

Thematic Analysis of Criminal Justice Professionals on Criminal Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Within this qualitative thematic analysis of professionals in the field of criminal justice, there is an emphasis on how multiple perspectives are an important factor to consider when understanding what aspects contribute to criminal behavior. It explores continuous misinterpretations of crime within the media, primarily regarding genetics and how prevalent serial murder truly is in society. The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: How do professionals in and adjacent to the field of criminal justice in the United States perceive representations of criminal behavior in the media? Through semi-structured interviews with 4 participants with a profession in criminal justice within the United States, it enables for an in-depth analysis of personal experiences with crime. This study mainly focuses on discussing thematic connections between participants and how their respective occupations have impacted their viewpoints, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these common misconceptions in media are formed.

INTRODUCTION

Within current society, there is an ongoing misconception of how criminal behavior is formed and its aspects, primarily with true crime enthusiasts. Despite the fact that criminal behavior is full of complexities and is not fully understood, it has held many inaccurate depictions within the media through misleading notions such as MAOA gene (see Appendix A) being referred to as the “murder” gene. Criminal behavior is generally defined as a complex phenomenon that incorporates the intertwining of social, environmental, and genetic predispositions. However, it is commonly misunderstood as only being genetically predisposed (see Appendix A) rather than being conditioned through external circumstances or exposures within adulthood. Criminal behavior, as a result, is often viewed as having one singular explanation that justifies all scenarios involving violent crime. Yet, this viewpoint of the phenomenon tends to overlook the possibility of other explanations that could explain the origin of different crimes. For instance, some people believe that criminals are born with similar family structures or hold the same tendencies which is why they act out in a certain way. Others may disagree with this idea and think that crime is directly influenced by others via social interactions and associations. As previously stated, the MAOA-L gene is commonly linked to an increased violent activity in males and antisocial personality

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disorder which can be perceived as a reason for why people become criminals (Parshley, 2016; McSwiggan et al., 2017). Social and environmental factors (see Appendix A) that come into play may stem from histories of family violence, childhood neglect, and even financial struggles that contributed to an individual's upbringing (Denno, 2006; Ferguson, 2010). Often the interlinkage of social and environmental factors can be seen with genetics as they all serve different functionings within an individual's behavior, with one typically overpowering the other in certain situations.

Despite this, individuals are more likely to believe that they are born to do crime, rather than it being influenced by the incorporation of other factors such as dysfunctional families or exposure to violence and drugs at a young age. Criminology studies conducted within the 19th and 20th centuries have negatively contributed to this concept by simplifying the complexity of criminal behavior. This has directly led to inaccurate theories identifying potential criminals through physical characteristics, making certain individuals more susceptible to discrimination (Bedoya & Portnoy, 2022; Nickerson, 2023). In order to solve this issue of inaccuracies, the perfect idea would be to explore multiple perspectives on crime. Instead of limiting the origins of criminal behavior to one singular explanation, having the mindsets of different people who deal with crime on a daily basis will provide sufficient information. A thematic analysis of professionals within the field of criminal justice will allow for a more in-depth analysis of perspectives on criminal behavior. Through this, perspectives can be compared to see whether or not certain concepts align with each other. This will reflect both the current understanding of crime factors but also showcase the different cultural backgrounds and its influence on the opinions of participants.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The main purpose of this thematic analysis is to provide an in-depth understanding of the different perspectives from professionals in the field of criminal justice on how they interpret the factors that contribute to criminal behavior. Through the usage of virtual interviews, it will allow for a better concept of criminal behavior amongst the general public offering the opportunity to dispel misleading notions within the media. Furthermore, through identifying similar perspectives of participants and their certain beliefs it can showcase how much personal backgrounds can influence perceptions of phenomena such as crime. In order to accurately evaluate this issue, the question that will be explored throughout this research paper is: How do professionals in and adjacent to the field of criminal justice in the United States perceive representations of criminal behavior in the media?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within earlier studies of the 19th century, a common assumption that was made is crime being a born phenomenon rather than being influenced within development. For instance, the findings of Caspi et al. (2002) demonstrated the likelihood for boys to result in erratic behaviors as a result of being abused as a child. However, it is still placed into question how the onset of criminal behaviors arose since the strong linkage between low MAOA activity and severe maltreatment in childhood does not prove a causal

