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Fact or Fiction?: (Mis)Representations of Crime, Race, and Gender in Popular True Crime Podcasts

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Fact or Fiction?: (Mis)Representations of Crime, Race, and Gender in Popular True

Crime Podcasts

A Thesis

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Lauren Elise Frederick

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling has long been used to socialize future generations. As a form of storytelling, podcasting has rapidly expanded through the true crime genre. Existing literature on such podcasts is limited by its focus on listeners and conceptual definition of "true crime." This study applied content analysis to 10 randomly selected true crime podcast episodes from 2012-2021, which were inductively coded and analyzed using critical race theory and feminist theory. Findings indicate podcasters applied stereotypical tropes of race and gender to perpetrators and victims, which do not always reflect demographics in crime statistics. Specifically, women were at times victimized as well as sexualized in theories about motive and in gendered crimes such as rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence, thus reinforcing broader feminine stereotypes. Furthermore, race was a salient feature in podcasts themselves focused on race or if race affected the case, but was otherwise invisible. The podcast sample also lacked representation of Black men, who make up a majority of victims and offenders in the U.S., as well as multiracial women, Latino men, AAPI, and Native Americans. This research provides insight on how storytelling reinforces stereotypes through contemporary means: true crime podcasts.

Keywords: true crime, podcasts, critical race theory, feminist theory

FACT OR FICTION?: (MIS)REPRESENTATIONS OF CRIME, RACE, AND GENDER IN POPULAR TRUE CRIME PODCASTS

Instead of treating cases equally and justly, national crime statistics reveal that the American criminal justice system continues to target people of color. This recognition has spurred a national conversation concerning many systemic issues that disproportionately affect racial minorities in the United States, such as mass incarceration and police brutality. The present research suggests that people of color are underrepresented in true crime podcasts, broadly, and men are overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime. Furthermore, when women are victims in true crime podcasts, their gender is underscored by their sexuality. When true crime podcasts misrepresent the racial and gender demographics of perpetrators and victims in the American criminal justice system, they whitewash discourses surrounding crime and reinforce gender stereotypes as men as inherently violent and women as vulnerable victims.

  With growing recognition and subsequent outrage over the treatment of people of color by the criminal justice system–as Black Lives Matter and similar social justice movements regularly highlight–critiques of the criminal justice system via social media have encouraged policy-makers to create more equitable solutions. These individuals, as well as people who enjoy following criminal cases through popular news and TV shows, have focused public attention on disparities in the criminal justice system throughout history and within recent years. With technology at our fingertips, the public gets real time updates when crimes happen, where they occur, who the perpetrators and victims are, and details on charges, trials, verdicts, and sentencing. Everyday citizens can now gain in-depth perspectives on the criminal process, something that has never existed

to this extent until this point in history. However, this fascination with crime and justice and the active involvement and critique preceded social media. Instead, the public's interest in crime began decades ago with mediums such as magazines and novels which created the genre of true crime.

True crime content provides an outlet for fascination with real life crimes. Instead of providing broken up reports on a case as seen in journalism, however, it develops a narrative from these facts to tell the story of a criminal act. This narrative form is conducive to better representing marginalized groups that are often stereotyped or ignored in crime reporting, as they can have a voice and provide their unique perspectives on crime and criminality. Each case is also discussed holistically rather than in updates, and delves into the history of perpetrators and victims, which gives background and context to the crime at hand.

In recent years, the most popular form of true crime content that has emerged is true crime podcasts. Studies such as Sherrill (2020) substantiate this growth in popularity, yet there is very little scientific research on true crime podcasts. Boling and Hull (2018) and Sherrill (2020) analyze the true crime audience, but only one blog-style post was found that analyzed the content of true crime podcasts. Given the expanding audience that gains representations of crime and criminality from these sources, more research is needed on true crime podcasts, especially on the content of podcasts themselves.

To address this gap in the research literature, the purpose of this case study was to understand how victims and offenders highlighted in true crime podcasts reflected or contrasted demographic trends in American crime statistics, as well as to examine emergent themes related to race, gender, and sexuality in true crime podcasts. Through

the lenses of critical race and feminist theories, this analyzed 10 true crime podcasts on Apple iTunes. In an effort to investigate a potential relationship between crime data and podcast content, this study focused on how stereotypes regarding race, gender, and sexuality are represented in true crime podcasts.

Findings from this study may be used to develop a deeper understanding of how true crime podcasts reinforce or challenge racism and sexism embedded within the American criminal justice system. Not only will this research add to existing literature on true crime podcasts in general, but it will also directly situate this subject in the field of criminology. In order to better assess discourses surrounding perpetrators, victims, and crime, this will provide information on the genre as a whole, and also develop further research questions about true crime podcasts and the true crime community in general, specifically regarding characteristics of criminal cases often selected for true crime podcasts and the perpetrators and victims they portray.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the history of the true crime genre is extensive, it has expanded exponentially with the advent of podcasts. Despite this growth, academic research has not fully examined the racial and gender disparities in mass incarceration as portrayed in true crime podcasts. Following a definition of the genre of true crime and its corresponding podcasts, this section will review the following topics: (1) Mass incarceration of Black men in the U.S.; (2) The lack of coverage on Black and other women of color as victims; and (3) The sexualization, spectatorship, and victim blaming of women in the criminal justice system.

