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## Minority Representations in Crime Drama: An Examination of Roles, Identity, and Power

Megan E. Chatelain  
*University of the Pacific*

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MINORITY REPRESENTATIONS IN CRIME DRAMA: AN EXAMINATION OF ROLES,  
IDENTITY, AND POWER

By

Megan Chatelain

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2020

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Megan Chatelain

APPROVED BY:

Thesis Advisor: Qingwen Dong, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Teresa Bergman, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Graham Carpenter, Ph.D.

Department Chair: Teresa Bergman, Ph.D.

## DEDICATION

To my mom who literally broke her body so mine could have a better life.

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## MINORITY REPRESENTATIONS IN CRIME DRAMA: AN EXAMINATION OF ROLES, IDENTITY, AND POWER

### Abstract

By Megan Chatelain

University of the Pacific  
2020

The storytelling ability of television can be observed in any genre. Crime drama offers a unique perspective because victims and offenders change every episode increasing stereotypes with each new character. In other words, the more victims and criminals observed by the audience, the more likely the show creates the perception of a mean world. Based on previous literature, three questions emerged which this study focused on by asking the extent of *Criminal Minds*' ability to portray crime accurately compared to the Federal Bureau of Investigations Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and the Behavioral Analysis Unit's (BAU-4) report on serial murderers and how those portrayals changed over the fifteen years of the show. A content analysis was conducted through the lens of cultivation theory, coding 324 episodes which produced a sample size of 354 different cases to answer the research questions. Two additional coders focused on the first, middle, and last episodes of each season (N=45) for reliability. The key findings are low levels of realism with the UCR and high levels of realism with the BAU-4 statistics. Mean-world syndrome was found to be highly likely to be cultivated in heavy viewers. Finally, roles for minority groups did improve overtime for Black and Brown bodies, yet Asian bodies saw a very small increase in representation. LGBT members were nearly nonexistent. The findings indicated that there is still not enough space in television for minority roles and

found that the show perpetuated stereotypes. Additional implications and themes include a lack of discourse on violence and erasure of sexual assault victims.

*Keywords: Crime Drama, Cultivation Theory, Minority Representation, Criminal Minds, FBI Statistics, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Stereotypes, Mean-World Syndrome, Realism*

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## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

*“Well, we’d better get started.”*

-Jason Gideon, *Criminal Minds* 1:1 “Extreme Aggressor”

### **A Statement of the Problem**

Television shows are still the greatest story tellers of our time no matter how viewers watch the shows (Parrott & Parrott, 2015) or which shows they watch. Through various media platforms (digital, cable, over the air, or streaming) millions of viewers tune in daily. Recent findings indicate that minority groups have been portrayed positively in the past 30 years (Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi 2015), except for crime in dramas. Due to the violent themes and new characters in each episode, crime dramas’ portrayals of minority groups have raised questions about expectations during real world interactions. For example, should White women be afraid to interact with men of any race in real world situations (Parrott & Parrott, 2015)? Therefore, it is important to examine race and gender portrayals in crime dramas because the implications of the shows can be harmful to minority groups and cultivate messages of fear in women.

An analyzation of *Criminal Minds* and how minority groups are depicted offer insight into minority relations and how they are portrayed. These portrayals include stereotypes, racism, and misogyny. Over time, continuous usage of negative depictions cultivates negative views about minorities in the real world (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002). *Criminal Minds* (CBS, 2005-2020) was chosen because it showcases urgent and heinous crimes in various cities nationwide. Fundamentally, difference in how patterns or messages are cultivated may contribute to social issues. Furthermore, crime statistics serve as a comparison for real versus sensationalized crime in television shows. For example, differences in location

challenges viewers' expectations of violence in locations close to their homes and cultivate negative views about minority groups in local areas. By using cultivation theory and a content analysis, observing themes in *Criminal Minds* are found to increase biases in stereotypes which contributes to viewers' expectations and conceptions of society (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 44). With crime statistics from the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and the Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU-4), there are be some findings which highlight differences and fictionalized portrayals of minorities. Minority group depictions in crime drama matter because our judgements may be affected (see Kopacki 2013). Because these shows have proven themselves to be popular with audiences, one possible result is that stereotypes can be perpetuated.

### **Purpose of the Thesis**

The goal of this thesis was to analyze stereotypes in crime drama particularly where minority groups (women, Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, mixed race, LGBT, differently abled, mental health) are depicted and roles they have (victim/perpetrator, investigator, positive/negative). By examining *Criminal Minds*, the study uses real statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for a comparison. Deviations from actual statistics highlight biases and negative stereotypes in the show. Instead of explaining effects on the audience, cultivation theory partnered with actual statistics indicates possible assumptions cultivated through messages in *Criminal Minds* which can inform the viewers' broader worldview (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 52).

Cultivation of messages is a dynamic process based on the television show chosen by the viewer (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 44). Thus, exposure to the entirety of the show means messages are more likely to be cultivated among audiences. These

messages inform conceptions of reality which shapes biases, racism, and misogyny in viewers. This thesis analyses messages in *Criminal Minds* to uncover stereotypes that promote biases, racism, and misogyny.

## **Defining Key Terms**

### **Realism**

Realism is the degree of believability or true to real life factor the audience observes (Tan, Nelson, Dong, & Tan, 2013). The environment characters are placed in and the behaviors they have are possible in real life which gives the audience the perception that the television show is truthful. In television, the more realistic a show is, the more likely the messages will be cultivated (Shrum 2017). Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan (2002) contend that the more realistic a show is, the more likely a viewer will equate the messages of the show with the “facts of life” (p. 44). Therefore, repetition of messages, biases, and stereotypes are legitimized when the show is more realistic.

### **Mainstreaming**

When heavy viewers (viewers who watch more than four hours of television per day) override their personal world views for the ones present in television shows, they are engaging in mainstreaming. Once a viewer diminishes their personal cultural beliefs or political ideologies, they start to agree to similar world views of other viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 51). This change is due to the types of ideologies presented in television. Though the audience may be from different backgrounds or nations, when mainstreaming occurs, they become homogenous (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 51). Importantly, audiences would share similar biases and stereotypes if these issues are continuous themes in television shows.

## **Mean-World Syndrome**

The concept of “mean world syndrome” is significant because violence present in television shows shapes viewers’ perceptions that the world around them functions the same way and is just as violent. Mean world syndrome (MWS) is, therefore, an effect of mainstreaming where the audience buys into the realism within the television show (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 52). Research from Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan (2002) conducted a study of heavy versus light viewers (less than two hours of television viewed per day) and found that heavier viewers had higher pro-sexism, fear of harm, and biases against non-White races. Therefore, under representation of minority groups and stereotypes in conjunction with violence perpetuates bias, racism, and misogyny in heavy viewer.

## **Resonance**

Resonance occurs when television events resemble real life events resulting in a stronger media effect in the audience. Signorielli and Morgan define resonance where “everyday reality and television provide a double dose of messages that resonate and amplify cultivation” (2013, p. 85). The messages shape perceptions more intensely because viewers make connections between television environments and the one they live in. These connections are why realism and mean world syndrome are major themes across the research. According to Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan (2002) viewers with preconceived biases will view biases in television messages as confirmation. Thus, resonance intensifies issues perpetuated by stereotypes.

## **Moral Authority**



Moral authority is the portrayal of morality in crime dramas based on the fight between good and evil (Cavender and Deutsch, 2007, p. 68). While aggression is part of police perceptions, moral authority depicted in fictional television shows suggest that the levels of aggression police have toward criminals is justified because they have the moral high ground and are attempting to triumph over evil. The theme of good versus evil is a common continuum present in crime drama which asks the viewers to believe those who are arrested are evil and should be punished. Meaning, stereotypes perpetuated in television shows causes viewers to expect criminals to look the same and have the same punishments as shown on television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002). Therefore, demographics of offenders and victims should be observed to discover how minority groups are described and placed in the continuum of moral authority because it uncovers stereotypes that can harm minority groups in the real world.

### **Uniform Crime Report**

The Uniform Crime Report (UCR) comes from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI collects data from reporting systems in the United States. The UCR began in 1929 as a way for police to have reliable information on crime in the country (FBI 2020). Today, the UCR obtains data from over 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. (FBI 2020). What makes this program useful, is that it is used to monitor social trends in violence and crime as well as predict violent behavior on a local level. Essentially, the FBI uses the UCR as a tool to monitor real world violence and predict possible scenarios that will increase violence. For example, once the UCR knows the extent of crime in a certain region, they can assess how many officers are needed in the region. Additionally, noticing patterns in crime gives officers the ability to prepare and prevent future crime (Walsh & Jorgensen 2017, p. 24).

## **The National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime**

The National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) is the frontrunner of serial murder research. Beginning in the 1980's as a branch of the FBI, supervisory special agents would interview serial murderers to understand why they committed their crimes. The NCAVC encompasses five units: Behavioral Analysis Unit 1 is in charge of Counterterrorism and Counterintelligence, Behavioral Analysis Unit 2 focuses on White Collar Crimes, Cybercrimes, and corruption, Behavioral Analysis Unit 3 deals with child victims, Behavioral Analysis Unit 4 centers around adult victims and the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP), and the Behavioral Research and Instruction Unit (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011) teaches incoming agents their responsibilities. For this study, the research and work conducted by the Behavioral Analysis Unit 4 (BAU-4) is critical because the television show *Criminal Minds* is based on that unit. Therefore, their definitions of crimes, motives, and other key information pertaining to activity in the show will be used. Additionally, their monograph titled *Serial Murder: Pathways for Investigation* (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011) includes statistics on serial murders that was used as another comparison to investigate the level of realism in minority portrayals. Additionally, these crime statistics were used to differentiate real world local crime like robbery and major crimes committed by rare offenders such as serial killers. Finally, the results of a symposium were published where representatives from law enforcement agencies all over the world agreed to definitions of serial murderers and what factors may lead to serial killings (U.S. Department of Justice 2011).

*Serial Murders* are defined as crimes, typically murder, with at least two victims at different times (U.S. Department of Justice 2011). The offenders may stop killing for long periods of time and tend to fall on a continuum ranging from organized to disorganized behavior

(Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). Additionally, the circumstances of the murders are similar, meaning it would seem like the same offender committed the crimes (U.S. Department of Justice 2011, p. 8).

*Motivations* are reasons for committing the crimes from the perspective of the entire set of circumstances (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). This means investigators are taking time, observing the situation, how the offender found the victim, how the body was left after the crime, and many other factors relating to the crimes. There are five motivations: sexual (intercourse), anger (personal hostility projected toward the victim), mental illness (psychiatric maladies such as delusions or hearing voices), profit (monetary), and an “other” category which captures motivations not typical (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011).

*Relationships* between the offender and the victim include five different categories. *Strangers* are defined as offenders who have no relationship to the victim that is known (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). *Targeted strangers* are victims who do not know the offender, but the offender knows them (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). *Acquaintances* are victims and offenders who have had a range of contact from slight to often (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). These types of contacts can be delivery drivers who have delivered more than once to a residence, coworkers, friends, and neighbors. *Relative/familial* relationships include blood, blended, and extended family (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). Finally, *customer/client* relationships are majorly victims who are prostitutes and offenders who are posing as customers (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). The reason these relationship categories matter is due to the way television shows depict the offender/victim relationships on their programs. Depending on where most of the relationships fall, messages of fear and danger may be communicated. Relationship descriptions matter because it increases possibilities of resonance with heavy

viewers which bolsters the mean world syndrome. Importantly, the perpetuation of stereotypes in conjunction with relationships causes heavy viewers to believe that certain minority groups are violent and certain minority groups are likely to be victims. For example, the more White women murdered in television shows, the more likely White women who are heavy viewers will associate themselves with the victims and fear relationships with those who resemble violent characters in the show.

### **Feasibility of the Study**

This study was done within a couple of months. Manganello, Franzini, and Jordan (2008) suggest coding the premiere episodes of each season because they are the episodes that attempt to gain viewers and keep them interested in the rest of the season. Additionally, the final episode was coded due to the break television shows take from June to August. These shows want the audience to return when the next season starts in September. The shows are written to increase ratings at the beginning of the season, keep ratings through the year, and keep audiences looking forward to the new season when the summer break ends. Finally, the midpoint of a season was be important because they renew attention to the show. Two recruited coders focused on these three episodes for each season. *Criminal Minds* has fifteen seasons which brings the total to N=45 episodes coded for reliability. Manganello, Franzini, and Jordan (2008) recommend seven for representation and character studies. To better understand the overall depictions of minorities in *Criminal Minds*, I coded all the episodes which total 324. The reason for coding all episodes was to fully develop an image of stereotypes and how these stereotypes changed over time. Additionally, criminals and victims change each episode which means each episode needed to be coded.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it used a current crime drama that existed within the past fifteen years to examine the representations of minority groups over time. This means that the events of this show are relatively fresh in the audience's minds. The length of time that *Criminal Minds* was on television offers enough data for a longitudinal study that questions representation. The representations of roles, genders, and races become the most important issues because *Criminal Minds* uses these representations to stereotype and suggest certain groups are violent. The length of the show gives heavy viewers enough exposure to continuous messages which nourishes, or cultivates, perspectives based on the show (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 49). Therefore, the nature of representations in *Criminal Minds* may be cultivating social constructions that presents the entire United States as more violent than it is. For example, violent crime has fallen 51% within the last twenty years (Gramlich 2019). Additionally, when polled, 57% of respondents claimed that the crime rate was worse than the previous year (Gramlich 2019). Gramlich (2016) argued that the respondents' high perception of crime was due to the level of documentation of crime in certain regions. In other words, the more the media discusses crime in the U.S., the more likely the audience will perceive crime rates to be increasing.

Therefore, who the criminals and victims are matters because they inform the viewers on expectations of what violent individuals looks like and what victims looks like. Thus, *Criminal Minds* as a longitudinal study analyzing stereotypes and biases illuminates what type of social order is being legitimized. Because the interaction between viewer and message is dynamic and continuous (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 49), observing changes in stereotypes over time may suggest possible changes to social order.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*“I think that theory should be at the beginning part of your story.”*  
 -Penelope Garcia, 6:17 “Valhalla”

### **Cultivation Theory**

For this thesis, I used cultivation theory. Cultivation theory began in the 1970s with George Gerbner. As a part of the Cultural Indicators Project, Gerbner researched ways that media, mainly television, shaped audiences’ reality. Initially, cultivation theory was used to find out if increases in violent television would cause an increase in crime. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1986) noted that the relationship of media and society goes beyond effects because society is shaped by mainstream values. Therefore, if the messages are consistent and media is everywhere with these messages, then most users should be affected (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli 1986, p. 21). Thus, cultivation theory is based on the television’s role as a storyteller and how those stories shape society.

In addition to storytelling, the types of viewers matter because rates of exposure could lead to increased cultivation. There are three types of viewer that are categorized in this theory: heavy (4+ hours of television watched per day), medium (2-4 hours watched per day), and light (<2 hours watched per day). Heavy viewers begin to absorb the perspective of the television which mitigates their own ideals, beliefs, and values (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 51). Even if the viewers have different political beliefs (liberal and conservative), heavy viewers start to embrace moderate world views (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 56). Thus, television messages cultivate world views and legitimizes social order presented in shows.

Furthermore, Gerbner suggests that television deals with message systems in which heavy viewers cannot escape values, portrayals, and patterns (2000, p. 6). Because viewing is an interaction between the viewer and text, cultivation is less of a unidirectional influence from television to viewer and more of a pull where viewers all fall into the same current which creates an ongoing process of interaction with messages and audiences (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002, p. 49). Thus, cultivation theory is exposure to patterns of television programming over time. Essentially, the more a viewer is exposed, the more likely they will absorb the world views of the show in favor of their own.

When audiences agree with certain messages, they may seek similar programs that match the patterns. Heath and Gilbert (1996) noted that choice of television shows lead to a higher cultivation of messages because the viewer is seeking the message. For example, someone who enjoys a show that promotes the use of technology will probably seek other shows that are similar. This is why streaming apps have the “because you watched...” feature. Furthermore, Shrum, Burroughs, and Rindfleisch (2011) found that those who watched television shows they enjoyed were more likely to be shaped by the program compared to those who were somewhat watching. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan (2002) found that heavy viewers were 25% more likely to perceive the world as a mean world compared to light viewers. Meaning, the amount of exposure to television cultivates a world view that is similar to the one portrayed on television.

Yet, there have been challenges to cultivation theory (see Brown, Lauricella, Douai, & Zaidi 2012). Mainly, critics claim the theory’s basis is that the audience is homogenous, and the shows are like hypodermic needles where the message is instantly injected into the minds of the audience. Unfortunately, this criticism only focuses on one aspect of cultivation theory. As

Potter (2014) reminded us, Gerbner's research is not limited to the effects of television, but also includes the mass-production of messages and the institutions who create those messages. By utilizing cultivation theory, researchers can go beyond the audience to the source and question power structures. The institutions that create the shows approve of certain structures and formats. Knowing the structure means recognizing the larger institution and, as a result, the messages they support. The way television shows have similar structures (i.e. 4-part acts, someone dies, there is a criminal, etc.) means that there is not a hypodermic needle effect, but a gravitational pull where viewers from different social backgrounds are affected by television messages (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan 2002, p. 49). More importantly, the audience does not need to be homogenous for cultivation to take effect. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan (2002) conducted a study which used multinational and cross-cultural participants and found that the background of the viewer is not a significant factor in cultivation. Instead, the amount of exposure to television and shows was the variable that caused mainstreaming. Therefore, the amount of time spent watching television is a factor in cultivating social world views that are cumulative and build over time. For example, if a show is heavy in stereotypes, a heavy viewer will begin to believe the stereotypes overtime even though the portrayals are not reflecting reality.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is based on the need to increase diversity in places where minorities might not have space, offer minorities equal access to positions and roles in leadership, and be inclusive with different voices (Johnson-Mallard, Jones, Coffman, Gauda, Deming, Pacheco, & Campbell 2019). Given the nature of cultivation theory, asking questions about DEI in television means investigating the roles of minority groups, and in the case of crime



drama, understanding who is a criminal and a victim. There has been very little research conducted on crime drama in conjunction with DEI.