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relationship for criminal behavior in adulthood. Consequently, studies such as Caspi et al. (2002) have directly led to the modern view of the MAOA-L gene being a sole indicator of someone's capability of engaging in violent criminal activity just because it is genetically predisposed. Jeffery (1959) discusses how current misconceptions in modern-day media are a consequence of those earlier studies, suggesting that the theory of criminal behavior is not a theory of crime. With this statement, it is being stated that despite there being overly generalized explanations for crime in these theories, criminal behavior is rather complex and cannot be applied to every criminal. Bedoya & Portnoy (2022) provide a sufficient example of Jeffery (1959)'s argument regarding inaccuracy by analyzing the work of Cesare Lombroso, an Italian physician who popularized the "biosocial theory of crime". Lombroso was heavily influenced by figures such as Charles Darwin, Franz Gall, and Paul Broca, who explored the relations of human evolution and certain skull structures of the body. This had further perpetuated his major theory of criminals having certain "atavistic" or ancient features by providing anatomical evidence of evolutionary features (Bedoya & Portnoy, 2022). He essentially viewed crime as being based on appearance and held the belief of certain physical features being inferior to society. Lombroso's theory inevitably reinforced the idea of eugenics (see Appendix A), creating a discriminatory view of what forms a criminal rather than accounting for other factors (Donohue, 2022). Lombroso's work received criticism from other theorists such as Charles Goring, who believed that crime cannot be identified through features and that his method was "insufficient" (Bedoya & Portnoy, 2022).

Despite the common idea of crime being physically identifiable in previous theories, newer studies have presented the suggestion of genes and environmental factors being interlinked. A tested hypothesis within the field of behavioral genetic studies is that criminal tendencies are heavily influenced by family dynamics. Denno (2006) explores the trial of Stephen Mobley, a convicted murderer who was genetically tested in court. His results had revealed that his family members shared the same mental disorders as him which opened the discussion of whether genetics play a role in crime. In addition, Baker & Raine (2006) discuss the association between genes and environment, as mental disorders such as antisocial personality can be inherited from family members. This is significant because it proposes the complexity of criminal behavior and how there are several considerations that come into play when determining the reasoning behind criminal acts. It holds an importance to the field of criminology because it explores how others interpret the development of criminals and how aspects of their lives can lead to certain behaviors or actions. While Baker & Raine (2006) discuss how upbringing can directly influence how crime is committed, Sutherland (1947) argues how environment is not always the case when it comes to crime, focusing on the idea of upper class citizens being more likely to violate the law despite their resources and stable lives. This source places into perspective the theory of crime, defining criminology as analyzing the interactions between societal perceptions and criminal behavior. It is worth noting that the study of criminology arises from the common curiosity of the mindsets behind the perpetrator and understanding how personal attributes can cause these behaviors to happen. Crime, which is defined as certain acts that are "undesirable" by society, can often have different treatments by society depending on the contextualization. For instance, when analyzing crime it is important to recognize the conditions of criminal law, the causes of the crime, and how the crime was controlled (Sutherland 1947). It directly proposes another idea of crime being a learned phenomenon rather than being an inheritance or environmental influence.

Nickerson (2023) also discusses the work of Cesare Lombroso, similarly to Bedoya & Portnoy (2022) but focuses primarily on how misleading theories such as Lombroso's can lead to consequences within legal court cases. As many courts do not have a proper way to deal with mental illnesses that are genetically predisposed, it makes it harder figuring out how to deal with those circumstances. Morse (2011) argues that mental disorders are already difficult to define under the court of law and that causation does not equal compulsion. In other words, even if a person's genetic history is examined, it does not completely excuse them from the crime they had committed. Despite various research within the field of neuroscience, it is not entirely clear whether genetic evidence will help the case or worsen it. Sabatello & Appelbaum (2017) support Morse (2011)'s claim of causation by discussing how using genetic testing can likely reduce sentences and heavily influence the outcome of the trial, disregarding the severity of the crime committed. Nevertheless, there still remains an unclear correlation between genes and crime, making it more difficult to make use of genetic evidence in court cases (Appelbaum, 2018). Genetic evidence is proposed in court serving as an opportunity to further explain the reasoning behind a crime, but can often be seen detrimental because it can appear to be excusing the actions made. It remains controversial due to its mixed opinions on whether it is suitable or convincing in the court of law.