True Crime Podcasts

True crime podcasts are an extension of the true crime genre which uses an accessible format for listeners. The cases highlighted by true crime podcasts are presented in a narrative format, which makes it possible to excavate or obscure the reality of crime in the United States. Many podcasters seem to select cases that they deem intriguing or important. Thus, an analysis of true crime content may be valuable in identifying the transmission of podcasters' values to a broader audience. If a podcast is well-received by an audience, as demonstrated by "likes," ratings, subscriptions, and streams, this suggests that such messages resonate with listeners. In this way, podcast content not only potentially shapes viewer's perceptions, it may also reflect their perspectives.

True crime gives a glimpse into the fascination surrounding crime and the public's perception of it. Punnett (2018) emphasized the uniqueness of true crime content, in that it fills in details neglected by regular news media in an accessible format to the public. People are innately invested in seeing justice take place, and they are interested enough to indulge in the content through multiple different platforms to learn more about crime, our justice system, and all of the people involved in it. True crime is unique in that the perpetrators can be highlighted prior to conviction, and the victims can be anyone experiencing criminal harm as a result of the actions of perpetrators.

Many true crime cases focus on victims of wrongful convictions, who are arguably victims as well, or question if the perpetrator reported on was guilty before trial even begins. It moves away from the rigid facts and updates to questioning them and asks bigger questions about the case and those involved. Was the perpetrator completely guilty

or to blame for their actions? What forensic evidence was collected in the case? Who was the victim before the act? Who was the perpetrator before the act? And how can their pasts be reflected in the criminal case presented? These and many more questions are posed for true crime fans to create deeper conversations about the criminal justice system and its shortcomings.

The genre of true crime can be traced back in history and in many different forms. Punnett (2018) provided a brief history of true crime, which spanned from the biblical era to a period following the American industrialization in forms such as books, magazines, TV shows, movies and more. Punnett (2018) provided a prior definition of true crime provided by Murley, which is "the story of real events, shaped by the teller and imbued with his or her values and beliefs about such events. Narratives can be textual, visual, aural or a mixture of the three" (2009:3). Punnett (2018) added his own qualifiers of true crime content, including aspects such as seeking justice, highlighting forensics, and a crusader narrative to expose wrongdoings and call others to action for social change.[1] Both the extensive history of true crime and modern definitions of the genre indicate a continued fascination with true crime.

This long-standing genre has only increased in popularity since its conception, especially with newer forms of media. Russell's (1995) article on the moral panic of rising violent crime included a prediction that true crime content would continue to captivate audiences as a result of this fear, leading to major crime stories dominating the news. Russell's (1995) prediction came to fruition, given the thousands of true crime shows, movies, and podcasts available today. The best exemplifier of this new media is

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[1] The complete list of Punnett's (2018) true crime tenets are justice, subversive, crusader, geographic, forensic, vocative, and folkloric.

true crime podcasts, available through platforms such as iTunes and Spotify. While unique in the convenience of listening, most true crime podcasts follow the same format of other true crime content in providing a narrative on real life crime and bringing up professional opinions and active conversations on the crime, those involved, and the criminal justice system. Sherrill (2020) utilized an ecology of true crime podcasts through a timeline as well as a content analysis of its media coverage, and found significant legitimacy in media and growth over time, with the period of 2016 to 2018 totaling almost 150 new true crime podcasts alone. The growing availability of content discussing crime and criminal offenders, as shown in previous academic literature, makes research in this burgeoning field necessary.

The most comprehensive, empirical analysis of true crime podcasts available in this review of literature is not scholarly. A blog post on *CaseFleet* analyzed four of the most popular true crime podcasts on a variety of items, such as if they were unsolved, if they featured serial killers, and the gender of the suspects highlighted (Kerr 2020). While Kerr's (2020) empirical findings may be valid, it is difficult to know without scholarly peer-review. However, theoretical research on true crime podcasts exists. Keeler (2021) created a typology of true crime podcasts types, including unique aspects of true crime podcasts and features such as collaboration of listeners in reporting to police or locating missing persons, reinvestigation of closed cases, closed-case analysis, and highlighting wrongful convictions. While such findings provide a framework for interpreting podcasts, only empirical research can substantiate these claims.