Shrum (2017) argued that there is a possibility of passing judgements based on what viewers see on television. Because television has information about events (such as a mugging), these events may be encoded in viewers' memory (Shrum 2017, p. 7). This means that there may be harmful judgements passed on individuals in future interactions. Additionally, if researchers stopped caring about cultivation theory, misattributed sources of memory may lead to a silencing effect where sources of information are no longer questioned. Recent research has focused on race relations, body type, and parasocial interactions that are created through television (see McNallie 2018; Melhem & Puyanunt-Carter 2019). More importantly, research in cultivation theory is trending toward Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2015) argue that the first-order effects are where viewers estimate the probability that some event will take place and the second-order effects is where the audience makes a judgement about social reality (p. 684). In other words, DEI's presence in television may have a significant impact on the way viewers interact with each other. For example, a lack of DEI in television means increasing the belief that there are no prominent roles for minorities based on a small, perceived, chance that there are no minorities with power. Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2015) suggest researching first- and second-order effects in conjunction with realism to better understand if DEI is present in television.

An example of first and second order effects from television comes from the "CSI Effect." Simon Cole argued that the dramatism which emphasized storytelling triggered an effect where the audience believed the show used real procedures (2015). The results of Cole's research found that prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges strongly perceived an effect where

the jury held biases (2015). Meaning, the jury's perception of trial proceedings and evidence was negatively skewed as a result of the show *CSI*. This type of effect supports Shrum's arguments on the first and second order effects for two reasons. First, viewers watching *CSI* are aware that they may be potential jurors in the future. The educational factor of the show lets potential jurors know what to look for at trial. Second, if the viewer does become a juror, the verdict may be affected by their perceptions of forensic evidence and its capabilities. For example, the presence of DNA at a crime scene may cause the juror to believe that the individual who left the DNA is guilty. Additionally, if minorities are the ones typically arrested in television shows, then there may be biases leading to wrongful convictions. Conversely, if there is not enough forensic evidence, those who truly are guilty may be acquitted (McCay 2014).

### **Violence in Crime Drama**

Desire to watch violent television shows and the effects the violence may produce has been studied extensively. With crime drama, portrayals of violence appear to be inevitable. Therefore, researchers asking why audiences tune into these shows has offered a great deal of insight. Furthermore, choosing to watch crime drama to observe justice being fulfilled has been found to increase anxiety in audiences when confronted with the possibility of death (Taylor 2012). Additionally, Kort-Butler and Hartshorn (2011) found that fear and violence may be cultivated through crime drama. By conducting a study with 784 participants, the researchers found that the older a viewer is, the more likely they are to believe that crime rates are increasing (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn 2011, p. 45). Therefore, watching crime drama over long periods of time, according to the research, cultivates a mean world syndrome in heavy viewers.

Sexual violence depicted on television has also been the basis for many studies (Cuklanz & Moorti 2006; Ferguson 2012; Kahlor & Eastin 2011). Researchers have found that 25% of

crime drama viewers perceived possible risks of violence while women who watched the news employed defensive behaviors (Custers, Hall, Smith, & McNallie 2017). In other words, there are first-order effects where viewers believe that they will encounter violence and second-order effects which bolsters a mean world perception. Due to these findings, asking who the victim is and who is the perpetrator offers insight into who the audience perceives as a victim and who will cause harm.

After watching sexually violent shows, women have been found to have higher anxiety (Ferguson 2012). These findings support the mean world syndrome. Additionally, Vangeel, Vandenko, Eggermont, and Wright (2019) note that the types of genres we watch can shape our expectations about sex and intercourse and, more importantly, when these shows are watched as adolescents, they can influence negative behaviors. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan (2002) suggest that the repetitive messages begin when viewers are children and serve as a foundation for broader world views (p. 52). For example, Hust, Marett, Lei, Ren, and Ran (2015) examined consent negotiation in 313 college students and found that there may be a cultivation effect where viewers of crime drama believe that those who commit sexual violence are not punished (p. 1378). Furthermore, those who believe there is a lack of punishment tended to support consent and seek consent prior to sexual intercourse (Hust, Marett, Lei, Ren, & Ran 2015). These findings suggested that there is a mean world perception with action being taken to reduce the violent encounters. These types of actions may include carrying weapons, avoiding certain situations, or avoiding certain people.

### **Representations of Different Abilities, Mental Health, Bodies, and Identity**

In addition to violence, differently abled individuals have been studied asking if the portrayals are accurate. After studying d/Deafness (individuals with hearing loss) represented on

television shows across multiple genres, Foss (2014) concluded that there is an extensive spectrum of inaccurate portrayals. Notably in crime dramas, Deaf activists are minimized with botched medical procedures causing criminal behavior, and those who have the potential of receiving cochlear implants are killed because they may know who a criminal is (Foss 2014, p. 439). With these negative portrayals of d/Deafness in crime dramas, it is possible that the shows are perpetuating harmful effects of useful medical procedures and cultivating a fear of people who cannot hear without aids.

A further issue is highlighted by Parrot and Parrot (2015a) is the representation of mental health in crime dramas. By utilizing cultivation theory, Parrot and Parrot (2015a) hypothesize that the individuals with mental illness are likely to be victims and perpetrators of violence. Findings were not surprising to the researchers who discovered that 51% of mentally ill characters committed violent acts and 46% were victims (Parrot & Parrot 2015a, pg. 650). These portrayals were found to be negative and support cultivation of stereotyping.

Yet, mental health is not the only problematic portrayal in crime dramas. The bodies of victims are often on display for viewers which has had mixed research findings. Foltyn (2008) argues that the presentation of the corpse or autopsy on crime dramas can be liberating for the viewer because the DNA and search for the truth gives the individual a sense of immortality. At the same time, Foltyn (2008) warns viewers that the autopsy coupled with the body on display is also a form of control because the investigator and/or coroner are the ones speaking for the individual.

For example, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* used forensic science and techniques (DNA, biological markers, trace evidence) to figure out who committed a crime. Pierson (2010) argues that these procedures were based upon Foucault's criticism of the clinical gaze where

doctors “read” patients bodies for information and follow up with the panoptic gaze where power and surveillance are normalized resulting in what Pierson calls a “forensic gaze.” With the cultivation theory, findings suggest gazes, whether the panoptic, clinical, or forensic, become a socially acceptable act making research continually necessary with crime dramas. Crime drama’s ability to objectify a human body may have greater consequences for minority groups if their bodies are not seen as personal. In other words, the minority body no longer belongs to minority. Instead, the body belongs to those in power. Shows such as *CSI* and *Criminal Minds* use investigators, police, and agents in positions of power which suggests that they have ownership over minority bodies. White male bodies are on screen far less than White women’s bodies which suggests that cases involving female victims are more about their body as an object rather than as a human who lived.

In addition to the body being placed on display, identity is a recurring theme in crime drama which may have some harmful effects. Harrington (2007) suggests that criminals, victims, and investigators are all looking to create an identity which is different from who they once were. Basically, in crime drama, no one is who they say they are. Bull (2015) reminds readers of the disguise motif and how these disguises prevent the wearer from being known which increases anxiety. The main argument from both researchers is that these shows can cultivate anxiety in the audience by telling them that they do not know the people around them and everyone is keeping something secret. Harrington claims that this hidden or reinvention of identity evokes a sense of fear when identity is concealed or unknown (2007, p. 374).

Essentially, the search for a criminal or knowing who the victim is, cultivates a need to know all of an individual’s identity. If there is something the investigators do not know about a potential killer, then there could be life threatening consequences. And, that we should be suspicious of

the people around us in the real world. Critically, the message of suspicion cultivates the mean world syndrome where mainstream audiences believe strangers are dangerous.

### **Gender and Race**

While bodies are on display, gender and race of individuals are called into question. Even though the body could be a victim or a criminal, the investigators and any other character is also on display. Therefore, research that asks what roles certain genders and races have is significant because these roles are visible and potentially normalized by viewers. Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi (2015) observed 2,575 characters across 20 years of top television shows. These shows included situational comedies, romance, drama, and crime drama. By asking what the roles of ethnic minority groups were in these shows, the researchers found that the roles for Latina and Black females were hypersexualized while Black and Latino male roles were fairly prominent (56.6%) (Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi 2015). With cultivation theory, understanding what roles minorities play and how they are treated gives researchers a snapshot of what roles have been normalized in society. Stereotypes are, therefore, legitimized when the roles are consistently negative for minorities.

More importantly, there was a significant absence of Asian Americans and Native Americans on primetime television which resulted in being excluded from analysis (Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi 2015, p. 30). When certain minority groups are completely absent, then DEI values are not being implemented. Even though the analysis found that the majority of roles where ethnic minorities were portrayed were positive and likable, the research excluded crime drama's depictions because these roles are not recurring (Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi 2015). Therefore, crime drama is unique because it portrays many groups and

individuals in multiple scenarios that tend to be violent compared to sitcoms or romance which do not have new characters in every episode.

As a result of noticing different characters every episode in crime dramas, Parrott and Parrott (2015) hypothesized that men had a greater chance of being a criminal than women will in crime drama. After coding 983 characters across 65 episodes, results indicated that 24% of males and 14% of female characters were violent. Additionally, the researchers questioned racial and gender compositions in victims versus perpetrators portrayed in crime drama between 2010 and 2013 (Parrott & Parrott, 2015). Findings indicated that 32% of White females, 23% of White males, 16% of Black females, and 15% of Black males were victims of crime (Parrott & Parrott 2015, p. 77). The implications of this study suggested that White women were more likely to be victims of crime when compared to other groups.

Additionally, perpetrators of crime had significant differences when comparing genders. When perpetrators were studied, women were considered threats to social order by poisoning and abusing those they are supposed to love (Cuklanz & Moorti 2006). Compared to men, women are motivated by greed and competition whereas men are motivated by pleasure and sex (Cuklanz & Moorti 2006, p. 315). Furthermore, men increased negative attitudes towards women when women were depicted in negative roles (Ferguson 2012). This research suggests that a self-motivated woman has little maternal instincts and can be a danger to the simple pleasures that men want which results in men taking those pleasures; essentially, creating a world where victim blaming is legitimized. With false rape claims, manipulation, and lack of empathy, the female criminal promotes misogyny. In summary, the female criminal is a threat to social order and male dominance while male criminals are motivated by personal pleasure.

In addition to race and gender portrayals, researchers Meyer, Fallah, and Wood (2011) state that women's confidence and self-esteem are in danger of falling to all-time lows as a result of crime drama stereotypes. Based on the portrayals of body, identity, and lack of prominent female roles, there are very few positive images for women. As a result, self-esteem suffers because women may connect with the victim who was targeted or a criminal who is trying to get rid of a flaw in their personalities or identities. Furthermore, mediated representations of women may construct women's thoughts and actions as instances of madness or insanity (Meyer, Fallah, & Wood 2011). Thus, what is normal behavior for a woman is called into question. Coulthard, Horeck, Klinger, and McHugh (2018) argue that crime drama is a paradox of gender violence and women's empowerment. Unfortunately, the empowerment women have is overshadowed by the extensive violence they endure. Critically, this legitimization of women's roles creates a cultivation effect that tells women that they must go through violence and fight for any type of empowerment. Additionally, Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, Shanahan (2002) found that heavy viewers scored higher on sexism scales because television cultivates gendered assumptions through gender-related activities (p. 53).

### **Motivations for Watching Crime Drama**

With all these issues the question becomes, why would anyone want to watch crime drama? The answer is that they are entertaining. Studies on the motivations for watching crime drama are sparse. Even so, top motivations for watching crime drama include knowledge seeking, preparation for real world encounters, emotional release, escapism, and justice fulfillment (Vaughan & Greenwood 2017). Previous research by Brown, Lauricella, Douai, and Zaidi (2012) found that the only statistically significant reason for watching crime drama was



satisfying curiosity or the need to be informed (p. 53). Their application of uses and gratifications theory found limited results and suggests that additional research is needed.

In addition to motivations, specifically the need to be informed, Van den Bulck (2004) found that there was no relationship between watching crime and experiencing crime. However, Van den Bulck (2004) noticed that the mediated experience of crime, or watching crime on television, had a significant relationship to having a fear of crime. This means that the need to be informed coupled with the desire to watch crime dramas may perpetuate the mean world syndrome.

### **The “CSI Effect”**

There have been some cultivation effects that have caused issues in the judicial system. McCay (2014) reminds us that the CSI Effect began with a news report which challenged the way the show presented evidence. Because of the dominance of forensic evidence and its use in discovering who criminal offenders are, an assumption began where judicial officials believed that jurors demanded forensic evidence to prove guilt (McCay 2014). Without the evidence, prosecutors believed the defendant would be let go. Further analysis by Cole and Dioso-Villa (2009) suggested that news media is at fault for the existence of the CSI Effect. Sensationalized headlines that claim juror verdicts are driven by the CSI Effect and triggered a perception in prosecutors that evidence should be present at trial and holding the need for “beyond a reasonable doubt” to a much higher threshold (Cole & Dioso-Villa 2009, p. 1340). As a result, juror expectations and verdicts have been called into question.

To understand the CSI Effect better, Cole and Dioso-Villa (2009) categories the types of effects into eight different categories. These are the *strong prosecutor’s effect*, the *weak prosecutor’s effect*, the *defendant’s effect*, the *producer’s effect*, the *educator’s effect*, the *police*

*chief's effect*, the *tech effects* and, the *victim's effect*. While these eight effects have been researched in terms of *CSI*, they are applicable to any crime drama television show where there could be messages about potential courtroom expectations and investigative expectations. Overall, Cole and Dioso-Villa's (2009) coded media articles that discussed the CSI Effect and found that 76% of all researched articles mentioned the strong prosecutor's effect which creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of increased acquittals.

### **Summary of the Literature**

The literature review pointed to a need for research where cultivation theory is applied to crime drama. Continuing to build upon cultivation theory is critical to understanding what types of social norms are being cultivated and legitimized. This means that more research needs to be conducted where statistics can be analyzed and applied to real life statistics. One of those statistics is real world crime statistics that have been gathered by the FBI. Noticeably, there is an absence of real crime statistics in the previous research. Applying statistics from the Uniform Crime Report and Behavioral Analysis Unit in comparison to the crime drama shows might present correlations of realism and highlight messages that are being cultivated. As a result of the literature review findings, I ask the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does *Criminal Minds* portray crime accurately when compared to the Federal Bureau of Investigations Uniform Crime Report?

RQ2: To what extent does *Criminal Minds* portray crime accurately when compared to the Federal Bureau of Investigations Behavioral Analysis Unit's report on serial murderers?

RQ 3: To what extent do minority group representations change over the fifteen year period of *Criminal Minds*?

Because society and media are constantly changing, adapting cultivation theory to include Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion take the theory in a new direction. Previous research had a theme of finding issues with representations in television, yet it did not look for steps that could be (or have been) taken to improve DEI for minority groups. Additionally, research on mental and physical health could be expanded to include DEI values. With the various representations of minorities crime drama offers, asking what those representations, and roles, are can offer some insight into what roles have been normalized. With the first- and second-order effects that cultivation theory discusses, questioning changes in representation over time in crime drama can offer some insight into shifting norms. This third research question includes observing changes in minority groups as victims and/or criminals, changes overtime in leadership roles and speaking roles, and changes in mental and physical health portrayals.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

*“In simple terms, at the BAU, we use behavioral science, research, case work, and training to hunt down monsters.”*

-David Rossi 7:22 “Profiling 101”

This study utilized cultivation theory to investigate messages of mean world syndrome, mainstreaming, resonance, realism, and moral authority in the television show *Criminal Minds*. Because *Criminal Minds* ran from 2005-2020, this study is longitudinal analyzing changes in representations and messages that can be observed overtime. A content analysis was conducted coding all 324 episodes and two trained coders coded 45 episodes for reliability.

### **Procedure**

Using a content analysis, I discovered how minority groups are represented. Having a content analysis means starting with the institution (who has the power), followed by message system analysis (examining themes), and finally, connecting these symbolic functions to assumptions of the real world (Potter 2014). This means taking note of events in each episode, how power is represented, and tallying these representations on a code sheet (appendix A). The code sheet was developed from a combination of three different studies (see Deutsch & Cavender 2008; Kopacki 2013; Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi 2015). All three studies have an interrater reliability with 90% agreement with a kappa of 0.87 which means the variables are understandable, significant, and tend to be valid.

A pretest of the series was conducted where the premiere episode of each season was observed. A few of the variables were changed to fit the episodes. For example, the motivation of killing because of gender was changed to misogyny because women were the targets. After the pretest was complete, two additional coders were recruited from an undergraduate public

speaking class and trained over two days. The code sheet was explained in detail and the coders watched and coded ten episodes of *Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders* because practicing on a series that was similar to the one in this study, but not exactly the same. These coders observed the first, middle, and last episodes of each season which totaled 45 episodes. These episodes were chosen for their need to get and retain viewers throughout the season and during breaks. When seasons have even episodes, the middle episode with the highest number of viewers was chosen. For example, if a season has 22 episodes, episodes 11 and 12 would fall in the middle. If episode 12 had reported more viewers than episode 11, episode 12 was chosen. To prevent any confusion with the recruited coders, I gave them a list of episodes to watch. I coded all 324 episodes of the original *Criminal Minds* series. The interrater reliability was found to be 88% meaning there was agreement with all three coders 88% of the time with a kappa of 0.79. Once all the episodes are coded, SPSS was used for the major computations.

After the coding was complete, statistics from the BAU and UCR was applied for comparison. These statistics are readily available on the FBI's website. The UCR's statistics are updated twice a year which allows for a comparison of change over time. These statistics come from police departments around the United States who share data with the FBI. The BAU analysis is directly related to *Criminal Minds* because the show is a sensationalized version of what the BAU does. Their statistics are based on solved cases and conviction records from individuals who have committed more than one murder.