METHODS

The approach used in this qualitative study is reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). RTA is mainly used to derive meaning from data, aiming to form theme-based connections amongst participants (Atkinson, 2017). Founded by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, RTA was created to allow for more flexibility in qualitative research, having no set restrictions to how information is analyzed. Whether that is through having an inductive or deductive orientation and choosing to use latent or semantic encoding, researchers are able to elaborate on their previous assumptions of their study with transparency (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2019). Using another method, such as grounded theory, would not give the same flexibility and would be too difficult to scale as it requires extensive time to formulate a theoretical framework. Current social science researchers utilize thematic analysis by interpreting the transcriptions of multiple participants in order to analyze similarities and differences within their responses and develop meaning within them. RTA is appropriate to use for this study because it utilizes a deductive approach, initially focusing on earlier theories in the field of criminology and wanting to develop a deeper understanding of how misconceptions have formed in the media. By being able to analyze the responses of participants, it makes use of a latent approach in order to dive deeper into the perspectives and how the meaning of each statement corresponds with previous knowledge. The overall goal of this research study is to examine how the backgrounds and personal experiences of participants influence their perception of criminal behavior, which is why thematic analysis offers the most effective way of establishing an answer to the research question. The aim is to use thematic analysis with a constructivist view, allowing the discussion to be constructed around the data provided from participants rather than previous knowledge.

The first step involved in Braun and Clarke (2019)'s thematic analysis is familiarisation with the data. This typically involves looking through the interview transcripts of each participant and seeing any

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similar patterns of emotional responses or expressions in language. For instance, a participant using the same phrase consistently to reinforce their ideas could be potentially noted. It allows for a baseline understanding of the participant's viewpoint without finalizing any themes, allowing for a smoother transition into the next step. The second step is generating initial codes; an example of this would be using words like "uncertainty" or phrases such as "feeling helpful" to describe each emotion evoked by the participants individually. To identify these codes in correspondence with the transcript, the statements by the participant are highlighted in the same color as the code. The third step is searching for themes which is when the researcher begins to look deeper into the codes assigned to each participant and seeing similar phrases or expressions between each transcript. An example of this would be seeing whether the participants share a similar uncertainty and how that may reflect their understanding of criminal behavior in relation to their discipline. The fourth step is reviewing themes, which is essentially seeing whether the themes generated from the codes are in alignment with the data collection or if they should be removed. This is an important step because it focuses on identifying what themes are weak and whether the paper would seem stronger without them. The fifth step in thematic analysis is defining and naming the themes previously generated. This involves providing a definition that outlines the purpose of the theme and what the title means in a simpler explanation. Additionally, the name should be able to portray the theme in a way that is easy to read and captures the overall concept that will be discussed later in the paper. The sixth step is producing the report, which is being able to explain the themes developed and how they correlate with the research question. It provides analysis of the themes and how participants' perspectives differed with the usage of careful interpretation of quotes from the data collection.

Researcher's Role

As the researcher, my role in this study was to allow for my participants to express their opinions freely without feeling constricted to a particular viewpoint. I reassured the participants that they're allowed to speak their mind and gave follow up questions asking about their own experiences. I understood how personal some of the questions would sound, so I made sure to clarify that the participants can share what they feel comfortable with and can choose not to answer if desired. To make sure this was possible, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews to allow for more flexibility in responses. My initial assumptions regarding this study were that the participants would be against the media's claims based on the pre-existing arguments on how the media portrays crime. Due to my curiosity, I wanted to gain more insight on how certain theories are formed and understand how current professionals in the field have dealt with similar views within their own personal experiences. When creating codes for each participant, I honed in on their emotions expressed throughout certain questions, focusing on whether they felt enjoyment or helpful contributing to their communities. Because of this idea in mind, my themes were centered more around their own attributes such as family structures, dislikes, mental health, and lenses on crime. All of these themes were created with the thought of the participants' own emotions and cultural backgrounds.

Ethical Procedures

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Before conducting the interviews, the research study went through an institutional review board process and was approved as minimal risk to the participants. The questions asked are not meant to cause harm to the professions of the participants and rather ask base-level questions that do not require the disclosing personal information of any victims. The interviews were conducted virtually and participants were asked 10 open-ended questions with a duration of 1 hour. Participants were initially asked if they were comfortable with answering the questions and reassured that they are able to withdraw their participation at any time. Consent was given for recording their interviews as well as mentioning their experiences in the research paper. Their responses were recorded through audio and later transcribed on electronic documents that are only accessible to the researcher. To maintain the privacy of each participant, their region is kept confidential and only their professions are mentioned due to its relevance to the research question. Participants are referred to as the following pseudonyms: Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, and Participant D.