There have also been a select few studies on true crime podcast listeners. Fans enjoy true crime podcasts for various reasons, with Boling and Hull's (2018) survey

showing that fans listened for entertainment and convenience of the media format as well as out of boredom. There are unique case studies on popular podcasts such as *Serial* and *My Favorite Murder* that discuss their personal impacts on the genre and the audience involvement they facilitate. While focused on true crime books rather than podcasts, the findings of Vicary and Fraley (2010) showed the audience to be mostly female looking for self defense tips, which could also apply to the audience of true crime podcasts.

Notably, none of these sources analyze the *content* of true crime podcasts in any substantive way or compare them to the reality of crime in the U.S. Scholars like Sherrill (2020) have cited the need for a "textual analysis of podcast content," which is applied in this study (19). Exploratory qualitative research may be best suited for this rapidly growing genre due to the relative lack of scholarly inquiry. In this area, getting a broad view of true crime podcasts and comparing its content to statistics can give an overview of what cases are selected by podcasters and how reflective they are of reported crime.

True Crime to Real Crime

Podcasters have both the power to highlight current social issues and explain how they are reflected in the cases they present, and the potential to perpetuate traditional crime reporting by journalists in legacy media, which often upholds stereotypes. A contemporary example of this binary includes the ability of podcasters to reframe mass incarceration of Black men in the U.S. as a social issue, or continue framing women as victims of violent crimes. Therefore, it is valuable to analyze how representative true crime podcasts' cases are of "real crime," or rather the documented and reported crime statistics from a federal agency.

The unique format of true crime podcasts also offers an opportunity to expose racial disparities in crime reporting, police brutality, and the historical scapegoating of Black men for violent crimes. They can help emphasize the desperate need for more conversation and change through choosing certain narratives and sharing the shocking statistical realities surrounding the topic. According to the annual Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR)[2], Black people are significantly overrepresented in arrests made, including for murder charges, as well as in victims of violent crimes. In 2019, out of the 7,964 offenders arrested for murder or nonnegligent manslaughter, 51.2% (n=4,078) were Black or African American, and out of the 13,927 murder victims reported, 53.7% (n=7,484) were Black (United States Department of Justice 2019a). While such statistics only include reported crimes, these numbers are staggering considering that only 13.4% of the U.S. population identified as Black or African American at the time of this survey (United States Census Bureau 2019). As Punnett (2018) suggested, it is possible that true crime focused on Black Americans could present in parallel to the white, mainstream version of legacy media. Highlighting the overrepresentation of Black Americans in the criminal justice system gives a potential push toward positive social change. In other words, true crime podcasts have the potential to include Black stories and experiences in discussions of crime and the criminal justice system. To some extent, this has come to fruition with true crime podcasts surrounding Black women: *Black Girl Gone*, focused on Black female victims, and *Sistas Who Kill* focused on Black female perpetrators.

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[2] The National Crime Victimization Survey is a preferable and more accurate report of crime; however, since it does not include statistics on murder, the UCR was utilized instead.

Gender is also crucial in conversations surrounding crime, as women have been historically victimized and sexualized concurrently with the violence against them. A commonly held narrative places a woman as the victim of violent crimes, seen as helpless and in need of saving from the violent acts of men, which may be true in cases of sexual violence, for example.

Although women are overrepresented and sexualized as victims of violent crime in true crime podcasts, national statistics suggest that males are the majority of perpetrators of murder, and also constitute a majority of murder victims. According to the UCR, 78.3% (n=10,908) of the 13,927 murder victims in 2019 were men (United States Department of Justice 2019b). As female victims of homicide cannot speak for themselves, Vitis (2022) suggested that they are utilized in true crime podcasts to make their needs synonymous with the community's, and their bodies become the focus of spectatorship and a way to deliver informal justice.

The portrayal of male perpetrators in true crime podcasts may further support female victimization and silencing given that women are often highlighted as victims and reflect the victim stereotype. While the aforementioned *Casefleet* study is not an academic source, the author reported that 82.1% of suspects were male and 17.93% were female in their podcast sample (Kerr 2020). In other words, this analysis found that male suspects were overrepresented in their sample, which suggests that true crime content may utilize stereotypes rather than national trends to perpetuate the narrative of female victimization.

A majority of true crime podcast listeners, however, are women (Boling and Hull 2018). The women included in this study listened to true crime podcasts for escape from

their daily lives, to learn intimate details about others, and for social interaction with friends about the content. This aligns with earlier findings on true crime engagement such as Vicary and Fraley's 2010 analysis of true crime book fans. Vicary and Fraley (2010) explored why women may be more drawn to the genre than men, and their findings suggested that women were more drawn to stories including self-defense tips, information on the killer's motives, and those with female victims.

Vicary and Fraley's (2010) findings support Punnett's (2018) contention that older women shared true crime stories with young women to keep them safe, and this notion may continue throughout adulthood. Although sharing such stories may be done with good intention, these stories may inadvertently blame women for the violent crimes against them. Because women are always seen as potential victims and encouraged to maintain their own safety in this manner, violence against women becomes a failed act of self-policing, as women should "practice safety by obtaining knowledge on men's violence" (Vitis 2022:112). By analyzing the content of true crime podcasts, it becomes possible to identify themes surrounding the topic of gender as it is highlighted by podcasters.

