td>2,124</td>
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<td>Little Shop of Horrors</td>
<td>July 27, 1982</td>
<td>Alan Menken Howard Ashman</td>
<td>Orpheum Theater</td>
<td>2,209</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wild Party</td>
<td>February 24, 2000</td>
<td>Andrew Lippa</td>
<td>City Center Stage I</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX B: SYNOPSIS OF SHOWS
Broadway

*Oklahoma.* *Oklahoma* follows the characters of Laurey and Curley and their friends in the territory of Oklahoma. During the show Laurey and her friend Ado Annie encounter many obstacles as they traverse different suitors. Ado Annie promised to marry Will Parker, but due to her inability “to say no” and her flirty nature she is not faithful. Her naïve infidelity leads to conflict with Will, but the two do end up engaged. Laurey on the other hand is clearly smitten with Curley, but is afraid to say no to the farm hand Jud, who has shown interest. Jud is a brooding loner and scares Laurey. She fears rejection would anger him and in retribution he may harm Curley. To Curley Jud practically admits to such. Even with this obstacle, she makes her decision to be with Curley. Jud returns to seek revenge. This is his downfall as he is killed in his altercation with Curley. In the end, Laurey and Curley are married and the show ends with a celebration.

*West Side Story.* *West Side Story* describes the conflict between rival gangs, the Jets and Sharks. This conflict is exasperated by racial tensions, as the Sharks are a Puerto Rican gang. The tension is further increased after a former Jet, Tony, and Maria, a sister of the Sharks’ leader Bernardo, fall in love. Their love story falls within a backdrop of a turf war and a rumble. During the rumble, the leader of the Jets, Riff is killed by Bernardo and upset over his best friend’s death Tony kills Bernardo. This modern retelling of Romeo and Juliet ends in true Shakespearean fashion. Tony is told that Maria is dead and is soon killed by a Shark in revenge. Maria witnesses the shooting and comforts the dying Tony and claims she is now dead inside because of the hate-filled deeds that had transpired.

*Hair.* *Hair* was a groundbreaking musical that discussed the counterculture of the 1960s. *Hair* has a less linear plot, but loosely follows a young hippie, Claude, who is drafted. *Hair* is a disjointed discussion of government and established authorities, such as religion, education, and
the military. Before leaving for Vietnam, Claude considers burning his draft card and discusses going to war with his friends. He decides to go and spends his last night in decadence with his friends, Hud, Sheila, Woof, and Berger before he leaves for Vietnam.

*Chicago.* *Chicago* is the story of two murderesses in the 1920s and their experience in the criminal justice system. Velma Kelly kills her sister and husband when she finds them in a compromising position. Roxie Hart kills her boyfriend because he decides to leave her. She attempts to have her husband, Amos, take the blame, but she realizes that she has been unfaithful and tells the police the truth. Roxie is arrested. Upon the advice of Matron “Mama” Morten, she hires a wealthy lawyer, Billy Flynn, to stage her defense. Both Velma, who is also represented by Flynn, and Roxie develop convoluted and false defenses which are highlighted in vaudevillian-like numbers. Both are acquitted and use their notoriety to become performers. They end the show performing together.

*Les Miserables.* *Les Miserables* follows Jean Valjean upon his release from prison. As an ex-convict he is unable to gain steady employment. To make money he decides to steal from a bishop. When the police bring him back the religious man the Bishop tells police that Valjean was given the silver as a gift. He goes on to tell Valjean to start a new life with the stolen silver. Valjean makes a new life for himself under an assumed name. Unfortunately he is labeled a fugitive since he changed his name. Javert, a police inspector, spends his life searching for Valjean and is unable to catch him to send him back to prison. Under this storyline, a student rebellion occurs and Valjean’s adoptive daughter Cosette falls in love with a student, Marius. During the rebellion, Javert infiltrates the student’s barracks but is discovered by a young boy to be an imposter. Valjean is given the opportunity to kill Javert for his actions, but he sets him free. Javert distraught over this situation and his inability to capture Valjean kills himself. The
rebellion is crushed by the authorities with the students all being killed with the exception of Marius. Marius is wounded but taken care of by Valjean who keeps him safe for Cosette’s sake. Cosette and Marius are later married. The show ends with Valjean confessing his life story to Cosette before dying.