Participants

Participants consisted of 4 professionals: two victim advocates, a police officer and a federal law enforcement officer. They were intentionally selected with having an educational background in either criminology or criminal justice, preferably working in the criminal justice system. The original sampling was 6 participants, however, only 4 participants provided in-depth responses that aligned with the research question. The expectation was that participants would provide useful insights regarding their field of discipline, adding more to the discussion of criminal behavior. It is important to note that the participants who are victim advocates are only able to provide their perspective on how to help individuals, since they primarily deal with cases that are traumatic. The police officer and federal law enforcement officer are also only able to provide their perspective of seeing how crimes happen and the way in which the court system deals with criminals. Both of the victim advocates have an educational background in criminology but experience in criminal justice, so they are only able to provide a foundational understanding of how crime occurs and theories in criminology. One of the victim advocates and the police officer hold a PhD in psychology, so they are able to accurately elaborate more on the psychological factors that come into play with criminal behavior as well as a deeper understanding of theories. They're both able to accurately explain how family dynamics and traumatic events are able to impact the mental state of someone while also connecting it back into possible opportunities for support. The federal law enforcement officer only has a degree in criminal justice, therefore they are only able to elaborate from their experiences seeing how crime is committed and investigating how it occurred. They cannot reflect on criminology theories nor do they have a foundation in why criminal behavior happens or what caused the perpetrator to commit it. What this smaller sample can provide is a perspective of how professionals in the criminal justice field from different backgrounds perceive criminal behavior and their views on how social media portrays the same ideas. It does not provide a large enough sample to apply to the entirety of criminal justice professionals in the United States, rather it aims to focus more on the difference in backgrounds of the participants selected.

Interview Questions

Through interviewing the participants individually rather than in focus groups, it allowed for a deeper understanding of their separate responses. Furthermore, the participants could not indirectly influence the opinions of one another and would maintain their own perspectives on the topic. The following questions were asked of the participants in order to gain their perspective on the phenomenon being investigated:

- 1) What is your profession and how did it impact your perception of crime, if it has at all? If so, what changes in your perspective have occurred through your experiences?
- 2) What is your perspective on true crime documentaries and its portrayal of serial murder cases? How does the portrayal compare to real life?
- 3) How would you evaluate the accuracy of the media's portrayal of how criminal behavior works?
- 4) How do you believe the understanding of criminal behavior has changed over the years? What factors, if any, in the past decade have led to these ideas?
- 5) What is your opinion on the biosocial theory of crime describing criminal behavior as a physiological trait?
- 6) How would you assess the role of biological factors in comparison to social environments in the development of criminal behavior?
- 7) What is the relationship between family dynamics and criminal behavior, if there is one? Does the closeness of a relative hold significance?
- 8) How do you feel about genetic evidence such as mental health evaluations being used in legal proceedings for serial murder cases?

FINDINGS

Four participants were asked the eight questions above in order to gain their knowledge and background of criminal behavior. Before discussing the significance of the results, it's important to provide the four main themes gathered and their definitions. All four themes that were formed through thematic analysis are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and Definitions

Theme	Definition
Familial Dynamics	Family structures being indicative of the outcome of a person's lifestyle choices.
Dislike of Media (Sensationalism)	A tendency for media outlets to overexaggerate facts or misinterpret the reality of a situation.
Mental Health Advocacy	Providing assistance for mental health disorders in order to provide the patient with the help they need.

Lens on Crime	Perspective of factors that contribute to the formation of crime, whether that is through social environment or through biological predispositions.
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Important details that were obtained through interviews with the participants are showcased within Table 2, corresponding to the themes.