True crime podcasts provide a unique opportunity to examine the victimization of women, tips on how the audience can avoid it, and versions of victim blaming and sexualization in popular media. True crime's narrative format and flexibility allows podcasters to highlight social issues they are passionate about that could be overlooked by legacy media. However, some podcasts continue to fall into stereotypes of race, gender, victims, and perpetrators. This study seeks to better understand their representations in true crime podcasts and how reflective they are of societal messages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Critical race theory and feminist theory provide useful lenses to analyze true crime podcasts from a criminological perspective. Since the impetus for violent crime is unique and complex with little consensus on one perspective that accurately portrays it, there are many theories in criminology used to discuss crime. In 1979, Wollan discussed the direction of criminological theory as moving toward the inclusion of values and philosophical principles, specifically on the ethics and morals of how criminals are treated by society and the criminal justice system. Two of the most recent theories that encompass this shift are critical race theory and feminist theory, specifically carceral feminism. Therefore, both theories will be used to analyze true crime content and specifically highlight the experiences of multiple minority groups in the context of perpetration and victimization of violent crime.

Feminist theory emphasizes the role of systemic sexism and the historical mistreatment of women in all social contexts. Specifically, feminist theory focuses on how a patriarchal society negatively impacts women. In the context of criminology, this often focuses on disparities among sexes in criminal treatment as well as the disproportionate victimization of women in gendered crime. This disparity is reflected in true crime content, as the discussion of female offenders is rare, and women are often the victim in such stories. This is especially obvious when women are depicted as submissive victims of brutal, violent, and therefore stereotypical masculine criminal acts.

Carceral feminism integrates an anti-patriarchal framework within the criminal justice system to advocate for more severe legal consequences for crimes that disproportionately affect women, such as rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, which are often committed by men. However, carceral feminism

ignores "the carceral state's complicity in sexual oppression" and encourages further

reliance on masculinized professiones (e.g., police) for protection (Bracewell 2019:76).

In addition, punitive action towards male offenders fails to solve the root problem of

violence against women and it is retroactive rather than proactive. Although carceral

feminism's goal is to provide necessary attention to the disproportionate impact of

violence against women, it may contribute to mass incarceration, particularly for men of

color.

   Critical race theory emphasizes the role of systemic racism, historical

mistreatment, and radically different experiences of racial minority groups, especially

Black Americans, with and by the American criminal justice system and law. This

disenfranchisement continues to create racial disparities in rates of arrest, conviction, and

incarceration of people of color. Therefore, this theory is particularly useful in the present

research in analyzing how victims and perpetrators discussed in true crime podcasts may

be further marginalized in the retelling of such crimes.

   Both critical race theory and feminist theory highlight the unique ways

marginalized groups are oppressed by the criminal justice system, with men of color

often labeled as perpetrators and women of all races, but especially white women, often

labeled as victims. By applying both theoretical frameworks to an analysis of true crime

podcasts, common narratives of crime could alter public discussions of crime, and new

forms of media, such as true crime podcasts, could provide this avenue for this change. In

the present study, the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and feminist theory

are applied to true crime poodcasts to examine how this content extended or disrupted

common racial and gender stereotypes.

RESEARCH METHODS

True crime podcasts are defined as recorded audio episodes with narratives that discuss the factual telling of criminal acts for entertainment purposes (Punnett 2009). Given a lack of existing research on true crime podcast content, an exploratory study was conducted to gain a general understanding of the genre and produce research questions for future research. The purpose of this study was to identify common themes in true crime podcasts and compare the crimes highlighted to demographic trends within mass incarceration. The research questions that guided this study included:

R_1: How do victims and offenders highlighted in true crime podcasts' content reflect recent demographic trends of offenders and victims in the United States?

R_2: What themes emerge in true crime stories on podcasts about race, gender, and sexuality?

R_3: How do these themes reinforce or contradict societal messages about racial, gender, and sexual inequality?

To answer these questions and develop an understanding of true crime podcasts, content analysis was utilized. Content analysis allowed for the substance of true crime podcast episodes to be interpreted and categorized into codes. Overall, this method of content analysis through emergent coding allowed analysis of how these podcast episodes are or are not reflective of crime reports and representations.

Population and Sample

This study's population consisted of 240 true crime podcasts from Apple's iTunes podcast page of popular true crime podcasts. This compilation occurred in September of 2021 but included podcasts beginning as early as 2012, and was selected with recognition that true crime is a narrative of a real crime or crimes that have taken place (Punnett 2018). From the population, a sample of 10 podcasts was drawn (see Appendix A).