### **Sample**

After viewing a few of the episodes, it was clear that coding the minimal number of episodes would not allow for a complete picture of minority depictions. The two additional coders continued to code the first, middle, and last episodes (N=45). However, I coded all the

episodes (N=324) because of time constraints. Once the entire fifteen years were coded, the sample was adjusted due to episodes having more than one case. The final sample size is 354. It is significant to note this difference because many of these episodes that had multiple cases were not the first, middle, or last episode in the season. Therefore, the inclusion of all episodes was necessary for a better picture of what *Criminal Minds* was presenting.

## **Measurements**

### **Variables**

The independent variable is *Criminal Minds*. This includes the number of episodes and release dates. This information provides easy tracking for episodes. Additionally, the original release date is asked to identify when events may have taken place, violence per month, and what representations for minorities were present at the time.

Dependent variables in the content analysis include gender, race, age, other identifiable factors such as physical illnesses, relationship, types of crime, motives, leadership roles, number of minority bodies in each episode, and the amount of violence in each episode. These variables are structured to indicate if there are changes to the roles minorities have over time and what percentage of those roles are positive.

*Gender*- As the literature review suggests, there is a significant difference in how male versus female offenders are portrayed. Therefore, gender includes male, female, transgender, gender neutral, unknown, and other to find out if there is change in what genders are depicted as criminals and who is depicted as a victim.

*Race*- which includes White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, Mixed Race, Unknown, and Other. Much like gender, depictions of which races are more violent, and the type of crimes they commit, can uncover biases and racial stereotypes.

*Age-* Measuring age can be difficult, however, the agents in *Criminal Minds* and in the real BAU categorize age as one of the descriptive factors in figuring out what an unknown subject looks like. Often, agents will state the possible age ranges of offenders based on the ages of the victims. Having an approximate age narrows down the suspect pool, but also tells viewers how old individuals are when they commit certain types of crime

*Other identifiable factors-* There may be other identifiable factors such as physical difference and mental health issues. Frequently, there are no physical issues, but mental health is something that the BAU has claimed as a reason for committing crime (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). Therefore, the show may portray individuals with mental health issues as violent and dangerous.

*Relationships-* Relationships include family, lovers, strangers, friend, coworkers, general acquaintances, classmates, and other. The *Criminal Minds* “strangers” category also includes customer/client relationships and targeted strangers. Understanding what relationships the offenders had with the victims can highlight messages about who the audience should be wary of. An example of the fear tactics created by the media in terms of relationship is “stranger danger.”

*Types of crime-* These include homicide (murder), suicide, rape, molestation, kidnapping, hostage taking, bombing, attempted homicide, stalking, human trafficking, and other. These were the top chosen crimes due to the nature of the television show.

*Motives-* This includes pedophilia, monetary gain, revenge, narcissism, jealousy, religious, race, misogyny, sexual intercourse, silencing a witness, mental break, psychopathic behavior, protection/self-defense, and other. While some of these motives seem like personality flaws, *Criminal Minds* is based on the behavior of the offender which includes personality issues.

So, a motive like narcissism would include killing for attention from the media or a family member.

*Leadership roles-* These roles include doctors, detectives, agents, cops, medical examiners, politicians, and other key leadership roles. However, there was a high number of minorities in roles not defined as leadership roles. These included witnesses, family members, homeless individuals, and prostitutes. These roles also matter because comparing frequencies of roles may offer some insight into what roles are stereotypically played by minorities.

*Minority bodies present in each episode-* Knowing if the percentages of speaking roles change overtime can clarify if minority voices are being heard more than previously. Additionally, not every role is a speaking role. Therefore, this section counts every minority body present in the show, speaking or not, to uncover the percentage of minorities who are given voices.

*Violence per episode-* Types of crimes, victims, and perpetrators may have higher rates of violence. Knowing how much violence is depicted over time can uncover some implicit biases about certain groups of offenders and victims.

## **The Code Sheet**

The code sheet is broken up into eight parts. The first part includes descriptions of the independent variables such as episode name and release date. The second section is based on the perpetrator with descriptions of the dependent variables which identify types of perpetrators. The third section is based on the victim with the same descriptions coded except for relationship because the perpetrator section covered it. The fourth section focuses on the types of crime committed by the offender. The fifth section is based on the motives for the crime. Section six tallies the amount of violence present in each episode. Section seven asks about minority roles.



The final section tallies how many minority bodies are present in each episode. Both section seven and section eight ask if Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is taken into consideration when portraying minorities.

### **Background of *Criminal Minds***

*Criminal Minds* was created in 2005 by Jeff Davis and aired on CBS. One of the executives, Mark Gordon, decided to produce the show because “people were using their brain” (CBS 2020). In each episode, there is a serial murderer, child abductor, or some sort of violent crime taking place where the Behavioral Analysis Unit is called in to help local police. The team of agents typically featured seven per episode, even though some actors left the show and others were brought in. Additionally, these team members represent the lead roles in the show. These members included Jason Gideon, Emily Prentiss, Aaron Hotchner, Derek Morgan, Dr. Spencer Reid, Elle Greenaway, Dr. Alex Blake, David Rossi, Dr. Tara Lewis, Penelope Garcia, Jennifer Jareau, Kate Callahan, Ashley Seaver, Luke Alvez, Matt Simmons, and Stephen Walker.

When the BAU arrives at the location where they have been asked to investigate, they work on building a profile of what potential suspects look like. This profile is based on the behavior of the criminal in conjunction with the victim demographics. And, as Gideon said, “Sometimes it’s what they don’t do” (1:6 L.D.S.K.). Because behavior is so important, the agents ask questions such as “why this victim, why this time, why this place” to understand the thought process of the unknown subject, or UnSub.

Throughout the show, statistics were used to describe offenders along with typologies that include motives for certain behaviors and crimes. For example, “95% of arsonists are male, 75% are White” according to Dr. Reid (2:19 Ashes and Dust). These statistics lend a sense of credibility to the show which may increase resonance and mean-world syndrome. Midway

through each episode, the team delivers the profile to the police or sheriff's department they are working with. The way they deliver this profile comes across like a classroom setting with a group of instructors teaching law enforcement about who commits crimes. The agents typically are lined up at the front of the room which gives them authority over the local law enforcement who are all facing the agents. These positions mean that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are important because the show may tell us whose voice matters. It should be noted that these profiles can be wrong and are often considered tools used by agents and law enforcement to narrow the suspect pool, not solve the crime.

Speaking of crime, Shemar Moore (the actor who played Derek Morgan) stated that he hoped the audience would be scared "because you realize that this is real stuff that happens every day" (CBS 2005-2020). Thus, with a combination of fear tactics and statistics, there is a high chance of mean-world syndrome being cultivated.

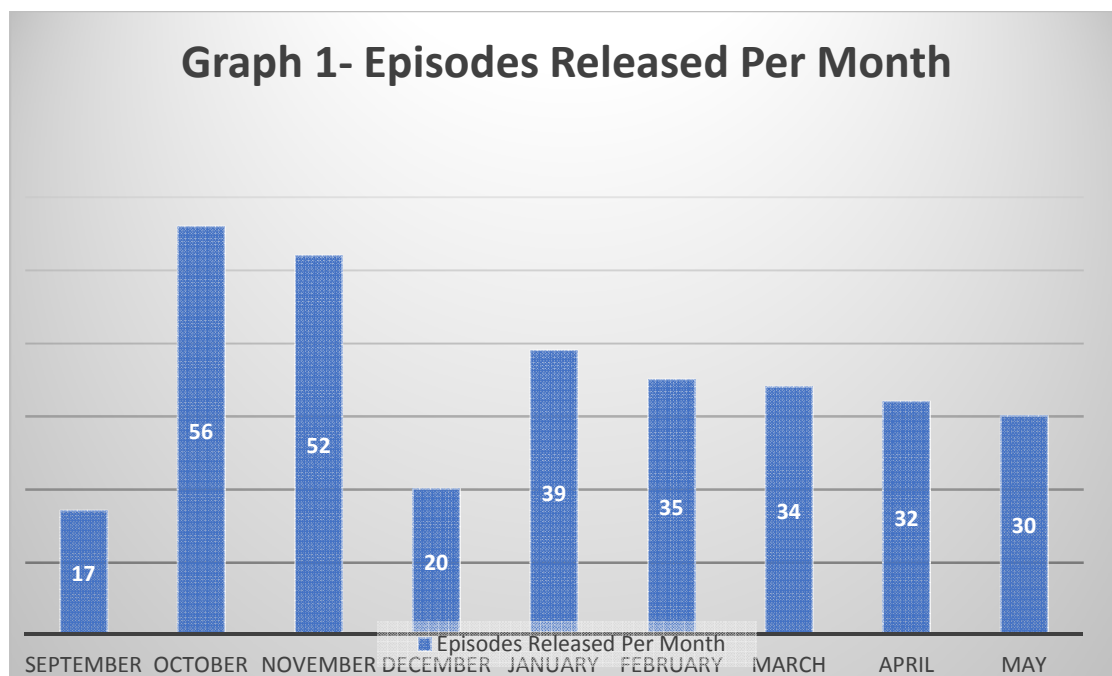
## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

*“We’re going to provide a psychological profile of the man we’re looking for. It contains some unusual, specific personality traits that someone out there is bound to recognize.”*

-Aaron Hotchner 2:22 “Legacy”

### **Part One- Original Release Dates**

Beginning with part one, many cases were originally debuted as a single episode. However, 39 cases were part of episodes or considered a second part to the main episode. Because these 39 cases debuted the same day, numbers of cases were considered a single day/episode to prevent double counting. The final number of days *Criminal Minds* had episodes released over a fifteen-year period was 315. Of the 315, most of the release days took place in October (Graph 1) with 56 (17.8%). Next, November had 52 (16.5%), January with 39 (12.4%), and February with 35 (11.1%). The months with the least episode release days counted were September with 17 (5.4%), December 20 (6.3%), and May 30 (9.5%). It should be noted that June, July, and August do not have release day numbers because there were no episodes released during those months. Additionally, September and May are the season premieres and finales with the middle episodes released in January. Because this is a fifteen-year total, it should also be noted that the episodes released during each month resemble the seasons they are in. For example, October had a few episodes relating to Halloween and February had episodes based on Valentine’s Day. These patterns suggested that the crimes presented in the episodes are typical of the season. That means the amount of violence shown per month matters because it may cultivate a mean world effect where heavy viewers perceive certain months as more violent even though that is not reality.

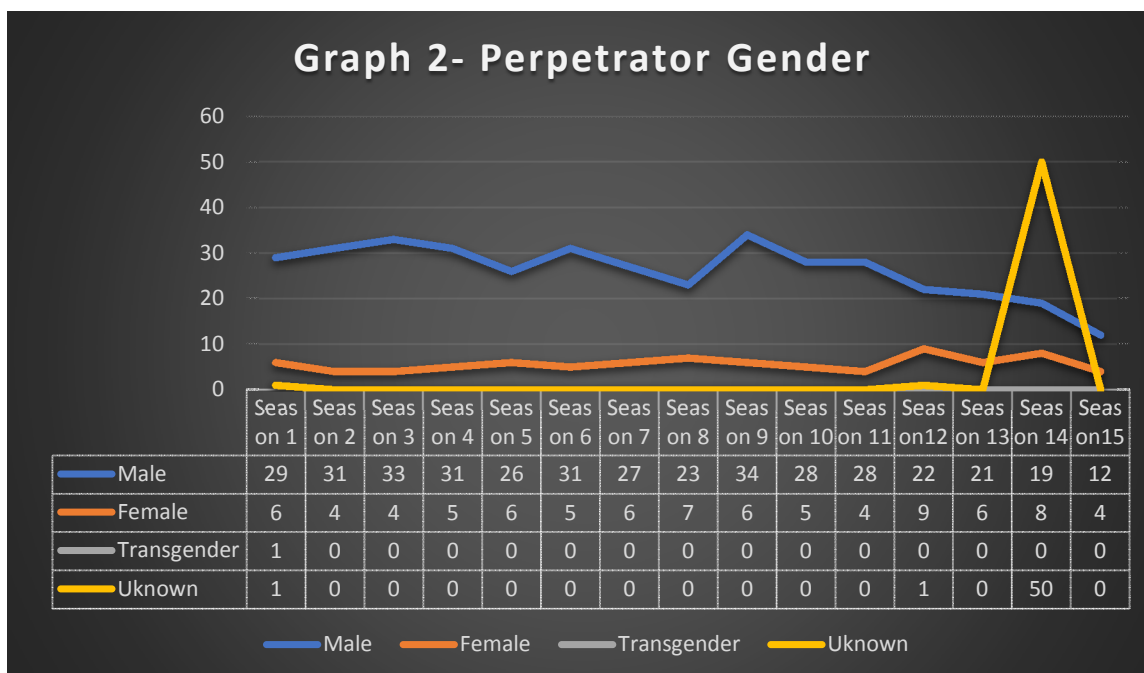


Noticeably, some of these months were lower in the number of released episodes. For example, the amount of violence (N=2,488) per month was different. October had the most violence with 517 observed acts (20.8%), May was second highest with 482 acts (19.4%), and March was third with 307 violent acts (12.3%). The lowest number of violence occurred in September 92 (3.7%), followed by December at 119 (4.8%), and February at 203 (8.2%). In other words, over a fifteen-year period, October was the most violent and September was the least violent.

### **Part Two- Perpetrator Statistics**

In this section, the number of cases observed is 354 because each episode was coded (324) and there were 30 instances where episodes had multiple cases. Each case had a different offender and victim which is why they were coded separately to promote accurate coding and results. Additionally, some cases had multiple offenders and multiple victims.

Beginning with gender (Graph 2), the total number of perpetrators was 533. Male offenders are the most likely to commit violent crimes at 395 (74%), females with 85 (16%), unknown offenders 52 (9.8%) and one transgender individual (0.2%). No gender-neutral offenders were observed or mentioned in the show.



By computing the average rate of change, male offenders decrease 1.133 per year and female offenders drop .133 per year. Season 14 saw a high number of unknown offenders due to a family cult who were committing crimes. An additional noticeable pattern is the drop in male offenders when female and unknown offenders increase. It means that the episodes are in a trade-off situation where there is only space for one gender of offenders. This does not mean that male and female offenders cannot operate together, but there would still be a situation where the offender must be classified as either male, female, or unknown.

When comparing *Criminal Minds*' demographics on offenders to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR), there are small differences in representations. The male offenders (Table 1) in *Criminal Minds* are 8% higher than the UCR and female offenders 9% higher which is double what is being reported nationally. Furthermore, these percentages indicated that there is a zero-sum situation where those who do not conform to gender binaries are excluded from the show. However, the relative similarity in offenders suggests that there may be some accuracy in offender portrayals in the show.

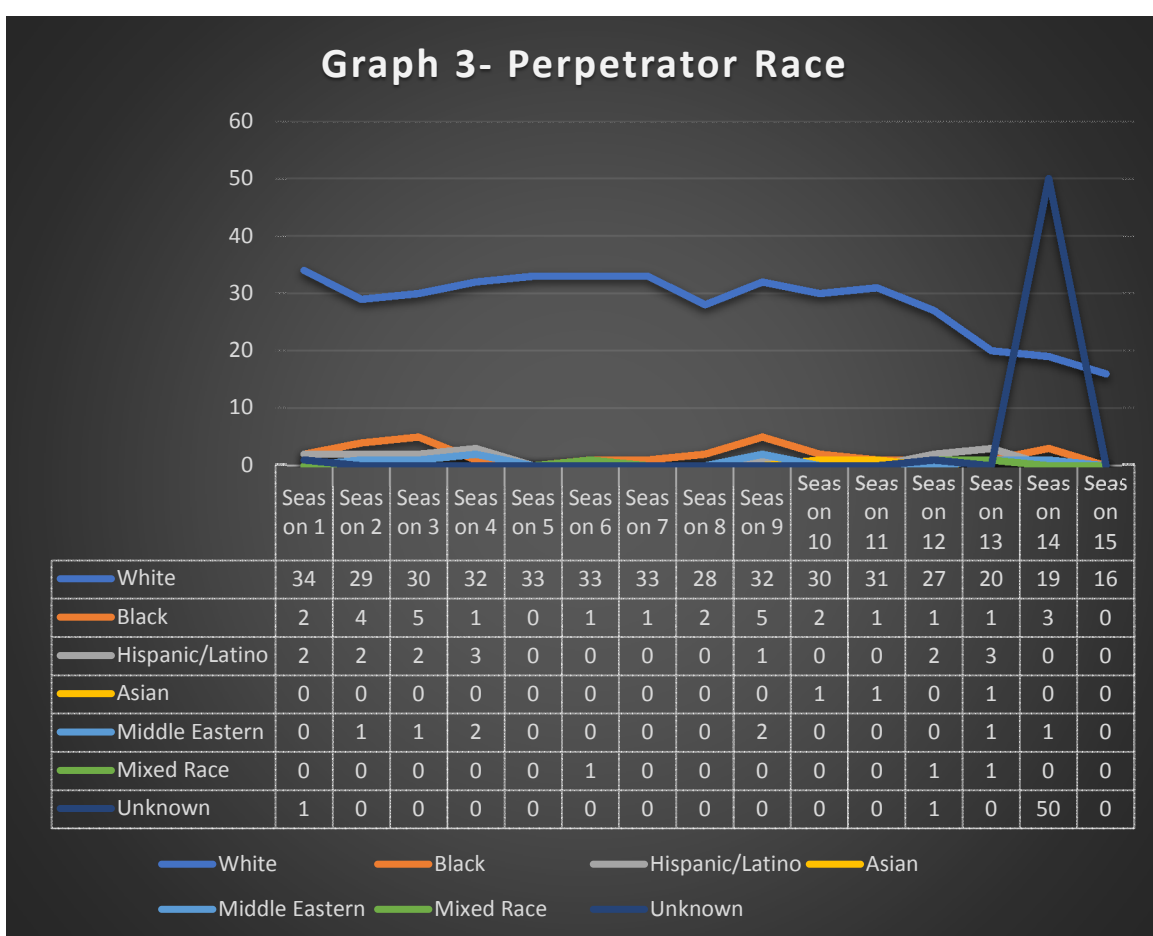
Table 1  
*UCR vs Criminal Minds Gender*

	Male Offenders	Female offenders	Male Victims	Female Victims
UCR	66%	7%	79%	21%
Criminal Minds	74%	16%	33.6%	41.1%

The most alarming differences in gender is with the victims. There are 45.4% fewer male victims in *Criminal Minds* than in the real world. Additionally, female victims in *Criminal Minds* are higher by 20.1% than the national average. This means that *Criminal Minds* is not portraying offender and victim races accurately when compared to the UCR. With the significant differences in victim gender, it is possible that the female victims are meant to elicit emotional responses or create sympathy for victims. Even though the high number of female victims and low number of male victims are deviations from reality, heavy viewers who are female may experience resonance with the victims which cultivates a mean world effect.