_Rent._ _Rent_ follows the story of a group of friends over the course of a year. Loosely based on the opera *La Bohème*, the show is set during the late 80s and with the backdrop of the AIDS epidemic. Roger, an HIV positive musician lives with his friend Mark, a wannabe film director. They are friends with an assortment of characters include Tom Collins, a professor at NYU, Mimi, an exotic dancer, Maureen, a performance artist, Joanne, an attorney, and Angel, a transgender street performer. The friends’ stories discuss love, community, and death within the Village in New York City.

_Wicked._ _Wicked_ is the prequel of _The Wizard of Oz_ based on the novel of the same title by Gregory Maguire. It follows the story of Elphaba,(soon to be the Wicked Witch of the West) and Galinda (soon to be Glinda the Good Witch). The show follows them as students in school and shows how they earned their titles. Elphaba, shows immense magical powers and is told by Madame Morrible that she should contact the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. In reality Elphaha is recruited by the Wizard to spy and oppress the animal race of Oz, she refuses and is labeled Wicked. Galinda becomes a representative for the wizard and is labeled Glinda, the Good. The Wizard with the help of Morrible stage a campaign to demonizes Elphaba and Witch hunters begin to plot to kill her. Galinda is horrified but feels stifled by her obligations. Elphaba in order to escape society fakes her death by “melting” and leaves. Before leaving she says goodbye to her friend Galinda, who then makes the decision to change the order in Oz in order to stop the despotic rule of the Wizard.
The Threepenny Opera. The Threepenny Opera follows criminal Macheath and his interactions with the women in his life. The show is set in the slums of London. He marries Polly Peachum and her parents are so upset they pay the police to arrest Macheath. Macheath is betrayed by his other wife Lucy and former girlfriend, and prostitute, Jenny and is arrested by the police. He does bribe is way out of jail, but through many mishaps is again arrested and sentenced to death. In this case again, his interactions women leads to his downfall. Fortunately the day of his execution is the same day of the Queen’s coronation. The Queen pardons him on all crimes and gives him a title. The show ends with Macheath being released from police custody and a plea to fight injustice.

The Fantasticks. The Fantasticks is the longest running Off-Broadway show and probable the most simplistic show. It follows two teenagers Luisa and Matt who are neighbors. There is no mention of time period or location within the show. The two protagonists live with their fathers in houses separated by a wall built by their fathers, as they are “enemies.” In reality, the fathers orchestrated the false feud, so that their children would fall in love. Luisa and Matt do fall in love and talk over the wall with one another. The fathers orchestrate a staged kidnapping in which Matt saves Luisa, ending the “feud,” and allowing their children to be together. Once their love sickness fades they begin to feel jaded about their partners. Matt feels Luisa is childish and leaves to see the world. Luisa angry with Matt’s decision stays behind and later decides to leave with the criminal El Gallo. When seeing the world, Matt is beaten and robbed. El Gallo tells Luisa of the world and what it is like, but has her wear a mask that does not allow her to see the evils of the outside world. Matt soon returns and the two protagonists are reunited. With their
new experiences they come together again and admit that they still love one another. There is a happy ending between the couple as well as their fathers.

*Godspell.* *Godspell* is based on the Gospel of Matthew. It begins with the “Tower of Babble” with many philosophies arguing about the origins of life and humanity. This chaos is stopped by John the Baptist and Jesus who brings order to the world on stage. Jesus then builds a community and teaches the fables and lessons of the gospel. He leads the community in taking communion and is soon betrayed by Judas. He is then crucified to a horror of the community he has forged. The community they celebrates his legacy and the world he has created for them.