Random sampling, or selection with each item having an equal chance of inclusion, was used to select each podcast and each episode within the podcasts (Bell 2015). This created a more representative sample of true crime podcasts, which allowed broader conclusions to be drawn about true crime podcast episodes and their themes.

Sampling podcast series.

To create the final sample, the primary researcher randomly sampled podcast series from Apple podcast descriptions[3] and removed cases that did not meet the study's population requirements. To eliminate podcast episodes that did not fall within sample parameters, the researcher ensured each randomly selected podcast series did not include (1) A focus on one perpetrator, victim, or case; (2) Multiple episodes for a single case; or (3) A focus on supernatural, paranormal, or conspiracy theories.[4]

Sampling podcast episodes.

If a series met the above criteria, a single *episode* was then randomly sampled from each of the 10 podcasts. Podcast episodes could not include: (1) A case that was discussed across multiple podcast episodes; (2) A focus on supernatural, paranormal, or conspiracy theories; (3) Interviews with a single person; or (4) An exclusive focus on updates from cases discussed in past episodes. These exclusions ultimately required hosts to discuss criminal acts using multiple sources as support and to present a case in its entirety for a comprehensive analysis.

In certain cases, episodes were initially selected for inclusion and later removed upon listening to the full episode. For example, the episode selected from *My Favorite Murder* was originally the episode titled "35 - A Small Foreign Faction." However, upon

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[3] Podcasts were derived from https://podcasts.apple.com/us/genre/podcasts-true-crime/id1488.
[4] For the purpose of this study, conspiracy theory is conceptualized as "an attempt to explain harmful or tragic events as the result of the actions of a small powerful group" (Reid 2016).

coding, the episode was focused on a CBS docuseries as opposed to a narrative written and discussed by the podcast narrators. Therefore, the episode was eliminated from the sample and another was selected that better represented the true crime genre, though relevant findings from the episode are included. The second episode from *My Favorite Murder* that matched the episode criteria titled "166 - Respecting the History of Coins" was also partially excluded as the first case involved the The Who concert disaster, which was not criminal. However, the second case, focused on serial killer Glennon Engleman, was coded and included as part of the final sample.

Coding and analysis.

The final sample consisted of 10 podcast episodes that matched the exclusion criteria. These episodes were qualitatively analyzed with inductive coding techniques in ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. A code refers to a word or short phrase that represents a construct or symbol signified by the researcher, while coding refers to the process of creating and refining these codes into patterns (Saldana 2016). The sampling unit of short phrases or sentences in the present study indicated co-occurrences and led to a holistic content analysis of the true crime podcast sample, including an analysis of patterns, themes, and meanings conveyed as well as demographics of victims, offenders, and crimes later compared to reported crime statistics. This study specifically utilized emergent or inductive coding, which refers to the process of independently coding data, comparing notes, recoding data as necessary, and reconciling all data together.

Significant details from each episode, such as crime details and podcaster discussions surrounding the case, were coded on initial occurrence, applied to further

episodes, and refined for a complete codebook that exemplified themes related to the present hypotheses. The coding of 10 podcast episodes reached a saturation point of true crime podcasts. At the conclusion of coding, all substantive codes were condensed into five code groups, or overarching themes: True Crime Podcast Similarities, Perpetrator Narratives, Victim Narratives, Gender, and Race. The themes of True Crime Podcast Similarities, Gender, and Race were then organized into the context of Perpetrator and Victim Narratives. These themes are integrated throughout the Findings section and identified in parentheses.

FINDINGS

The comparisons of true crime podcast cases to reported crime statistics was a driving question in this study. Almost all crimes highlighted in the sample were violent, with the only episodes deviating from this pattern being "The Real Wolf of Wall Street," which focused on white collar crime, and "Eric Edgar Cooke," which included both violent and nonviolent crimes, with an emphasis on violent crimes (Appendix B). The locations of the crimes were spread throughout the U.S. and included one international case, and the years of the crimes that took place ranged from 1887 to 2020 (Appendix B). While the sample supported the stereotype of violent crime as more prevalent than nonviolent crime, the sample also highlighted geographic diversity between urban, rural, and suburban locations, the historical time frame of crimes, and discussion of often-overlooked topics, such as wrongful convictions, missing persons, Black female perpetrators, and more.

Common Themes in Narratives of Perpetrators and Victims

In terms of those involved in the crimes being presented, podcast formatting tended to follow two patterns: being "perpetrator-centric," or focused on the past lives, acts, and consequences of a sole perpetrator, or "victim-centric," in which the victims lives are described and how they became victims of crime or missing persons. While many podcasts include both perspectives, especially in narrative forms that expressed empathy for the victims or shamed the perpetrators, the heavier focus on one or the other was often seen. This focus has implications for the way the individuals are labeled and therefore treated after their case, with the label of perpetrator and victim holding much heavier when it becomes the context in which their case is presented and could weigh on future discussions of those involved even outside of the podcast itself.

Race and gender in perpetrator-centric podcasts.