White offenders (Graph 3) totaled 424 (79.6%), Black offenders were 28 (5.3%), Hispanic/Latino totaled 15 (2.8%), there were 3 (.6%) Asian perpetrators, 8 (1.5%) were Middle

Eastern, 3 (.6%) were Mixed Race, and 53 (9.8%) Unknown. No Native American offenders were portrayed in the show. However, one was considered a suspect, but was able to prove his innocence and aid the BAU in their investigation. The average rate of change for White offenders was -1.2 per year and Black offenders fall an average of .133 per year. Again, season 14 had a higher number of unknown race offenders. On another note, the representations of White offenders drop in season 11 and continues to fall until the final season.



When discussing serial murders, it made sense to include actual Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) research. 100% of offenders recorded in their 2011 monograph were male. The exclusion

of female offenders was because they were very uncommon serial murderers and not reported as often (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). Therefore, *Criminal Minds* is not too far off from accurate depictions with 74% male and 16% female offenders even though the number of female offenders is still overrepresented when comparing the numbers to the BAU. With the accuracy issues in mind, it is possible that *Criminal Minds* is more inclusive than the real BAU because they portray female perpetrators.

Of the offenders in the race category, 74 were White females (13.9%), 350 were White males (65.7%), 7 were Black females (1.3%), Black males totaled 21 (3.9%), Hispanic/Latina totaled 3 (.56%), Hispanic/Latino totaled 12 (2.3%), 2 were Middle Eastern females (.37%), 6 were Middle Eastern males (1.1), there were 3 Asian males (.56%), 3 Mixed Race males (.56%), and 53 of unknown race (9.9%).

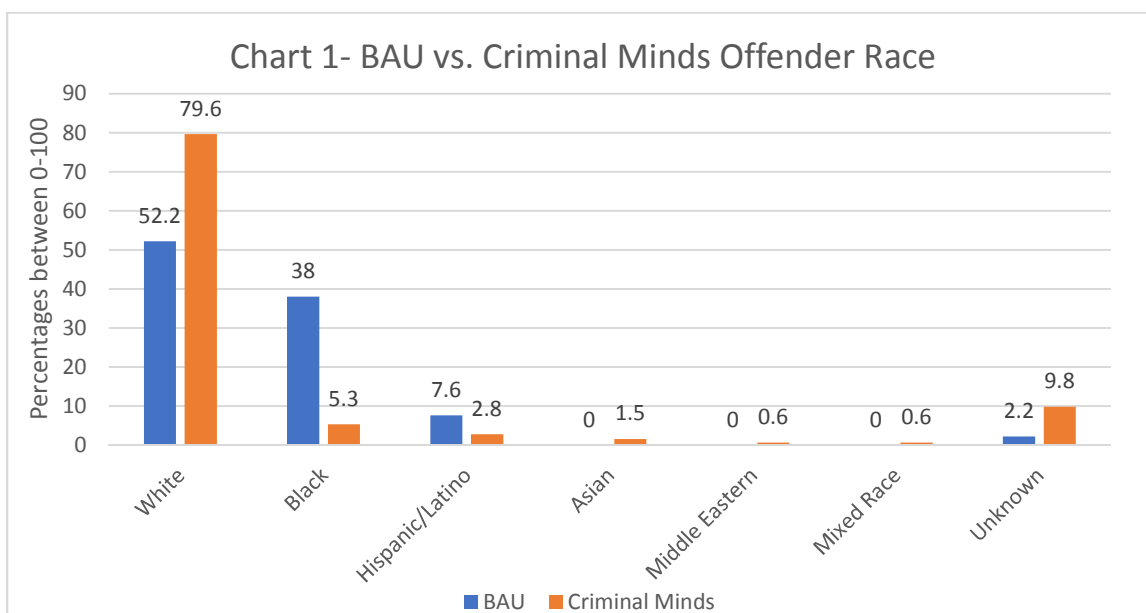
*Criminal Minds* is very different from the UCR in some parts, and accurate in others. Table 2 displays the perpetrators race. To begin with, *Criminal Minds* exaggerates White offenders compared to the UCR and underrepresents Black and Hispanic offenders. However, Asian and Middle Eastern offenders are minimally different which means they show somewhat accurately represents them. Yet, the Asian and Middle Eastern offenders are slightly higher on the show than in reality which may suggest that there is an unrealistic depiction of the two races as offenders.

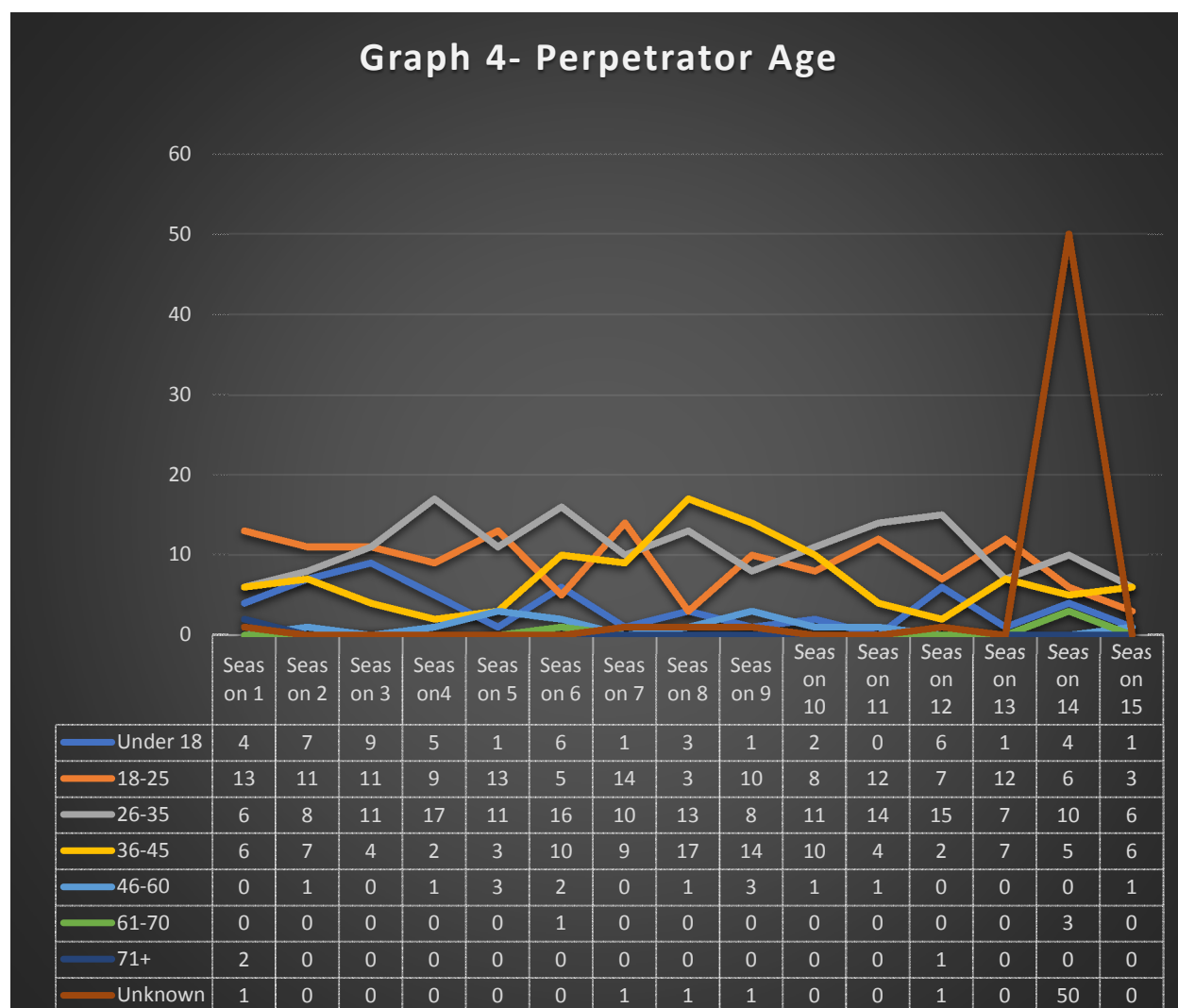
Table 2  
UCR vs. *Criminal Minds* Perpetrator Race

	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Asian	Middle Eastern
UCR	30%	39%	10%	1%	0
Criminal Minds	79.6%	5.3%	2.8%	1.5%	.6%



Differences in race are indicated in Chart 1. Comparing *Criminal Minds* to the BAU reports, White offenders are still overrepresented in the show. However, the BAU numbers are more accurate than the UCR numbers are in the White category when compared to *Criminal Minds*. Meaning, the BAU is similar to the show. Black offenders are also underrepresented in *Criminal Minds* compared to the BAU. Again, Asian offenders are higher in *Criminal Minds* than what has been reported by the BAU suggesting an unrealistic portrayal of minority offenders.

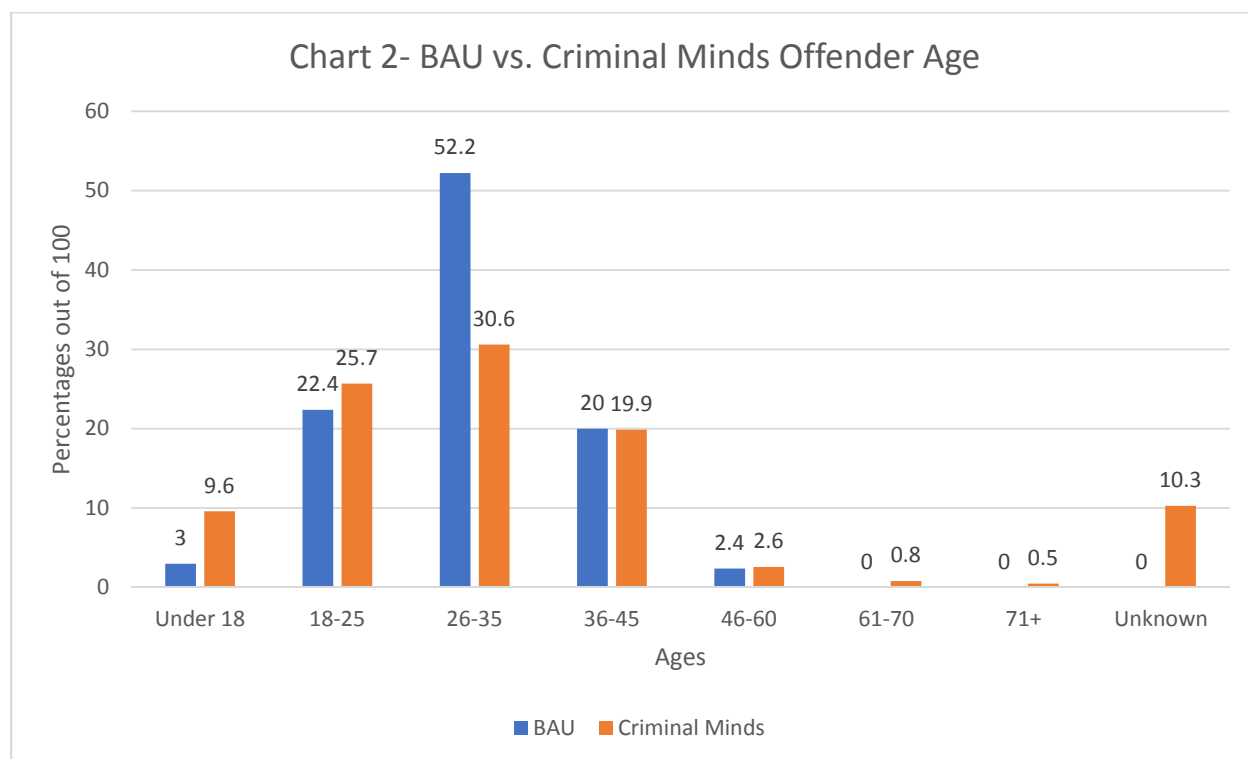




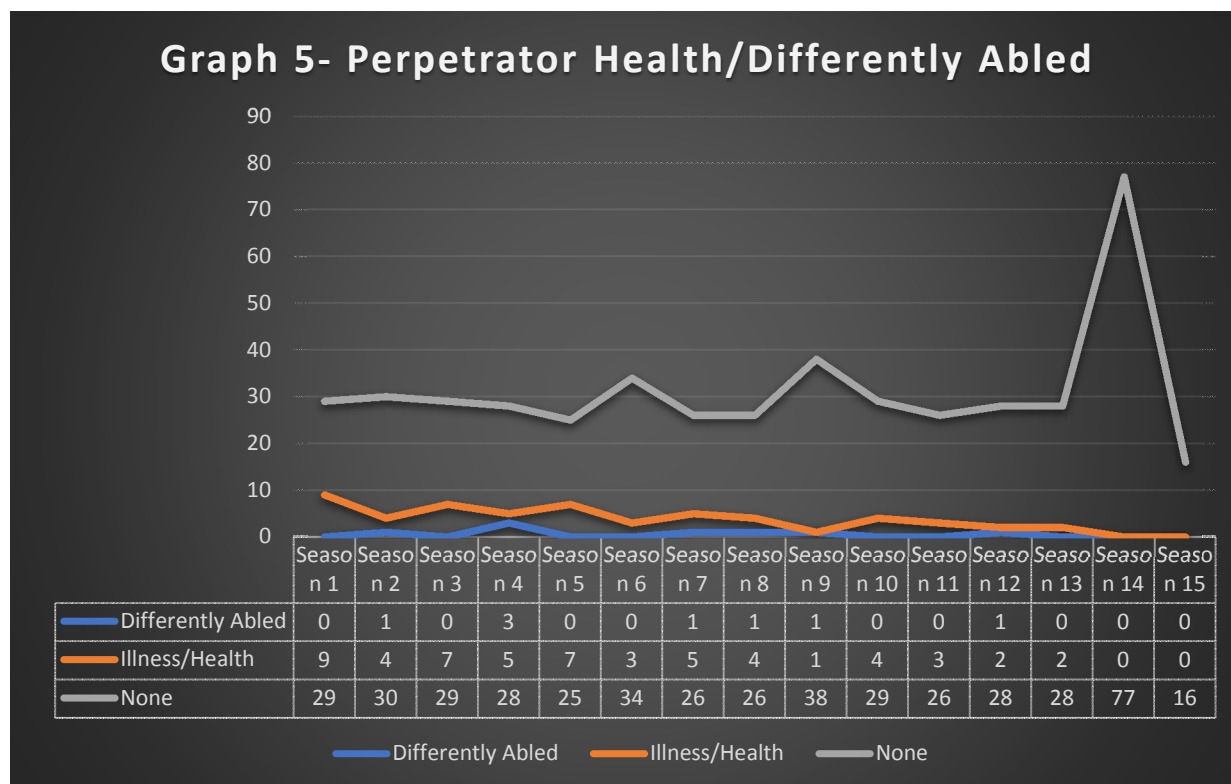
Perpetrator age (Graph 4) totaled 51 (9.6%) under 18 years old, 137 (25.7%) between the ages of 18 and 25, 163 (30.6%) were 26-35, 106 (19.9%) were 36-45, 14 (2.6%) were 46-60, 4 (.8%) were 61-70, the 71 and older range had 3 (.5%) offenders, and there were 55 (10.3%) of an unknown age. The average rate of changes was computed which found that the 18 and under category falls .2 per season, 18-25 falls .6 per season, 26-35 drops .1 per season, and 36-45 drops .07 per season. Most offenders tend to be 45 and under. Comparing the ages of offenders (Table 3) in the Uniform Crime Report to the ages in *Criminal Minds*, the ages are relatively similar. The two categories with the most differences are the 36-45 group and the unknown age group.

Table 3  
*UCR vs. Criminal Minds Offender Age*

	Under 18	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60	61-70	71+	Unknown
UCR	12%	20%	22%	7%	5%	2%	2%	30%
Criminal Minds	9.6%	25.7%	30.6%	19.9%	2.6%	.8%	.5%	10.3%



Above, chart 2 compares the BAU's findings of offender ages to *Criminal Minds'* representations of perpetrator ages. The groups that saw the highest differences were the 26-35 group which is a difference of 21.6%, unknown ages at 10.3%, and the under 18 group at 6.6%. The BAU reports more offenders in the 26-35 range and fewer offenders in the unknown and under 18 groups. Essentially, there is a likelihood that serial murderers will fall between the ages of 18-45 when comparing the BAU statistics to *Criminal Minds*.



Offenders with different physical abilities (Graph 5) totaled 8 (1.5%). These individuals tended to use wheelchairs, have missing limbs, or were Deaf. Illness and health issues totaled 56 (10.5%). These offenders had schizophrenia, cancer, dissociative identity disorder or heard voices. 469 (88%) had no ailments visible or discussed in the show. With the rate of change average, those with mental illness and other health issues fell .6 per season, differently abled individual representations drop .07 per season, and those with no ailments drop .87 per season. The Uniform Crime Report does not record offenders who are differently abled or have mental or physical health issues. However, the Behavioral Analysis Unit does record offenders who have been diagnosed with a mental illness. The BAU reports that 32.6% of offenders had been diagnosed with a mental disorder before the offense occurred, 42.9% of offenders had a personality disorder, 19% had a psychotic disorder, 11.9% had a developmental disorder, and

11.9% had a mood disorder (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011, p. 16). When compared to the number of mental health issues in *Criminal Minds*, the show is under representative of offenders with mental disorders.