*Little Shop of Horrors.* *Little Shop of Horrors* follows Seymour, an awkward and poor shopkeeper at Mr. Mushnik’s flower shop. He buys a mysterious plant and calls it Audrey Two. The mysterious plant brings success to Mushnik’s shop and success and notoriety to Seymour. He quickly finds out that Audrey Two requires blood to live. Seymour relents and Audrey Two grows very large becoming a sentient being. The plant tells Seymour that it requires people to feed on. During this storyline, the audience is also shown the story of Seymour’s coworker and friend Audrey. Audrey is in an extremely unhappy and abusive relationship with a dentist, Orin. She dreams of a happy, middle-class, and suburban life with a nice man like Seymour. When faced with the need to feed the plant Seymour decides to give Orin to the plant because of his horrendous treatment towards Audrey. Seymour then has to feed Mr. Mushnik to Audrey Two when his boss finds out the suspicious events of Orin’s death. After these two deaths, Seymour gains more fame and notoriety. This good fortune ends when the plant attempts to eat Audrey, killing her. After Audrey’s death, Seymour decides to sacrifice himself to the plant. The show ends with Audrey Two reproduces all over the world and taking over the planet.
Assassins. *Assassins* is a concept musical therefore does not have a linear plotline. It instead uses the stories of presidential assassins as a way to discuss American culture. The assassins included are John Wilkes Booth, Charles Guiteau, Giuseppe Zangara, Leon Czolgosz, Sarah Jane Moore, John Hinckley, Lynnette “Squeaky” Fromme, Sam Byck, and Lee Harvey Oswald. Each assassin’s story and motivations are described within the musical. The show ends with Lee Harvey Oswald assassinating John F. Kennedy and the assassins describing the impact of this action on the public.

*The Wild Party.* *The Wild Party*, based on the poem of the same name by Joseph Moncure March, follows the relationship of two vaudevillian performers, Queenie and Burrs. Queenie and Burrs appear to be the well-matched couple and upon meeting each other believe they have found their other half. After the initial phases of their courtship, their relationship become dark and violence due to Burrs temper. Queenie in an attempt to improve their relationship throws an impromptu party. She invites her good friend Kate, professional prostitute, who brings along her new beau Mr. Black. A motley crew is also invited to the party including a teenager, a mute dancer, a gay composing couple, and a boxer and his girlfriend among others. The party begins and rages on into the night. Queenie and Mr. Black feel an immediate attraction to one another. Burrs takes notice, but is slightly distracted by Kate’s sexual overtures. The four characters go through tumultuous actions throughout the party, but Queenie and Black decide they cannot resist their attraction to one another. Early the next morning, Burrs finds them together in bed. Burrs in a rage pulls a gun from the dresser and threatens to kill them all. In a desperate attempt to stop him, Black attempts to get the gun from Burrs and in the struggle he kills Burrs. Queenie tells Black to leave. She then leaves the apartment and the party is over.
APPENDIX C: FINAL PROTOCOL

1. Title:

2. Opening Date/closing dates:
   a. Number of performances

3. Theater in which it premiered:

4. Director and Producers:

5. Estimated Length:

6. Cast of Characters:
   a. Number of men/women
   b. Any characters of different races

7. Main topic/subject matter:

8. Main themes:

9. Legal narratives:
   a. Fairness
   b. Due Process
   c. Equality
   d. Individual Rights
   e. Community rights
   f. Race
   g. Gender
   h. Class
   i. Sexuality
   j. Legitimacy
   k. Legal reasoning
1. Morality; moral reasoning

m. Punishment/judgment

n. Convict Narratives

o. War/Rebellion

10. Deviance narratives (crime/drugs/sexuality)
   a. Violence
   b. Stealing
   c. IPV
   d. Sexual assault
   e. Drug Use
   f. Gambling; prostitution
   g. Delinquency

11. How are the characters involved in narrative? What is the context?

12. Interesting quotes/lyrics pertaining to law, justice, morality, reasoning, etc.
   a. Quotes
   b. How may these pertain to the themes and narratives?

13. Context of narrative within the time period of show? How may the show relate to historical setting and recent events in the United States?

14. Economic
   a. Cost
   b. # of Actors/employees
   c. Budget

15. Citing known people in media
16. Any well-known actors in act
   a. Famous/celebrities
   b. Broadway-famous
## APPENDIX D: TABLE OF EMERGENT THEMES

### Table 3. Table of Emergent Themes

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<th>Deviancy</th>
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