For perpetrator-centric podcasts, podcasters often examined in great detail the perpetrator's character and life if the perpetrator was identified by police (Perpetrator Narratives). Their backstories, criminal histories, actions leading up to their crimes, and the crimes themselves were often provided to audiences in these podcasts. If perpetrators were not identified, perpetrator-centric podcasts often included speculation about who the perpetrator might be. Of note in the perpetrator's backstory were traumatic events, mental illness, addiction, and anything that could impact their character or future motivations. These were especially important in the cases of serial killers, such as the episodes "Eric Edgar Cooke" and Glennon Engleman in "166 - Respecting the History of Coins," as well as with Jason Todd Ready in "A Monster With A Secret," all of which were white men who committed multiple murders. The perpetrators were then often examined in the

context of the case being discussed, including their introduction to the setting of the crime, their criminal tactics, and any suspicious behavior they showed prior to their acts. This could suggest a form of retrospective labeling in which the perpetrator's history is seen through a perspective that further criminalizes them.

Even when the perpetrator was unknown, the episodes still often discussed possible perpetrators and their motivations for committing the crime. Since the episode "JJ Velazquez" focused on his wrongful conviction, the true identity of the perpetrator was discussed in depth to counter its comparison to JJ, with a name included of the possible true perpetrator of the crime who matches the description. The episodes "MISSING: Jennifer Blackmon Is Missing," "Who Killed Donna O'Steen?" and "Mojave Mystery," while mainly focusing on the known victims and their last known whereabouts, speculated on the possible perpetrators as well. It was implied that Jennifer Blackmon's perpetrator was her estranged ex-husband whom she was last seen with and April Pitzer's possible perpetrators were men she spent time with in the area prior to her death. Donna O'Steen's perpetrator was given special attention, as the crime scene evidence was analyzed and questioned in the context of the perpetrator's motives, such as why he took the items he did, why he targeted Donna in the first place, and even his own intelligence and identity in the community. Overall, it seems that even when the perpetrator is unknown, it is particularly fascinating in true crime to discuss what role they played in the crime that took place and their motives in doing so.

Perpetrators and victims were compared to their stereotypes at times, particularly those rooted in race and gender. There were many significant findings regarding gender that emerged from the sample (Gender). In terms of perpetrators, women were

underrepresented as offenders, with only two of nine offenders being women (Table 1).

While males are statistically more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of crime and

this skew towards male offenders does exist, it is not to the higher degree present in the

sample (Table 1).

In terms of qualitative findings surrounding women as perpetrators, the episode

"WTF Is Up With The Missing Idaho Kids" held the only example. In the case, the

perpetrators are the parents of the children, who are heavily criticized for their actions.

However, the mother and father are described differently, with the mother being

described as crazy and a poor mother, which was not equally applied to the father. This

lack of women as perpetrators and brevity in their individual contributions suggests the

sample relies upon males as ideal perpetrators and women as ideal victims.

Table 1. Offender and Victims of Violent Crime by Race and Gender[a,b]

Race	Gender	Offender*	Victim	Total
White	Male	5 (55.6%)	11 (42.3%)	16 (100%)
	Female	1 (11.1%)	11 (42.3%)	12 (100%)
Black or African American	Male	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (100%)
	Female	1 (11.1%)	1 (3.8%)	2 (100%)
Multiracial	Male	2 (22.2%)	1 (3.8%)	3 (100%)
	Female	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (100%)
Latino/a or Hispaniic	Male	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (100%)
	Female	0 (0.0%)	2 (7.7%)	2 (100%)
Total		9 (100%)	26 (100%)	35 (100%)

[a] Unsolved cases unknown offender(s) n=4 ("MISSING: Jennifer Blackmon Is Missing," "Who Killed Donna O'Steen?", "Mojave Mystery"). Cases with an offender description regardless if found or convicted are included Table 1 as well, such as in "JJ Velazquez."
[b] Multiple victims across race and gender n=2 ("Eric Edgar Cooke," "166 - Respecting the History of Coins")
Note: The episode "35 - A Small Foreign Faction" was not included in Table 1 due to its exclusion from the final sample. The episode "The Real Wolf of Wall Street" included the case of Jordan Belfort, which had over 1,500 victims and thus could not be represented in Table 1 as well.

Both the presence and absence of the topic of race in each podcast episode provided valuable information on the sample and possible implications of the true crime genre (Race). Because of its limited discussion, podcast episodes were categorized by the explicit discussion of race and its impact on the case or the absence of it from the narrative entirely (see Appendix C). Unless race was a significant aspect of a case or any of its actors were people of color, it often remained unmentioned in the narratives. As shown in Table 1, a majority of perpetrators and victims highlighted were white and race was often only mentioned in podcasts specifically on race or when race affected the case. The sample also showed an absence of Black men, multiracial women, and Latino men both as offenders and as victims. The absence of Black men in the sample is especially noteworthy as Black men make up the majority of both offenders and victims in reported crime statistics. Other races and ethnicities, such as AAPI and Native American, were also not present in the sample.