There were 2,685 victims throughout the 15 years of *Criminal Minds*. Each perpetrator harmed an average of 5.038 victims. Thus, the final category for perpetrator statistics is the relationship (Graph 6) perpetrators have to the victim. 86 (3.2%) were family members, 20 (.7%) were lovers, 2,283 (85%) were strangers, 101 (3.8%) were friends, 56 (2%) were coworkers, 31 (1.2%) were classmates, 73 (2.7%) were general acquaintances, and 35 (1.3%) were some other sort of acquaintance or unknown. As graph 6 indicates, there was a drop in the number of stranger relationships over the fifteen-year period. This suggests that over time, the relationships between offender and victim were more likely to be general acquaintances, friends, or coworkers. In other words, the mean world syndrome may be more prevalent with stranger interactions, but as time passes in the show, there could be a slight increase of fear in heavy viewers where they think friends, coworkers, and general acquaintances could cause them harm.

When comparing the relationships (Table 4) present in *Criminal Minds* to the Uniform Crime Report, there are some noticeable differences. Again, the “strangers” category indicated an overrepresentation (by 75%) in *Criminal Minds* where the offender and victim do not know each other. The “unknown” group shows a 46.7% difference in representation with the UCR marks the unknown category much higher than *Criminal Minds*. What table 4 is suggesting, is that there are still offenders who have unknown relationships to the victims which means the relationship could exist or not. This decreases the realism levels in *Criminal Minds* when compared to the UCR because realistically, there might not be a clear definition of relationships between stranger and victim. More importantly, there is still a high number of stranger

relationships in *Criminal Minds* which perpetuates mean world expectations. Should heavy, mainstream viewers watch crime drama, there is a strong possibility for cultivating the mean world syndrome.

**Graph 6- Perpetrator Relationship to Victim**

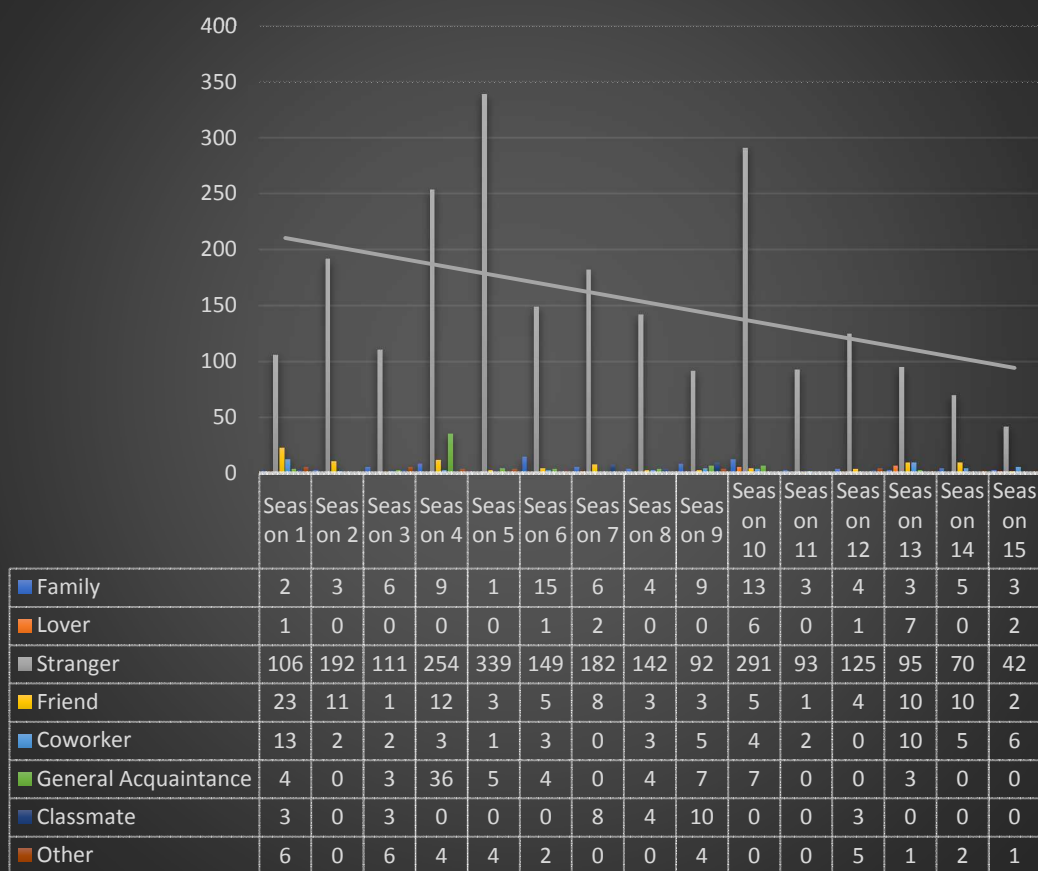


Table 4  
*UCR vs. Criminal Minds Relationships*

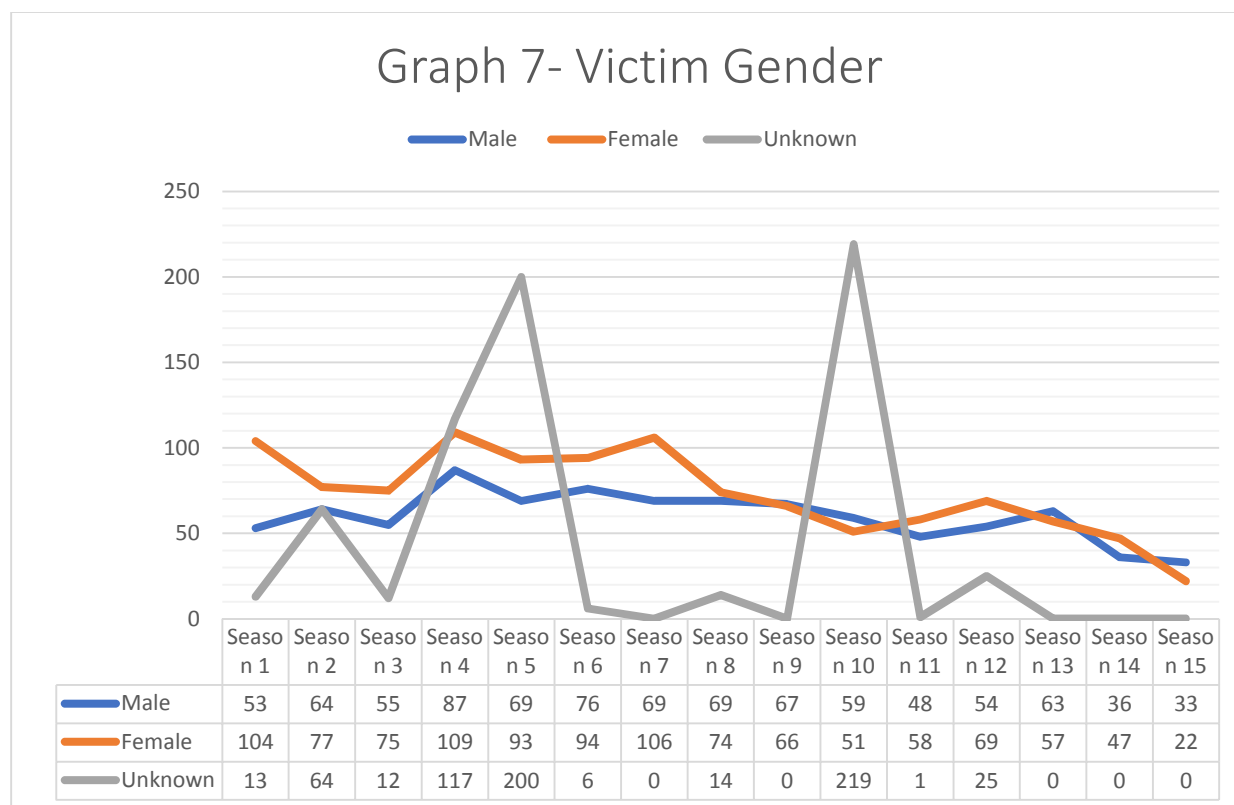
	Famil y	Lover s	Strange rs	Friend s	Coworke rs	Classmat es	General Acquaintanc es	Unknow n
UCR	9%	5%	10%	3%	0%	0%	13%	48%
Criminal Minds	3.2%	.7%	85%	3.8%	2%	1.2%	2.7%	1.3%

The BAU reported that offender and victim relationships are highest with the customer/client category at 41.5% (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). Strangers (31.5%), acquaintances (12.1), targeted strangers (11.7%), and unknown (1.9%) (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011) were the other categories used to describe relationships. The unknown category of *Criminal Minds* was very close to the BAU report with .6% being the difference. When the totals of family, lovers, friends, coworkers, classmates, and other general acquaintances are combined, the number is 13.6% which is 1.5% higher than the BAU. BAU's strangers and targeted strangers category totals 43.2% when combined. Because the category of customer/client was created for victims who are prostitutes and offenders who are clients which suggests a lack of known/long-term relationships, they can be combined with the stranger category to total 84.7%. This total is .3% lower than the *Criminal Minds* numbers suggesting that the show has similar representations in relationships compared to real BAU statistics.

### Part Three- Victim Statistics

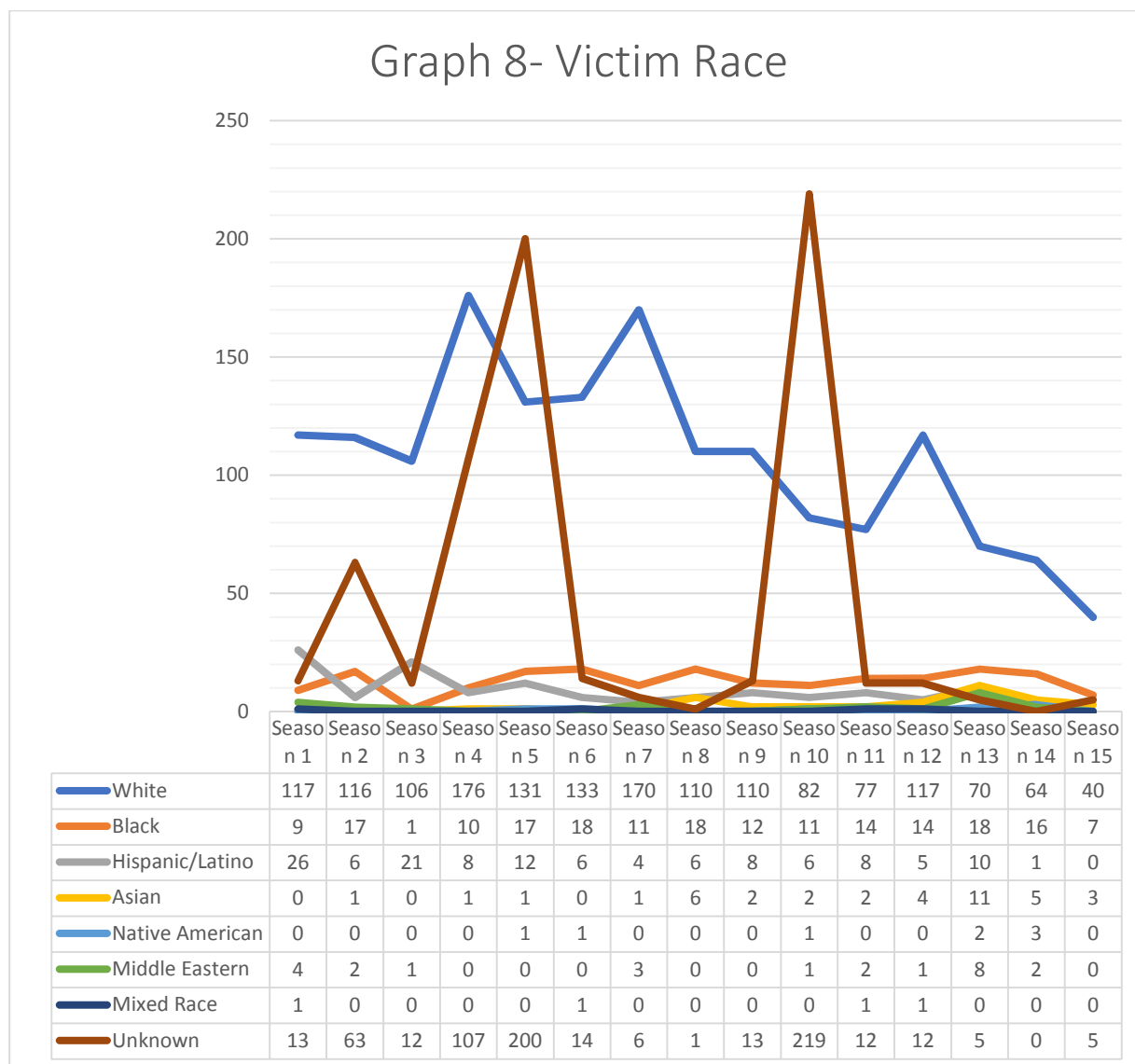
There were 2,685 victims over the 15-year tenure *Criminal Minds* had. Starting again with gender (Graph 7), male victims totaled 902 (33.6%), female victims were 1104 (41.1%), unknown victims were 679 (25.3%). There were no transgender and gender-neutral victims. Thus, there may be a trade-off like the one suggested by perpetrators. Observing graph 7, there are three times where male victims were more than females over the fifteen-year period which is

a small number. Additional similarities are the noticeable absence of minority groups like gender-neutral and Transfolk and the corresponding rise in unknown victims with male and female victims dipping. The average change in male victims dropped 1.33 per season, with female victims dropping 5.5 per season, and unknown gender victims falling .87 per season. Table 1 above notes the differences in victim gender compared to the Uniform Crime Report which suggested that female victims are overrepresented and male victims are underrepresented. However, the Behavioral Analysis Unit noted that female victims were 75.4% compared to male victims at 24.6% which suggests that the degree of realism in *Criminal Minds* is higher when compared to BAU statistics.





Race of the victim (Graph 8) included White with 1619 (60.3%), Black with 182 (6.8%), Hispanic/Latino 127 (4.7%), Middle Eastern 24 (.9%), Asian 39 (1.4%), Native American 8 (.4%), Mixed Race 4 (.1%), and unknown 682 (25.4%). Within the race category, there were 915 White females (34%) and 704 (26%) White males, 92 Black females (3.4%) and 90 (3.3%) Black males, 62 were Hispanic/Latina (2.3%) and 65 (2.4%) Hispanic/Latinos, 8 (.4%) female Middle Easterners and 16 (.6%) Middle Eastern males, 21 Asian females (.8%) and 18 Asian males (.7%), 8 Native American females (.4%), 4 (.1%) Mixed Race males, 682 unknown (25.4%). The rate of change for White victims decreased 5.1 per season, for Black victims the average fell .13 per season, Hispanic/Latinos fell 1.7 per season, Asian victims increased .2 per season, Native American representations fell .13 per season, Middle Eastern victims dropped .27 per season, Mixed Race victims also dropped .06 per season, and unknown victims fell .53 per season.



Graph 8 indicates a pattern with race where increases to minority races have a corresponding drop in White victims. Table 5 indicates the UCR versus *Criminal Minds* and their representations of victim race. *Criminal Minds* overrepresents White victims and underrepresents Black and Hispanic victims. While Asian and Middle Eastern victims are somewhat similar, the difference can still be observed.

Table 5  
*UCR vs. Criminal Minds Victim Race*

	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Asian	Middle Eastern
UCR	38%	38%	16%	2%	0
Criminal Minds	60.3%	6.8%	4.7%	1.4%	.9%

The racial breakdown for the BAU is 60% White, 29.8% Black, and 10% other (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011). Comparing the BAU's numbers to *Criminal Minds*, White victims are accurately represented while Black victims are vastly underrepresented. The other category (combining Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American, and unknown) totals 39.6% which was very high compared to the BAU's report.

Ages for the victims (Graph 9) 18 and under with 261 (9.7%), 18-25 with 564 (21%), 26-35 with 689 (25.7%), 36-45 with 545 (20.3%), 46-60 with 204 (7.6%), 60-70 with 30 (1.1%), 71+ with 6 (.2%), and 386 (14.4%) that were unknown. The patterns in Graph 9 indicated that most of the victims are 60 and under. The rate of change for the 18 and under and 18-25 categories indicated a decrease in 2.5 per season. The 26-35 category fell an average of 1 per season and the 36-45 category fell .9 per season. 46-60 age. range dropped an average of 1.1 per season and the 60-70 group increased an average of .07 per season. The 70+ category fell an average of .67 per season with the unknown category dropping .47 per season. Ages of the victims (Table 6) in *Criminal Minds* compared to the UCR are minimally different. The largest difference is in the "unknown" age group with 13.4% more in *Criminal Minds* than what is reported. Conversely, *Criminal Minds* has 10.4% fewer victims in the 46-60 age group than the UCR reports.