Table 2: Participants Responses and Corresponding Themes

Theme	Participant	Quotation
Familial Dynamics	Participant A has family members who were not following a good path. Participant B expresses having anxious parents with a lot of empathy. Participant C did not come from a good background as a child and wanted to pursue a different path. Participant D had strict rules on coming home as a child in order to stay safe.	“I have a couple of uncles who grew up not in a really good place,” “Both of my parents are a little bit rather anxious and have a lot of empathy.” “I never lived in a home before. I didn’t grow up surrounded by the greatest of people either.” “I had to be in the house by the time the streetlights came on. No negotiations, no exceptions.”
Dislike of Media (Sensationalism)	Participant A believes that movies and music are big influences for media’s portrayals Participant B does not like the media because of their constant sensationalism of details. Participant C believes that news sells for a certain propaganda or agenda rather than facts. Participant D believes that the media just wants engagement	“So, movies for sure have a big influence.” “Okay, so I’ll be very upfront, I’m very biased. I hate the media.” “News, social media, Facebook, they’re always going to talk about the bad or even scare people into normalizing things.”

	and for someone to not look into the facts when viewing.	“Because what they want is for someone to take the headline at face value and engage.”
Mental Health Advocacy	Participant A believes that everyone deserves the opportunity to receive help regardless. Participant B believes that people with mental health issues should not be paired in prison. Participant C believes in helping out those who have mental health problems. Participant D thinks that it’s worth it if it’s helping explain the crime.	“So I believe in trying to help them more than just punishing them, I guess it would be.” “I think that we would benefit from having some kind of secure facilities for people who’ve committed crimes that focus on treatment.” “I’m very big on mental health.” “Yeah, I mean...If a person can actually articulate how an accused person’s mental health maybe altered their reality.”
Lens on Crime	Participant A displayed a primary focus on environmental factors, wanting to ensure mental health is taken care of. Participant B believed that both sociological and biological factors played a role, with each having more importance in specific scenarios. Participant C focused on the psychological factors of criminal behaviors and how mental conflicts can contribute to certain behaviors. Participant D believes that social and environmental factors have	“Because, if you put two people in the same environment, they’re not gonna grow up the same way.” “There are biological factors, but there’s also sociological factors. And I think that there are times when either could be more important.” “Also, psychological factors are really important because again, someone who’s suffering with schizophrenia.”

	a bigger impact compared to biological markers.	“Social factors and environment, I believe, are way more likely to have an impact on someone rather than their biological marks, 100%.”
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To provide a simplified overall summary of the perspectives of the participants as showcased above in Table 2 depicting specific quotations, Table 3 as shown below, displays an overview.

Table 3: Summary of Participants’ Responses

Themes	Participant (Summary)
Familial Dynamics	A - Uncles with criminal history B - Anxious and empathetic family C - Not a good upbringing as a child D - Strict household rules
Dislike of Media (Sensationalism)	A - Influenced by movies and music B - Tries to sensationalize ideas C - Promoting a certain agenda D - Taking information at face value
Mental Health Advocacy	A - Providing assistance to all B - Having secure facilities C - Very big on mental health D - Evaluation helps explain the crime
Lens on Crime	A - Environmental B - Sociological and biological C - Psychological D - Social and environmental

RESULTS

The responses of the participants showcased patterns overlapping as depicted within the six themes, with most participants having a common notion of wanting to offer a service to help the current state of the social justice system. Two of the participants, Participant B and D, showcased a stronger tie on the idea of sensationalism, with their passion focusing primarily on how the media tends to overestimate the weighing of a situation. Another instance is two of the participants hold a PhD in psychology, resulting in more discussions of the psychological wellbeing and factors that play into interpreting certain actions as being a result of mental issues.

Theme 1: Familial Dynamics

All participants showcased a significant connection to the idea of family structures enabling individuals to have specific behaviors or traits by sharing their individual experiences growing up. Participant A described their experiences with family members who were subjected to crime but contrasted that with their decision to take a path that was beneficial for them, offering the opportunity to help others rather than go down the path of criminal behavior. Similarly, Participant C discussed a similar situation by not being raised the best and having a father who was constantly in and out of jail. Instead of taking the same path as their father, they chose to become a police officer because that would offer a better perspective on life. Participant B and D, however, discussed how their upbringings were rather reinforcing good behaviors and how their parents tried to keep them out of trouble. Participant B focuses on how both of their parents were very anxious and held a lot of empathy which they believed was directly passed onto them. Participant D spoke about how their mother had strict regulations such as not being able to remain out of the house for a certain duration in order to protect them. Despite these differences, there was a constant subtheme brought up about whether or not the age of the participant would've impacted their decisions. For instance, Participant C discussed how if they were younger and had seen their father in jail, they would probably be more likely to follow his path. Participant D discussed the environmental factors of upbringing as a child and stated if they were placed in an upbringing that fostered criminal tendencies, they would be more inclined to behave in that way. Participant B also alluded to the idea of environmental factors and how not being taught right from wrong at a young age will make it more difficult to care about morals and easier to commit crime. Participant A focused more about how the specific part of the family may impact the likelihood of following a certain path, for instance, they mentioned how if their father was a gang member they would be more inclined to take on that role rather than other family members such as cousins or uncles.