As race was only salient when prevalent to the case, the whiteness of the perpetrators was assumed, especially in serial and mass murders. The sample lacked males of color as perpetrators and included only one woman of color as a perpetrator in the episode "Hannah Mary Tabbs," which was the focal point of the podcast and the episode. This episode was not only unique in the gender and race of the perpetrator, and open discussion on the implications of both, but also provided a stark contrast to the rest of the sample as she was only charged with accessory to murder when she likely committed it or orchestrated it herself.

There was a difference in how some of the crimes committed by white men were discussed as well, especially in any unique quirks the perpetrators held relative to a

typical perpetrator. In "The Real Wolf of Wall Street," the case of Jordan Belfort met the criteria of being a white male perpetrator, but his story is unique in true crime because it was non-violent. Belfort committed a white collar crime, which are often difficult for the general public to understand, and he defended his acts on the grounds that they were less harmful than murder, even though his crimes impacted over 1,500 people's financial security. His case was even glorified in the media and its retelling, especially in the profit made from his crime, his hypermasculine work environment, and his party lifestyle, and his crimes are not fully described even in his own movie. Therefore in contrast to Tabbs' case, Belfort's crimes are typically viewed as harmless, whereas murder is viewed by the public as potentially the most harmful of all crimes. This shows how the crimes of white men, especially committing white collar crime, are considered in a very different light by the public.

Another case where whiteness was highlighted was in the episode "A Monster With A Secret," in which the white male perpetrator supported "the purity of the Aryan race" and was described as a Neo Nazi (0:02:10). The racism of this perpetrator provided more insight into his morality and strongly held beliefs, and was a significant part of his backstory. It also related to the crime committed itself, as the children he murdered had a Hispanic father, meaning it could have also been racially motivated. The perpetrator in "Respecting the History of Coins" was also described as a "rabid racist" and anti-semite, though it was not discussed in depth or related to the crimes highlighted (0:53:53). These descriptions were on the opposite end of Jordan Belfort's, highlighting how racist views play into the disturbance of the perpetrator and his motives.

This centrality of the perpetrator is noteworthy, especially compared to podcasts that focus more on the victims, such as when the perpetrator is unknown. In podcasts focused on the perpetrator, victims are often named and given the circumstances of their death but the story of the perpetrator continues to the next victim. However, in those such as "Mojave Mystery" the victim is given an in-depth background as well as life circumstances that led to their disappearance or death. All podcasts offered sympathy to the victims, with things such as their family members and support systems often discussed as well as their successes and good deeds in life, like owning a business or volunteering, which served to show the humanity of the cases presented. None of the podcast episodes included victim blaming and the victims were almost always treated with respect in their narratives.

Race and gender in victim-centric podcasts.

Similar to the mold of white men being perpetrators of crimes, there are often stereotypes of ideal victims as well (Victim Narratives). White women and children especially are often seen as the "perfect victims" of crime because of their innocence, ignorance, and inability to defend themselves. This was relevant in "WTF Is Up With The Missing Idaho Kids" as well, with the victims of two children, Tylee Ryan and JJ Vallow. The podcasters expressed more explicit sympathy for the children, discussing how "screwed" the case was and how they personally "feel bad for the kids" as at the time of recording they were still missing. "35 - A Small Foreign Faction," the episode that did not meet the episode criteria but was qualitatively analyzed, also included the white female victim of JonBenet Ramsey, specifically how she was hypersexualized as a young pageant girl. While she keeps her innocence as a child victim, the podcasters

discuss how when pictures of JonBenet are shown in documentaries, including the one discussed on this podcast episode, they are almost always of her in pageant makeup, making her look adult. The podcasters discussed how the "sexual picture[s]" that are often shown were disgusting and "intentially do not look like a six year old" (1:21:32; 0:15:23). This complexes the "ideal victim" caricature with sexism further expanded in other episodes, but both episodes caught similar media attention because of the fact that children were, or could have been, victimized by their parents, meaning they were powerless and abused by ones who should love them most.

Race is also a factor in characterizing an ideal victim, since white people are given more attention than people of color, especially young children like in the previous episodes. The difference in treatment between white children, Black children, and their adult counterparts is notable in the statistics provided in Table 1 as well as in the podcast episode "Hannah Mary Tabbs." The podcasters offered a unique discussion of racial difference in victims, as when the victim of the crime was found they spent time attempting to determine his race. The podcasters discussed this saying investigators were asking "how much attention should we be giving this? Is it a white person dead, or is it a black person dead? How much do we really care?" and it was later dismissed by the public as "just some Black body" (0:24:16).