Graph 9- Victim Ages

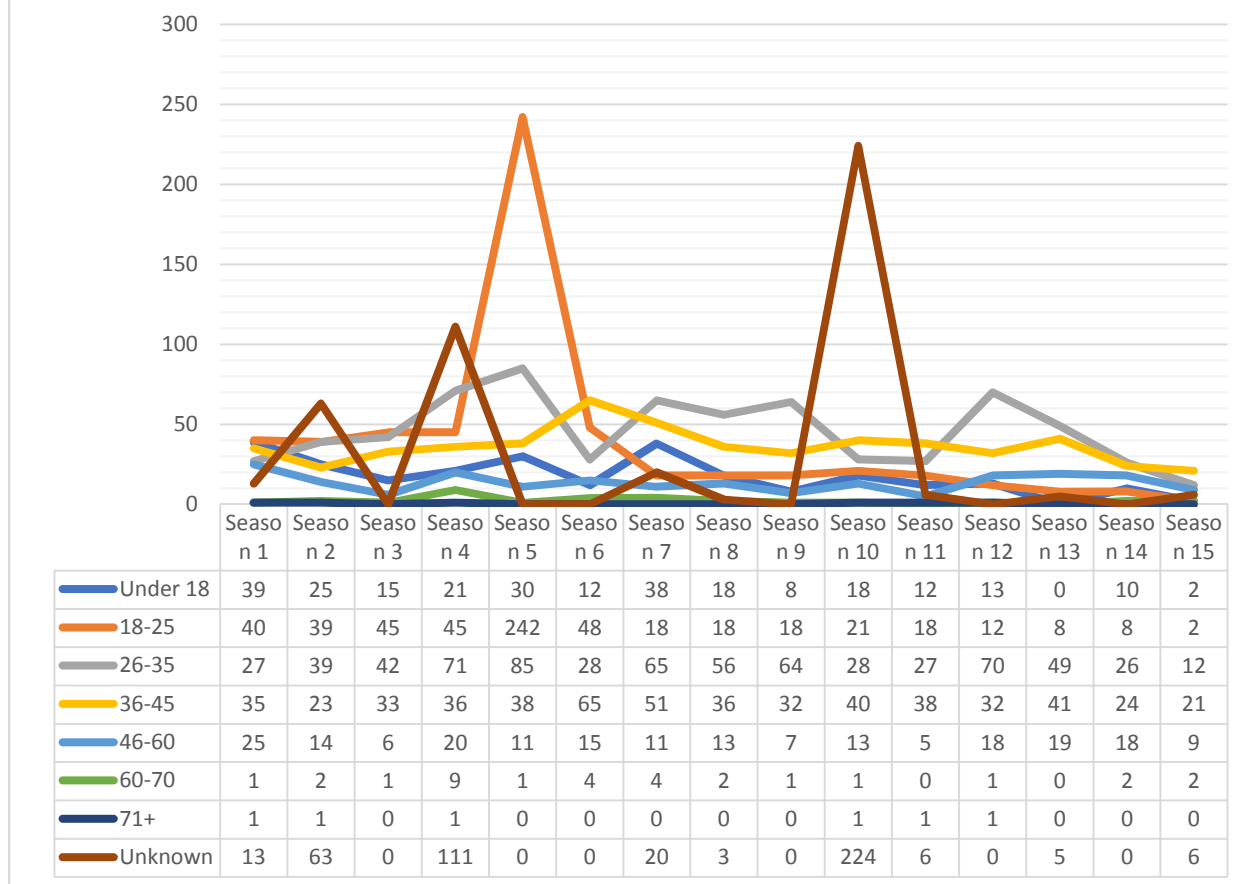
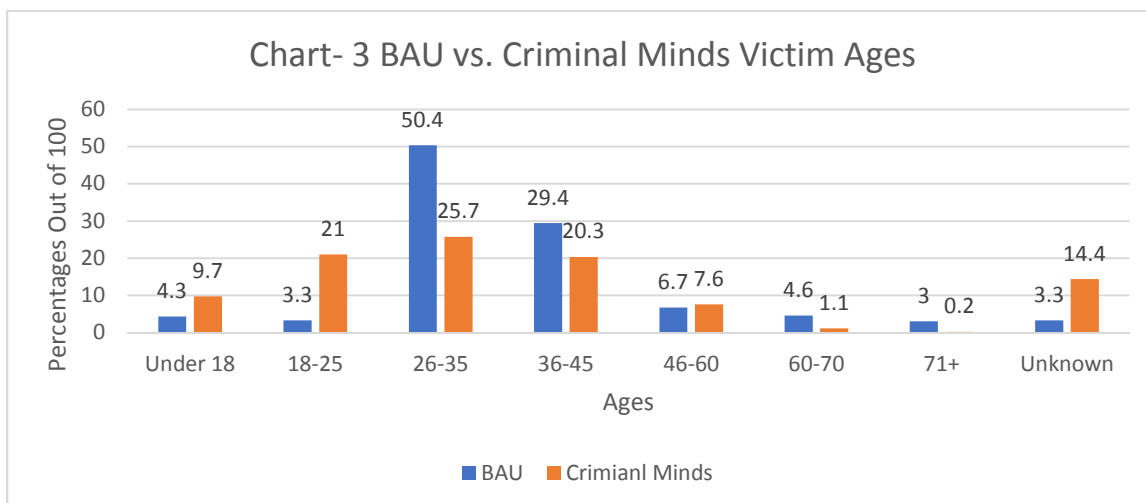


Table 6

*UCR vs. Criminal Minds Victim Age*

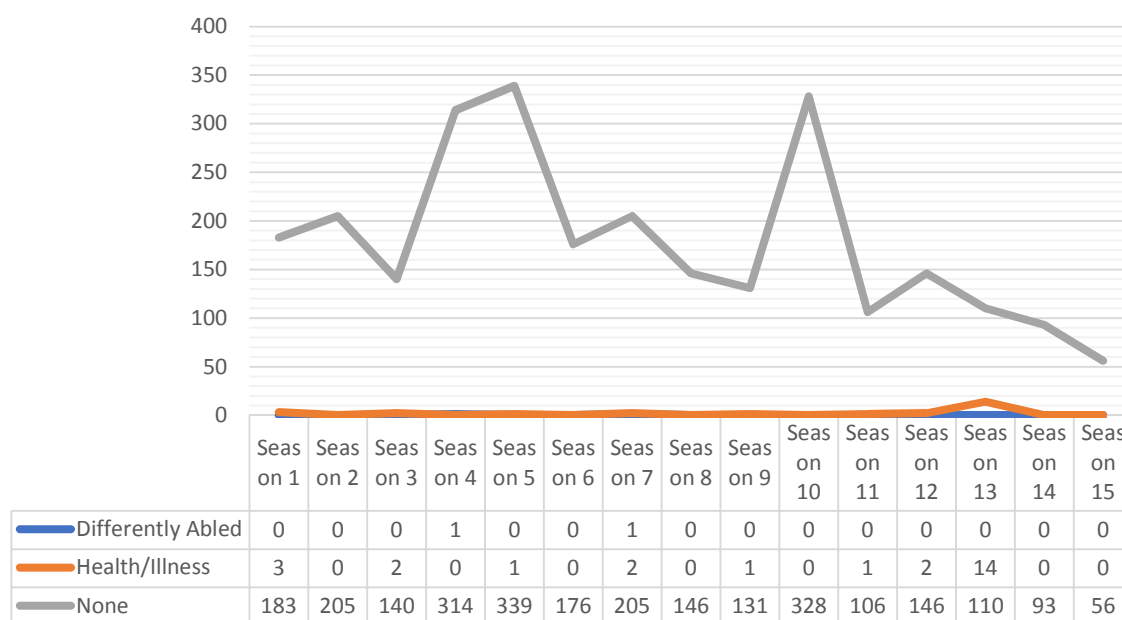
	Under 18	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60	60-70	70+	Unknown
UCR	13%	20%	19%	21%	18%	5%	3%	1%
Criminal Minds	9.7%	21%	25.7%	20.3%	7.6%	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>.2%</b>	<b>14.4%</b>

The BAU's statistics on ages of the victims were different in many of the categories. To begin with, the under 18 category has 5.4% less than what is depicted in *Criminal Minds*. 18-25 is 17.7% less, 26-35 is 24.7% higher, 36-45 is 9.1% higher, and the unknown group is 11.1% lower. The 46-71+ groups are relatively similar.



The final victim category is other identifiable factors (Graph 10). The victims who were differently abled made up .07% (2) of the total. Health issues and illnesses were .97% (26) of the total. The number of victims who had no ailments or physical differences were 2657 (98.96%). The health/illness rate of change showed a drop in .2 per season. The no ailments category fell 8.5 per season. The differently abled category saw no measurable rates of change because there were no significant findings.

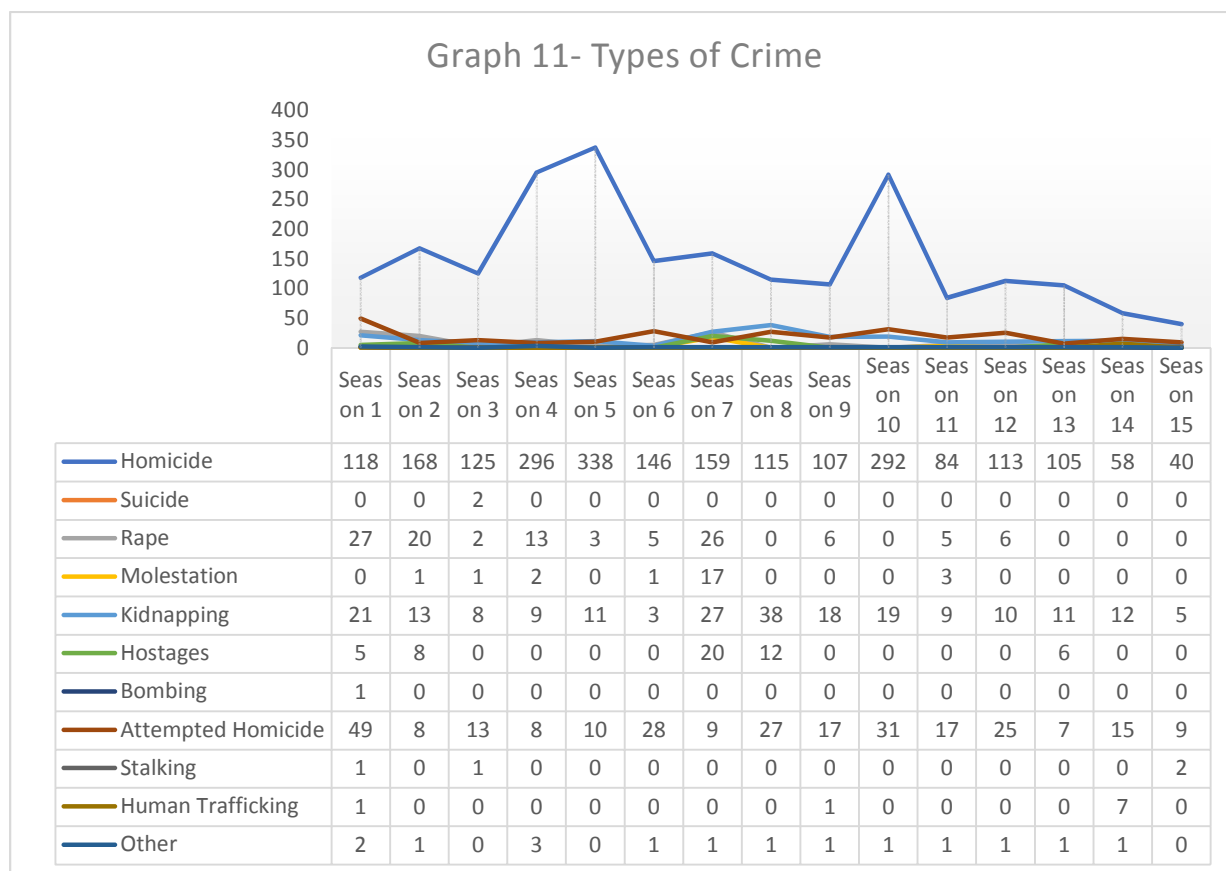
Graph 10- Other Identifiable Factors in Victims



#### Part Four- Types of Crime

Within the types of crime category, there were 11 possible criminal acts (Graph 11). The first is homicide followed by suicide, rape, molestation, kidnapping, hostage taking, bombing, attempted homicide, stalking, human trafficking, and other. Perpetrators can commit multiple acts of crime on a single victim. Thus, the total number of crimes were 2,971 with perpetrators committing 5.557 acts per offender. Homicide totaled 2264 (76%) with an average rate of change dropping 5.2 per season, suicide totaled 2 (07%) , 113 (3.8%) victims were raped and had a rate of change at -1.8 per season, 25 (.8%) were molested with a rate of change -.2 per season, 214 (7%) were kidnapped with a rate of change at -1.1 per season, 51 (1.7%) were taken hostage and had a decrease of .08 per season, there was 1 (.03%) bombing victim, 9 (.3%) were victims of human trafficking, there were 273 (9.2%) attempted homicides which also had an average

decrease of 2.7 per season, 4 (.1%) victims were stalked, and 15 (.5%) other crimes were committed.

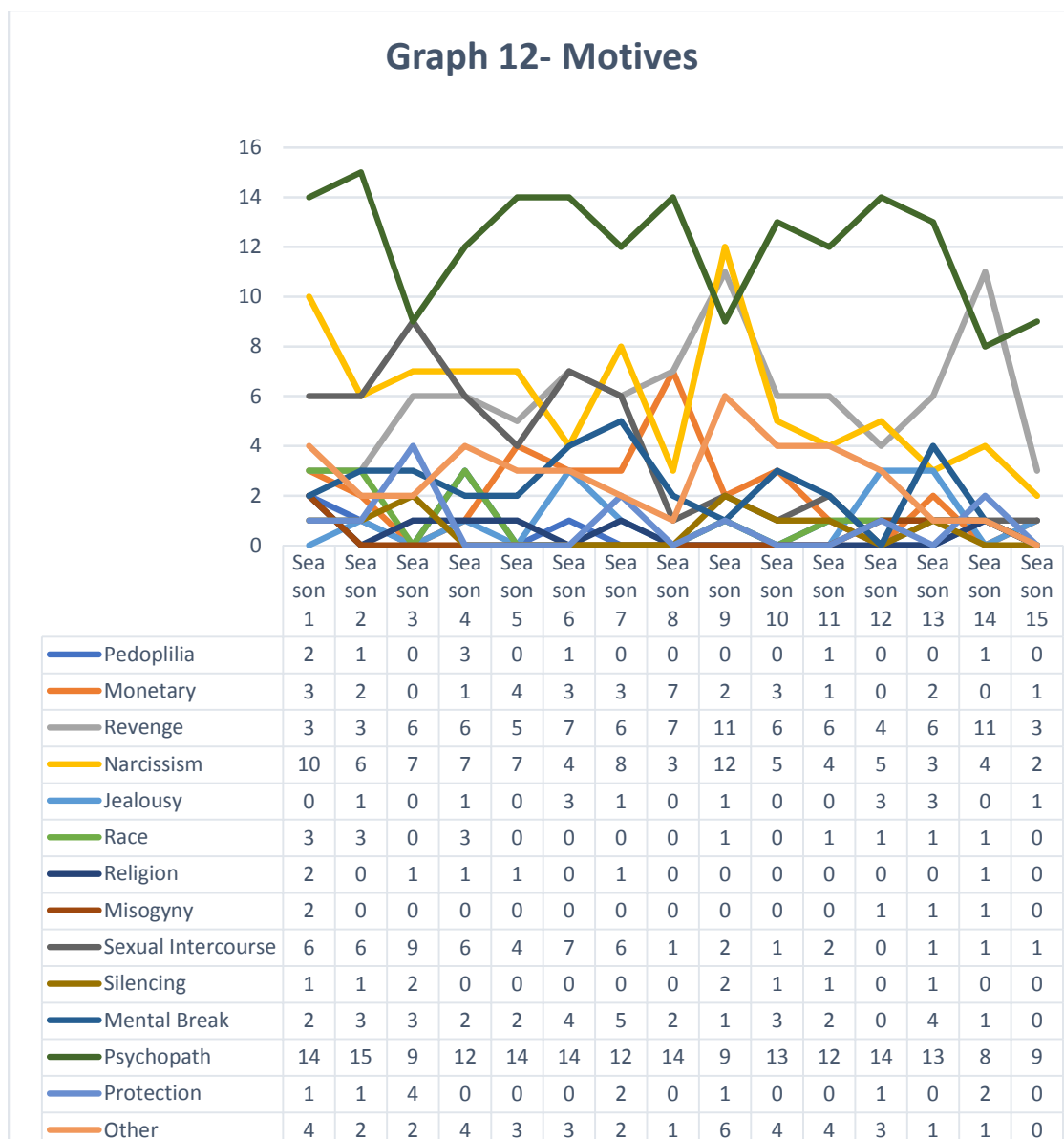


### Part Five- Motives

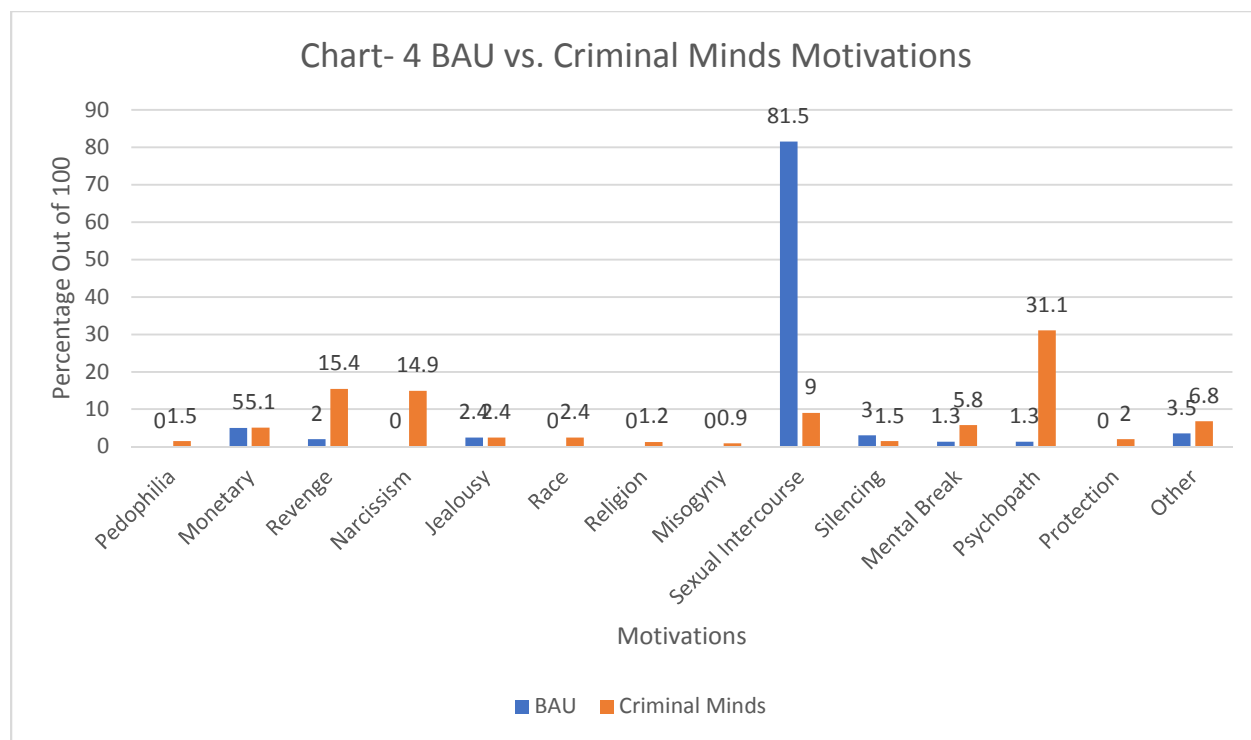
Much like acts of crime, offenders had multiple reasons for committing the crimes which meant that N=586 because each motive needed to be counted for accuracy. Motives (Graph 12) include pedophilia with 9 (1.5%), monetary gain with 30 (5.1%), revenge with 90 (15.4%), narcissism with 87 (14.9%), 14 (2.4%) cited jealousy as a reason, 14 (2.4%) also claimed racial motivations, 7 (1.2%) acts where religiously motivated, misogyny counted 5 (.9%), sexual intercourse totaled 53 (9%), silencing a witness was 9 (1.5%), 34 (5.8%) perpetrators had mental

breaks, 182 were psychopaths (31.1%), 12 (2%) wanted protection for themselves or their families, and 40 (6.8%) had other reasons such as sociopathology or no reason to commit the crime at all. Psychopaths were the highest motivation (Graph 12) which meant that the need to kill was driven by mental instability and/or lack of knowing right from wrong. These offenders were “need-driven” (CBS 2020) which means that the killings were compulsive versus a motivation like revenge which is passionate and emotional. Additionally, *Criminal Minds*’ stereotyping of mental issues cultivates a mean world syndrome in heavy viewers because it suggests those with mental health concerns could become violent.