Theme 2: Dislike of Media (Sensationalism)

All participants have expressed a disliking towards the media, primarily because of its tendency to provide information inaccurately or try to portray it as being more exaggerated than it actually is. Participant C discusses the constant scares on social media outlets to get the public to normalize certain things or make certain news seem more threatening than they actually are, focusing on how it lacks factual evidence but wants to guide people towards a certain agenda. Similarly to Participant C, Participant D highlights how certain headlines tend to phrase aspects in a way that would get the public to react in outrage and not look deeper into the factual evidence which can cause the spread of misinformation. Participant B expressed a heavily rooted disliking towards the media due to the heavy sensationalism of topics which can strike fear in the audience consuming it, similarly to what was stated by Participant C and D. Participant A, however, did not heavily focus on the negative aspect but did highlight the unrealistic expectations that are often portrayed through media such as movies and music rather than social media as what was discussed by other participants.

Theme 3: Mental Health Advocacy

All participants expressed a desire to help out individuals, especially if they are experiencing the symptoms of a mental health disorder that could be impacting their ability to function or could be causing them to act violently. This response aligns quite well with their professions, as they want to be able to help out others as much as they can, offering a solution such as mental health facilities as stated by Participant B who believes it's a better outcome than having those with mental health disorders merged into the same facility as other prisoners. Participant C believed in being able to use knowledge of psychological disorders to help out people and recognize whether or not they may be comfortable in certain situations, allowing for a better understanding of the symptoms and why certain behaviors occur. Participant A reflected on how they want to help all people, regardless of their situation, so they emphasized the importance of evaluating mental health disorders to gain a better understanding of the circumstance. Similarly to Participant A, Participant D stated how they have no issue with mental health evaluations if it is helpful in allowing the court of law to understand the reasoning behind certain actions or behaviors.

Theme 4: Lens on Crime

All participants shared different perspectives on how they view criminal behavior, spanning from focusing on environmental factors to believing in psychological aspects. Participant D expressed that environmental factors are more influential on criminal behavior, mainly referencing how if they were to be raised in a rich household with access to good education they would turn out to be a law abiding citizen and the opposite vice versa. Participant B explained how they are not entirely set on a specific view, however, they do believe that major factors are sociological and biological factors and in certain situations both can prove to be more impactful. Participant C discusses the importance of psychological factors and references schizophrenia as an example of how much a mental disorder can contribute to whether someone is able to executively function. Participant A focused on the environmental aspects, similarly to Participant D but primarily related it to the importance of nurturing individuals and providing them with a source of comfort to be able to live happily as an adult.

DISCUSSION

The established themes from the research study: familial dynamics, dislike of media (sensationalism), mental health advocacy, and lens on crime intersect with pre-existing theories in the field of criminology, reflecting on how the responses of participants coincide with the views of the media. Familial dynamics showcases how each of the participants have held vastly different upbringings, with some experiencing unstable family conditions revolving around crime while others had strict or caring households. It directly reflects the differential association theory proposed by Sutherland (1947), which suggests that criminal behavior is learned through learned behaviors in society rather than being genetically predisposed. For

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instance, Participant B reflected on how their family is very anxious and empathetic, suggesting that these behaviors throughout their upbringing led to them becoming a successful victim advocate, being able to empathize with enough concern for potential legal issues. In contrast, Participant C expresses not having a good upbringing and seeing their own father punished for his mistakes. While Participant C's experience is vastly different in comparison to Participant B, their father kept reinforcing for them to take on a better path and become a police officer in order to help others. This reflects the idea of social conditioning, in which the participant's father was the main piece of advice to lead them onto the right track. Dislike of media (sensationalism), coincides with the cultivation theory proposed by Gerbner & Gross (1976), suggesting that the views of the audience receiving the media tend to be shaped as how the real world works. As stated by Participant D, the tendency for media to exaggerate facts or sensationalize them for engagements can be the main contributors to why true crime enthusiasts have an unrealistic view of how prevalent crime is. In conversation with the theory of Gerbner & Gross (1976), Boling & Hull (2018) present their findings on true crime podcast watchers and how they tend to use the information as entertainment or as a way to help themselves in society. Most of these viewers typically choose serial murder as it's more entertaining and aligns with their own desires. The issue that arises with viewing media such as this is that it tends to give the audience a mixed view of crime. By constantly consuming serial murder cases, it gives the false idea that these are occurring more frequently than they truly are, as pointed out by Participant C. The participants who experience crime cases on a daily basis recognize that these situations aren't very common and dramatized as documentaries may convey to the viewers.

Mental health advocacy contributes to the conversation of Morse (2011)'s causation versus compulsion theory, which causes a common debate on whether a person should be sentenced for longer based on their genetic evidence. As stated by the participants, there's often a desire to help out those struggling with mental health disorders, however, it may blur the lines between helping out and serving justice. Participant B reflected on this idea by expressing how depending on the level of severity in mental functioning, a person convicted of crime should be placed in a separate facility because they aren't fully capable of being in the same prison as criminals who are fully aware of their actions. It acknowledges the side of causation that focuses more on the reasoning behind the crime but doesn't truly excuse or change anything about what happened while also highlighting that compulsion can significantly impact whether someone is even fully aware of the actions that they made. Rather, participants are aware that mental health disorders can in fact impact a person's decision making process and ability to understand the severity of the crime but still appear to place an excuse upon their actual actions. Lens on crime is directly situated in conversation with the argument proposed by Baker & Raine (2006), suggesting that antisocial behaviors can be attributed to both genetic and environmental factors equally. While Participants A and Participant D believed that environmental factors held a larger weight on how crime occurs, Participants B and C focused on the biological and psychological factors that may impact how someone's process of thinking works. It reflects on the idea of how both genetic and environmental factors can be viewed as equally important depending on the person's perspective, with educational backgrounds impacting these perceptions. It further suggests that there isn't a predetermined answer when it comes to figuring out what lens crime is looked through, when there are multiple explanations and variables that can account for it.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

While this research study is limited in its scope with a smaller sample sizing ($n = 4$), it reveals a deeper analysis of the professionals within my sampling of the criminal justice system. It does not provide a solution or direct causal relationship to all professionals in the field of crime in the United States, but rather reveals how different perspectives can vary in contextualization of the participant's upbringings. It adds onto pre-existing literature surrounding how criminal behavior is perceived by showcasing how these different levels of education and professions can align with understanding of crime. The participants showcased a common theme surrounding not having enough information to truly determine criminal behavior, suggesting further research to focus on examining how upbringing and social conditionings can affect a person's criminality.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DECISIONS

By analyzing multiple perspectives through thematic analysis, the field of criminology will benefit from the incorporation of these differing views and take it into consideration when forming newer theories. While this study does not account for all individuals nor can be generalizable to a larger population, it showcases the importance of seeking different opinions and how certain upbringings can impact how crime is viewed. Even though the sample size isn't desired, it still offered an in-depth analysis of responses from professionals who experience the misconceptions constantly centering around social media and in their daily work. Diverse backgrounds are important to consider when recognizing the complexities of criminal behavior, dispelling misleading notions that promote unrealistic ideologies. By acknowledging the views of professionals in the field, it can be reflected to the public how instantly believing information at face value results in more negative outcomes rather than providing sufficient information for keeping society safe. Through recognition of multiple viewpoints such as sociological, environmental, psychological, and biological, criminal behavior is able to be understood as a phenomenon that varies depending on the circumstances and is not limited to one explanation.

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Appendix A

Definition of Terms

MAOA-L - monoamine oxidase A low activity, an enzyme linked with increased antisocial behaviors such as aggression that commonly occur in males.

Genetic predisposition - refers to the concept of genetic variations causing individuals to become more inclined to a certain behavior.

Social and environmental factors - refer to the childhood experiences or social interactions that shaped one's behavior in adulthood.

Eugenics - an inaccurate scientific theory in which certain inherited features or traits can benefit the human population through “selective breeding”.