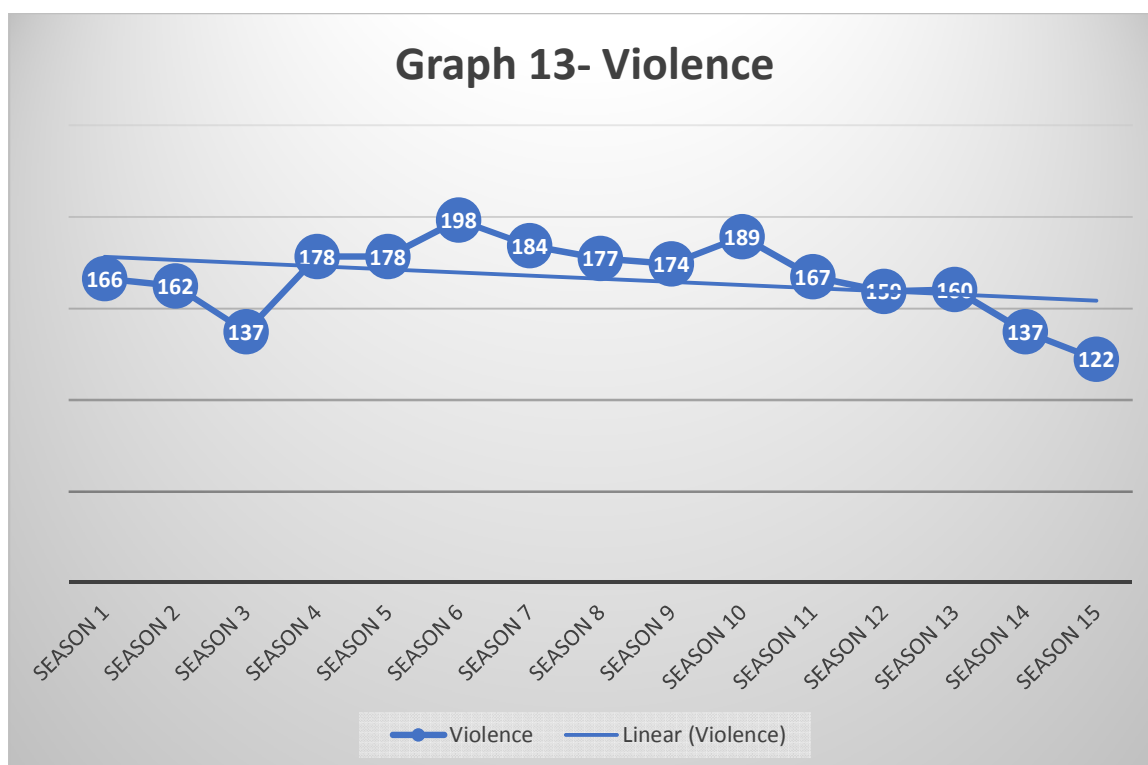


No motivations were recorded by the Uniform Crime Report, however, the Behavioral Analysis Unit does have the statistics reported. Sex was the top motivation with 81.5%, other had 5.6%, profit was 5%, unknown was 3.5%, anger was 3.1%, and mental illness was 1.3% (Morton, Tillman, & Gaines 2011, p. 18). These percentages of motivations were very different from *Criminal Minds* (Chart 4). For example, sexual intercourse is drastically different by 72.5%.



### Part Six- Violence

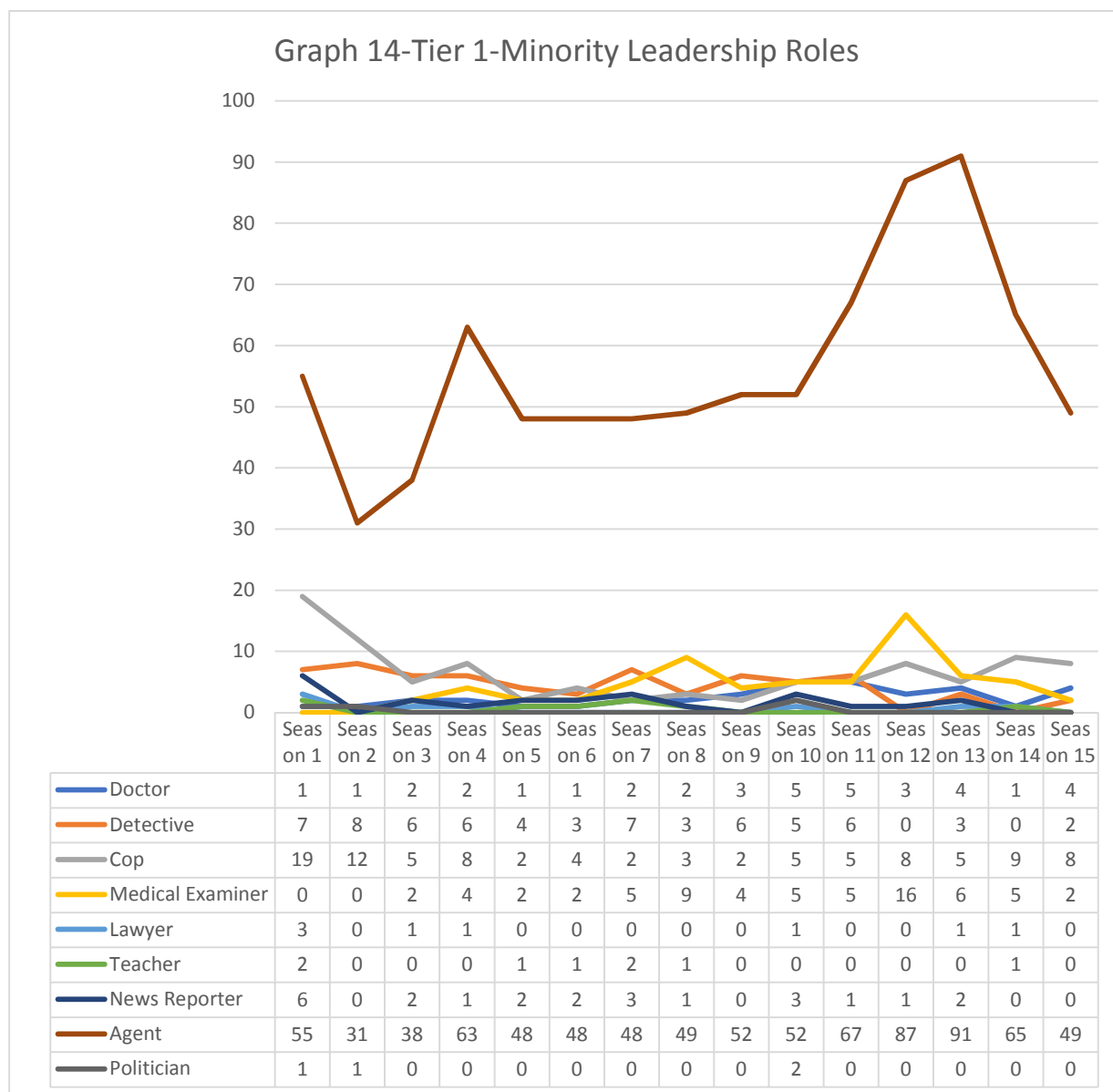
There were 2,488 acts of violence throughout the 15 seasons of *Criminal Minds* (Graph 13). The show averages 165.9 visible violent acts per season. Additionally, there were an average of 7.7 violent acts per episode (N=324) which is 1 act of violence for every 5 minutes and 32 seconds of each episode. The average rate of change was -2.9 per season. The trend line in Graph 13 indicates that there was a drop in violence shown in *Criminal Minds* as the seasons progress. This is important because the number of minority bodies observed in the show increases. In other words, the minority bodies are shown to be less violent than the previous White offenders.



### Part Seven- Minority Roles

Minority roles had positive and negative representations. Because victims and perpetrators who are minorities are counted in other categories, this part is based on roles where the minority was neither a victim nor a perpetrator. There are three tiers of minority roles: leadership, every day, and vice. Over the 15-year run that *Criminal Minds* had, 1,571 minority roles were depicted. Minority leadership (Graph 14) roles (1,154) as doctors were 37 (2.4%) with an average rate of change at an increase of .2 per season, detectives were 66 (4%) with a rate of change at -.3 per season, cops were 97 (6.2%) with a rate of change at -.73 per season, medical examiners totaled 67 (4.3%) and had an average rate of change with an increase at .13 per season, lawyers totaled 8 (.5%) with a rate of change at -.2 per season, teachers also had 8 (.5%) with a rate of change at -.13 per season, news reporters had 24 (1.5%) which had a

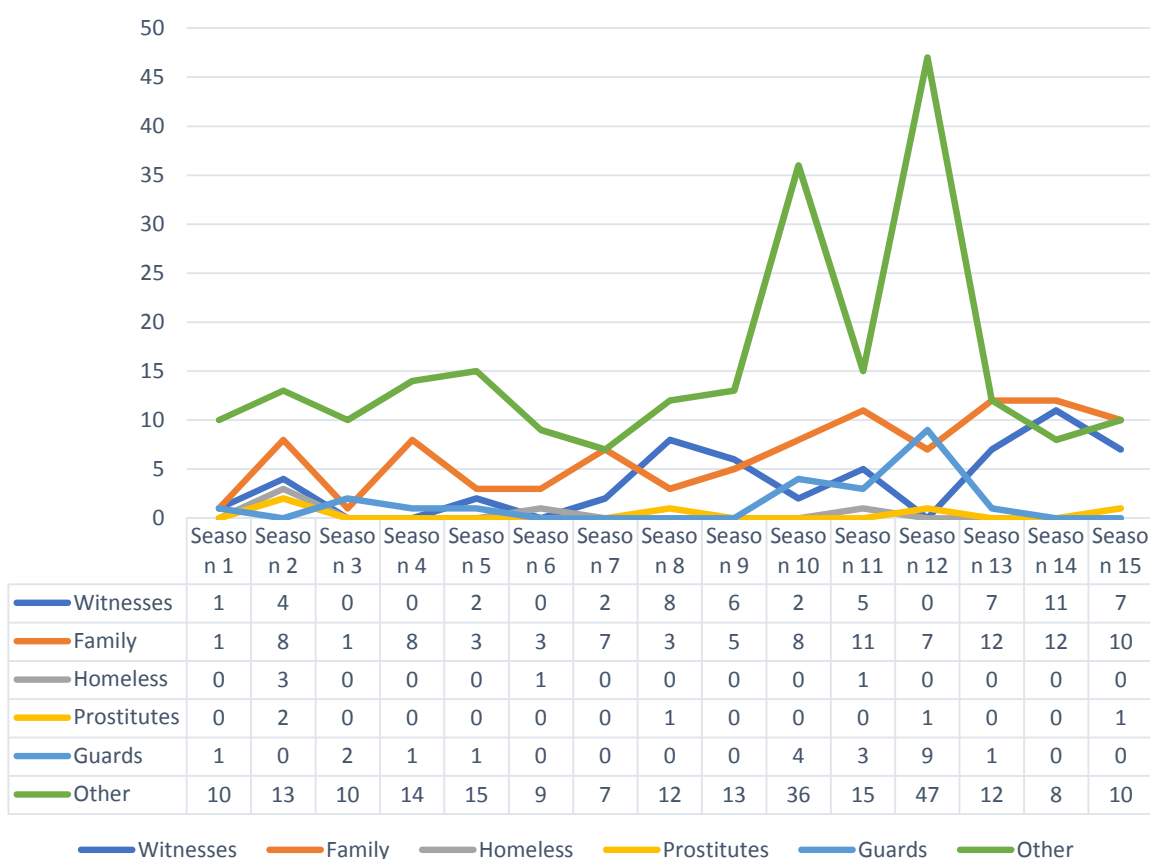
decrease of .3 per season, FBI agents present were 843 (53.7%) which also saw a rate of increase averaging 2.4 per season, politician 4 (.26%) with a rate of change averaging -.077 per season.



Of these roles, there were some FBI agents with reoccurring roles. Since every episode was counted, each episode they were present, their role was counted. The agent measurement is a key part of this section because these are the lead roles in the show. Agents are the ones

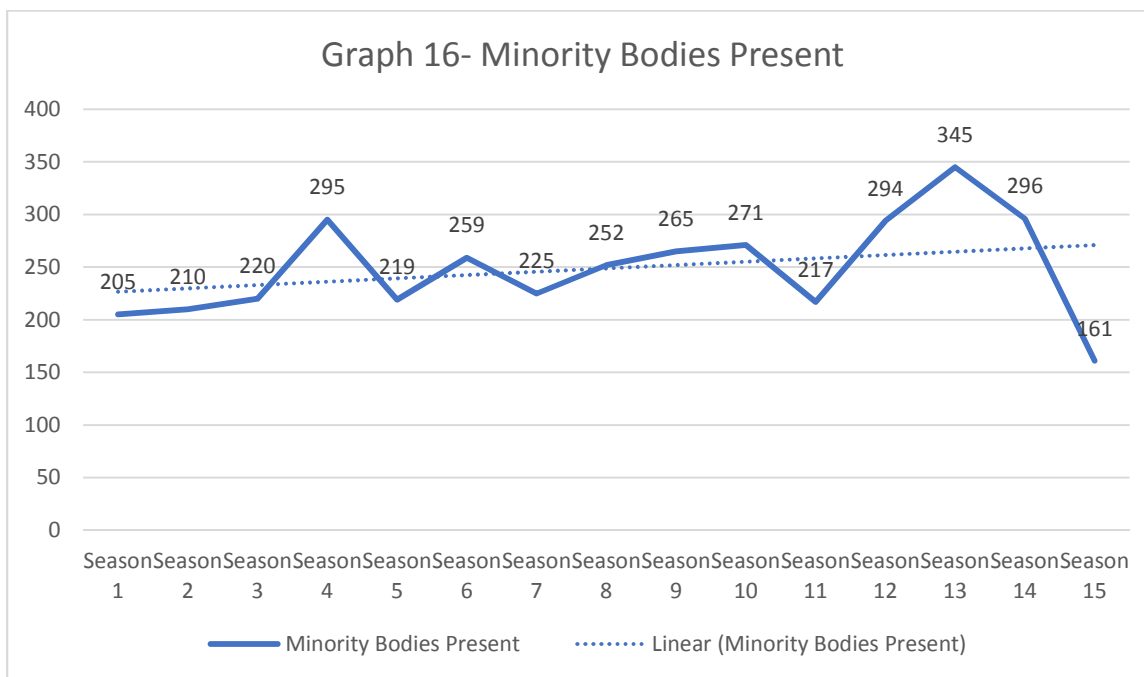
solving the crimes and, therefore, have the highest leadership roles. The second tier (Graph 15) of minority roles (407) included witnesses at 55 (3.5%) with an average rate of change increasing .4 per season, family at 99 (6.3%) with an average increase of .6 per season, guards at 22 (1.4%) with a rate of change at a loss of -.07 per season, and other (military, friends, employee/employers) at 231(14.7%) with an average increase at .15 per season. The final tier (included in Graph 16) of minority roles (10) are homeless 5 (.32%) with an average rate of change dropping -.23 per season and prostitutes 5 (.32%) with an increase of .06 per season.

**Graph 15- Second and Third Tier of Minority Roles**



## Part Eight- Minority Bodies

The total number of minority bodies present was 3,734 (Graph 16). Of the bodies present on *Criminal Minds* only 42% had speaking roles. The average rate of change was an increase of 6.1 per season.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

*“Yeah, why is it that neither of those points of view surprise me?”*  
 -Emily Prentiss, 3:6 “About Face”

### Research Question 1

The first research question *To what extent does Criminal Minds portray crime accurately when compared to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Report?* has a two part answer. First, offender and victim races overly represent White offenders and victims while underrepresenting other races. While minority groups are not portrayed as offenders often, they are also largely ignored as victims. This mean that *Criminal Minds* perpetuates stereotypes because the show does not consider minorities to be victims, unless they are women. Additionally, the show cultivates a mean world syndrome where White women should be afraid of men because men are far more likely to commit murder. Therefore, if women are heavy viewers, they will likely absorb the mainstream view that the show cultivates.

Ages of offenders and victims were relatively similar in that they stereotype which group is more likely to be violent. For example, most offenders in *Criminal Minds* are in the 25-35-year-old group. This stereotypes younger individuals to be more violent.

Second, crime rate statistics with the Uniform Crime Report are significantly higher and tend to be in the 380-480 per 100,00 people (UCR 2020). This makes crime rate comparisons very difficult because incidents can be in the tens of thousands. Therefore, crime rates are not accurately portrayed in *Criminal Minds* when comparing them to the Uniform Crime Report because the crimes in the show are under reported. After all, *Criminal Minds* has a limited amount of time in each episode to focus on crimes committed which means the types of crimes cannot be compared to the UCR’s extensive database.

Even though comparisons are difficult, the question of cultivating the mean world syndrome still exists. Knowing the rate of crime in reality versus the fictional portrayal of crime on *Criminal Minds* supports cultivation of the mean world syndrome. However, the crimes are not comparable, only the victims and the offenders are. This means that any instance of mean-world syndrome being cultivated would be based on viewers that perceive themselves as possible victims and who those viewers believed would be more likely to harm them. Meaning heavy viewers who watch the show over the fifteen-year period would embrace the mainstream values and stereotypes. Therefore, cultivating stereotypes looks like this: the offender would be a White male, between the ages of 26-35, and a stranger to the victim who is most likely a White female also between the ages of 26-35. In reality, the offender may be a Black male of an unknown age and unknown relationship to the victim who may be a White or Black male between the ages of 36-45. When observing the two “most likely” scenarios, the messages coming from *Criminal Minds* are not supported by the Uniform Crime Report because they are not realistic and do not reflect real world crime.

### **Research Question 2**

After questioning the differences of the Uniform Crime Report to *Criminal Minds* and noting that there are major issues, it would seem logical to ask *To what extent does Criminal Minds portray crime accurately when compared to the Federal Bureau of Investigation Behavioral Analysis Unit’s report on serial murder?* Much like the Uniform Crime Report, there are noticeable differences. One of those differences is motivation for the crime. *Criminal Minds* placed their main motive on psychopathy with just over 30%. However, the BAU reports that over 80% of serial murders are sexually motivated. This finding suggests that *Criminal Minds* negatively stereotypes individuals with mental health issues. Gender portrayals in



*Criminal Minds* was not too far off from reality. The BAU study had 100% male offenders while the show only had 74%. These numbers may seem significantly different, but they are not because female offenders are acknowledged by the BAU, however, being under reported causes studies to ignore female offenders. Therefore, the show was more accurate than the BAU report when offender gender is the subject because it acknowledged women offenders.

Offender race was almost exact with White representation, yet minority representations are skewed. Black and Hispanic/Latino offenders are underrepresented in *Criminal Minds* while other races such as Asians and Middle Easterners are overrepresented. This finding is problematic because it perpetuates the stereotype that Middle Easterners and Asians are violent, possibly even terrorists based on the description from a few episodes.

Given the reports from the BAU, *Criminal Minds* is cultivating a mean world syndrome based on crime statistics and how the viewer perceives the world around them. For example, the *Criminal Minds* profile is the same as above: the offender would be a White male, between the ages of 26-35, and a stranger to the victim who is most likely a White female also between the ages of 26-35. And the BAU profile: the offender is likely to be a White male, 26-35 years old, and a stranger to the victim who is most likely to be a White female also between the ages of 26-35. Thus, knowledge of serial murder statistics would likely create a resonance effect where the viewer perceives *Criminal Minds* to be highly realistic or enough to believe the numbers and portrayals of crime are correct. However, these types of crime are not common and still create a mean world syndrome where heavy viewers perceive serial killers to be everywhere.

It should be noted that one of the writers and producers of the show is Jim Clemente who worked as a Supervisory Special Agent with the BAU for 22 years. In the season 11 DVD extras, Clemente stated, "The fact that I get to use my experience in the FBI to actually teach

people through the entertainment modality of a great successful CBS crime series, I think it's just wonderful. We're teaching them information that can actually save their lives" (CBS 2020).

Additionally, Robert 'Roy' Hazelwood who is the Senior VP for Academy Group Inc. and former FBI criminal profiler with the BAU noted, "I have watched *Criminal Minds*. I was struck by the reality, by how close to reality this particular show was" (CBS 2020). Essentially, real profilers believe the show is close to the truth and one of them wrote episodes based on his personal experience with cases. In other words, the writers and messages of the show are telling the viewers that the show is realistic and warns of a mean world. Consequently, it is safe to conclude that *Criminal Minds*' goal is to create fear by cultivating the mean world syndrome based on stereotypes.

### **Research Question 3**

*To what extent do minority group representations change over time in Criminal Minds?* offers an understanding of how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is being represented in the show. To begin with, minority bodies seemed like they were included with 3,734 present in the show over the 15 years. However, the lack of speaking roles tells a different story.

*Criminal Minds* began in 2005 with minimal speaking roles for minority groups. No medical examiners were minorities for two years, very few minority doctors were represented, family members, and witnesses were limited. However, as time went on, there were increases in FBI agents, doctors, medical examiners, family members, and witnesses. Of the FBI agents, there were an average of seven team members per season.

In the first season, there were only two agents of color. By the 15<sup>th</sup> season, there were four. Derek, Elle, Rossi, Tara, Stephen, Luke, and Matt represent a diverse cast, Derek is a mixed race male (Black/White), Elle is Cuban, Rossi is Italian, Tara and Stephen are Black, Luke is

Hispanic, and Matt is Korean. Essentially, leadership roles are present for minority groups who are people of color. There are only two women in the real BAU (CBS 2005-2020) which means that the female roles of JJ, Penelope, Emily, Ashley, Tara, Alex, Kate, and Elle depict a more diverse BAU than reality. This is positive for women because they can vision themselves as agents, technical analysis, communication liaisons, psychologists, linguists, and team leaders.

While these minority representations are positive, there are negative sides that need to be mentioned. Mental and physical health are underrepresented. There are no leadership roles for those who are physically disabled. One female was Deaf in the entire 15 years of the show and her role was to stock books in a library. There were two people with hearing issues that were offenders and two people wheelchair bound that were also offenders. Mental illness is another underrepresented group. There were no leadership roles for those with a mental illness. At one point, Dr. Reid thought he might have schizophrenia, but that was proven to be untrue. Mental health was not discussed much in the show, aside from offenders having mental illnesses. A few times, agents had to go through therapy to release tensions, but it was mentioned in passing or on screen for no more than three minutes. In fact, during an episode where Prentiss had her last visit with her therapist (and the only visit shown on screen), made it seem okay to lie to the therapist in order to go back to work. She told her therapist about new relationships (she did not have any) and that she was sleeping fine (she had nightmares). When Aaron (the Section Chief) read the report, he noted that she was lying, but did not have her return to therapy. Instead he said he did not care what Emily told her therapist, only that she let him know when she was having a bad day (7:12 Unknown Subject). Thus, space does not exist for positive representations for mental health. Instead, having a physical or mental difference meant the individual was more likely to be violent.

Critically, this means the show is perpetuating biases where differently abled individuals and those with mental illnesses were to be feared or ignored. This cultivation effect might be extremely harmful in heavy viewers who absorb this mainstream view because the show is suggesting that viewers who have mental health concerns should stay silent. The show is essentially cultivating a fear of mental illness and physical disability by telling the audience that if they have these issues, they are likely to be considered violent by those without mental and physical issues. Heavy viewers might not open up to their doctors or family members about depression or other mental health concerns if they believe there is no space for them in the real world which is viewed through the lens of *Criminal Minds*.

When Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are added to the mix, there is a positive amount of diversity where women are considered leaders and the same could be said for people of color. However, equity is at a negative when the number of minority voices compared to the number of bodies in the show were less than half. This statistic suggests an element of silencing unless the role the minority has is an agent. Inclusion is also negative for support because there were no transgender or gender-neutral roles aside from one (offender who was transgender). Additionally, leadership roles do not make space for those who are differently abled and/or have a mental ailment. Therefore, the show does not improve with minority roles overall because of these significant exclusions.

### **Key Findings and Implications**

Based on the findings suggested by the research questions, there are five key findings and implications. First, realism is high for some of the findings which means *Criminal Minds* attempts represent accurate depictions of serial murders. For example, the episodes released per month have themes based on holidays that take place during those months. There are

Valentine's Day discussions, Halloween costumes and spring break themes. These monthly themes play on resonance with heavy viewers because they would recognize typical behaviors during the months (like shopping for presents around Christmas). Thus, the show can suggest that there is a certain expectation of violence during specific seasons which increases a mean world effect. However, crime rates have fallen 51% within the last twenty years (Gramlich 2019). This suggests audiences who are long-time heavy viewers will absorb the perception of increasing violence and believe in a mean world. These findings support previous research on cultivation theory by implying that exposure to heavy viewers will cultivated a shared perception of reality.

Furthermore, there is a high level of realism when comparing the show to the Behavioral Analysis Units statistics. Implications include the perception that the show is not exaggerating specific victim genders and races. Instead, heavy viewers would perceive the show to be completely accurate which means they may empathize with the victim or the perpetrator. Therefore, fear of violence would increase in heavy viewers after watching *Criminal Minds* for an extended period. Conversely, the show is not accurate when compared to the Uniform Crime Report's statistics which suggests the types of crimes committed in the show are not typical of real-world crime. Hence, the show's portrayal of victims is problematic because it creates a victim-type where specific races and genders are depicted. For example, heavy viewers would expect to see White females victimized on their screens and may believe that many victims in the real world are also White females. If the heavy viewers are White females, resonance and empathy would increase because they see themselves as possible victims. As a result, these viewers would be more likely to view the world as a dangerous place.

Additionally, Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan (2002) noted that the more people watch television, the less selective they are in what messages they are exposed to because recurring features of television are in all types of programming (p. 45). Therefore, the second finding is that the results support previous research in cultivation theory. Because patterns are recurring in other television programs, audiences do not need to narrow their viewing to *Criminal Minds* for exposure to harmful stereotypes. This connection between *Criminal Minds* and consistent themes suggests that all crime dramas perpetuate stereotypes, biases, racism, and misogyny. Because audience members watch *Criminal Minds*, they are more likely to absorb the mainstream beliefs of violence. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan (2002) noted that patterns could be recognized across many types of programming including the news and cooking shows. The current research offers findings to support Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan's by discovering that even in a program which attempts to be as realistic as possible (based on BAU-4's research and cases), there are still stereotypes.

Third, there are some issues in the way violence is portrayed. As noted, there was a great deal of violence in each episode. One of the main issues found is the drop in sexual assault discourse. There was a noticeable drop in sexual assault discussions toward the final seasons where previously there was support for victims and survivors. There are only 17 rape crimes in seasons eight through the finale compared to seasons one through seven which had 96. Given the rise of the #MeToo movement, the lack of discourse surrounding support for sexual assault victims and survivors is appalling and suggestive of victim erasure. If mean-world increases the more a heavy viewer watches the show, it may be possible that certain types of crime are

perceived to drop while others increase (drop in rape versus rises in murder). Thus, there may be a silencing and erasure effect that should be studied further.

The next key finding deals with the patterns between victims and offenders. Notably, there is a tradeoff between genders as victims and offenders. Increases to female offenders means a drop in male offenders. With heavy viewers, there may be a cultivation of false dichotomies where females take the place of males meaning males no longer have access to representation if females increase representation. This is problematic because it could lead to a rise in misogyny and create more fear in women.

Additionally, there are spikes in unknown races, genders, and ages of offenders that takes place in season 14 which did not occur in previous seasons. These spikes of unknown offenders coincide with drops of known offenders which suggested that offenders are becoming smarter and more difficult to identify over time. This finding supports previous research that argues identity of criminals matters because the unknown factor increases fear. It means that the offenders could be anyone. Furthermore, the same could be said for the victims. Not knowing who the victims are could mean heavy viewers are confronted with the uncertainty of future interactions with people they do not know supporting a mean world effect.

Finally, there are some implications with representations of minority bodies that must be discussed. As mentioned before, female representations are depicted as trading off with male representations. When Agent Hotchner leaves the BAU, Agent Prentiss takes his place as the leader. While this change in leadership is positive, there are still noticeable absences of Transgender and Non-binary people. There are no leadership roles for those who do not conform to male or female identities which means there is a lack of inclusion in *Criminal Minds* for them. Additionally, having space for only male or female leadership roles prevents diverse approaches

to crime and types of crimes committed. For example, there are no cases where Transgender bodies are victims and only one where the offender was a Transgender male to female. This means the show is not diverse where gender is concerned which mainstreams the notion that gender nonconforming individuals have no space in the real world.

Furthermore, there are few roles for minorities, unless they are agents which saw significant increases toward the last season. In the beginning seasons of the show, there were more law enforcement officers who were Black or Hispanic, but those numbers dropped toward the final seasons. However, there were more roles as agents, medical examiners, and doctors which means the distribution of prominent roles for minority races increased. Unfortunately, the representations are still not enough due to the lack of speaking roles minority races have. Without speaking roles, voices are not heard which means there is a lack of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for minorities overall.

Lastly, mental health did not have positive representations. For mental health, there is a significant correlation between offenders and mental issues which suggests that those who have mental health issues could become violent. While this is not the case across the board with individuals who have mental health concerns, it does support the Behavioral Analysis Units report that 32.6% of offenders have mental health issues and have been diagnosed with a disorder. Implications could include fear of those with mental health issues and the perception that having a mental health diagnosis means the individual is likely to be violent.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this research. First, the Uniform Crime Report's statistics are vast which means that the Excel sheet provided takes a long time to interpret 15 years' worth of data. When the data does come through, some of it is missing because the original reports do



not count certain attributes. For example, there are no statistics on health when crime is discussed. Even though the data is extensive, not all law enforcement agencies report data to the UCR. For this reason, real world data is incomplete and should be revisited every couple of years. Furthermore, crime rates have dropped in the past twenty years which suggests that accurate data should be preferred.

Second, the data from the Behavioral Analysis Unit is approximately 10 years old and finding data that was newer proved to be difficult. This limits the fact checking by a few years. With that in mind, the BAU's data is empirical and based on 30 years' worth of serial murders. However, it does not reflect local crime statistics. BAU-4's research is limited to serial killers which are very rare. Thus, the falling crime in local regions coupled with the rare occurrences of serial killing suggests more data is necessary for accuracy of real world crime.

### **Future Research**

Future research should not use the UCR. First, the data is too much as stated above. Second, the program is becoming obsolete in 2021 and is being replaced by a new program that has more law enforcement agencies reporting.

Additionally, future research should observe discourse on sexual assault to uncover possible erasure of victims. Because *Criminal Minds* reduces discourse, there may be a trend in other crime drama where victims, survivors, and the willingness to believe them are absent. Furthermore, this research could include questions of misogyny and false tradeoffs. With drops in portrayals of sexual assault support and female offender representations increasing, there could be a rise in misogyny in heavy viewers.

Other research should compare longitudinal studies where all episodes are counted. For example, including another show such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* could make up for

some of the gaps in data or be closer in statistics to the UCR. Adding other shows in their complete form to the scholarship could offer better pictures of what cultivation theory look like as a whole. Additionally, different types of programming (such as cooking shows, news, home improvement, and comedy) should be used to highlight the recurring patterns and stereotypes in television. Furthermore, these studies should include DEI tools to describe which shows, or even genres, are more diverse, inclusive, and equitable than others.

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## APPENDIX: CODE SHEET

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Series \_\_\_\_\_ Episode \_\_\_\_\_ Original Release Date \_\_\_\_\_

**A. Perpetrator:**

1. Gender: a. Male                      b. Female                      c. Transgender                      d. Gender Neutral  
e. Unknown                      f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Race: a. White      b. Black                      c. Hispanic/Latino                      d. Asian  
e. Native American      f. Middle Eastern                      g. Mixed Race                      h. Unknown  
i. Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Approximate age: a. Under 18 years old                      b. 18-25                      c. 26-35  
d. 36-45                      e. 46-60                      f. 61-70                      g. 71 and older                      h. Unknown
4. Other identifiable factors:  
a. Differently Abled \_\_\_\_\_                      b. Illness/Health \_\_\_\_\_                      c. None
5. Relationship to victim: a. Family                      b. Lover                      c. Stranger                      d. Friend  
e. Coworker                      f. General Acquaintance                      g. Classmate                      h. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Victim:**

1. Gender: a. Male                      b. Female                      c. Transgender                      d. Gender Neutral  
e. Unknown                      f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Race: a. White      b. Black                      c. Hispanic/Latino                      d. Asian  
e. Native American      f. Middle Eastern                      g. Mixed Race                      h. Unknown  
i. Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Approximate age: a. Under 18 years old                      b. 18-25                      c. 26-35  
d. 36-45                      e. 46-60                      f. 61-70                      g. 71 and older                      h. Unknown
4. Other identifiable factors:

a. Differently Abled \_\_\_\_\_ b. Illness/Health \_\_\_\_\_ c. None

**C. Type of Crime:**

- |               |                       |                 |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Homicide   | 2. Suicide            | 3. Rape         | 4. Molestation        |
| 5. Kidnapping | 6. Hostage            | 7. Bombing      | 8. Attempted Homicide |
| 9. Stalker    | 10. Human Trafficking | 11. Other _____ |                       |

**D. Motives for the Crime:**

- |                      |                             |                  |               |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Pedophilia        | 2. Monetary                 | 3. Revenge       | 4. Narcissism |
| 5. Jealousy          | 6. Religious                | 7. Race          | 8. Misogyny   |
| 9. Sex (intercourse) | 10. Silencing Someone       | 11. Mental Break |               |
| 12. Psychotic        | 13. Protection/self-defense | 14. Other _____  |               |

**E. Tally violence (infliction of pain, bodily harm) shown.**

**F. Minority leadership roles:**

- |                    |                  |              |                     |           |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1. Doctor          | 2. Detective     | 3. Cop       | 4. Medical Examiner | 5. Lawyer |
| 6. Teacher         | 7. News Reporter | 8. FBI Agent | 9. Politician       |           |
| 10. Witness        | 11. Family       | 12. Homeless | 13. Prostitute      |           |
| 14. Security Guard | 15. Other _____  |              |                     |           |

**G. Tally the number of minority bodies where present in the show.**