Gender is often most synonymously discussed with victimhood in the context of crime. Looking at the demographics of this sample, it shows an almost equal representation of females as victims of crimes, with there only being two more female victims than males (Table 1). It is interesting to note that in reported crime males are statistically more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of crimes, with victimization

rates more even across genders and offender rates skewed more heavily towards males. The qualitative content of the sample highlighted the degradation of women, both with the victim's experiences as well as the podcasters themselves using sexist tropes in their narratives. These conversations varied from discussing cases of missing women to perpetuating the hypersexualization of women and the normalization of violence against women. The presence of either of the latter themes within each podcast episode is provided in Appendix C.

The sexualization of women, especially victims of violent crimes, presented in four podcast episodes. The first was "Eric Edgar Cooke" in which the perpetrator raped the victim postmortem. The description of this act, especially the murder and the specific details of exactly how the woman was raped, were discussed in depth and graphically. The act of murder and rape by the perpetrator is described as terrible and strange, with questions drawn by the podcasters on why the perpetrator changed his regular violent tactics, committed rape, and left the victim out on her neighbor's lawn.

The episode "Who Killed Donna O'Steen?" provided a significant finding as well. The murder of Donna O'Steen remains unsolved and the podcasters in Jensen and Holes discussed the details of the act, crime scene, possible motives, and possible perpetrators from a professional standpoint. Donna O'Steen was found with 13 stab wounds to the neck and chest. Even though there was no evidence of sexual assault, the podcasters discuss that "there's potentially a sexual component" to the crime that took place as she was a single woman at home and the perpetrator could have "planned and fantasized about attacking Donna," with them going on to suggest "that his intent was sexual assault or sexual assault and homicide" (0:15:33). This assumption that there was a sexual

component to the murder of a female victim without any form of evidence to support it exemplifies the sexualization of women, especially as victims of violent crime.

There were also a few smaller examples of women being sexualized. In the episode "The Real Wolf of Wall Street," Jordan Belfort's workplace is described as a hypermasculine environment, including in the sexualization and degradation of women as a crucial aspect. The narrators of the podcast described the deviant acts that took place in the office, but also described women as commodities to be passed around, with their quote stating "Sex in the office is common. Young female assistants are passed around almost as much as the drugs" (0:16:48). All of these examples sexualized the women discussed and thus provided significant findings.

The victimhood of women, as introduced in the above section, was present in multiple podcast episodes and will be further elaborated on here. Episodes such as "Eric Edgar Cooke" included graphic details of the violent acts against women, though this could be in relation to the podcaster's choice in narrative. Another notable case of women being victimized, even if a perpetrator, is the episode "Hannah Mary Tabbs." Even though Hannah Mary Tabbs organized and concealed the murder of a male victim of color, she was seen as incapable of the offense due to her womanhood, which is well highlighted and discussed by the podcasters. They discussed how to those viewing the case at the time "a woman couldn't possibly do this," as well as a more complex intersectional discussion on the fact that bias normally disadvantages Black women, but being a woman in this case "served her very well," as she was able to create a narrative of a desperate woman and pan the crime off onto the other male perpetrator present (0:30:47; 0:45:44). Finally, victimhood or seriousness of circumstances can be denied to

women, such as in the case of Lisa Mederos. She was experiencing abuse by her boyfriend Jason but when the police were dispatched to her residence "she assured the officers that she was fine and Jason refused to speak with them about the abuse allegations" (0:05:16). Because of this, officers dropped the case instead of further separating the couple for confidential interviews on the events that transpired. Later, Lisa did come to the police and reported her boyfriend's abusive behavior. This included surveillance of her phone calls, economic abuse, and strangulation, but police officers denied facilitating an eviction without physical evidence of the abuse and only provided her alternatives instead. This improper practice by police and dismissal of abuse alligations was a fatal mistake, as Lisa and three of her loved ones were murdered by Jason after the reports. This shows that women can be both seen as perfect and ideal victims, or their claims can be dismissed if they do not fit the stereotype of the crimes they report.

The prevalent conversation surrounding the comparison between missing women of color compared to missing white women was also covered well in the sample, with one episode on a missing Black woman, Jennifer Blackmon, and another on a missing white woman, April Pitzer. Since Jennifer Blackmon's case was featured on the podcast *Black Girl Gone*, which specifically discusses Black female victims, specific attention was given to this trope. Specifically regarding the limited attention to missing Black women's police investigations, they state the following:

> … we all know that when the victim is not a Black woman, the police seem to not
> hesitate in releasing as much information as possible, but time and time again, the

public is left with little information that can help in finding a black victim (0:11:18).

While April Pitzer's investigation did not receive huge press coverage as well because she was an addict, the descriptors of her include repeatedly state that she was a former, aspiring model though it was not relevant to her story, and her narrative is shaped as her having the perfect life before everything changed. Her appearance is also discussed, with her mother stating "She was so beautiful and then she just started getting so thin and it was just so sad," and her beautiful face and body are again mentioned at the end of the episode (0:04:35).

Within the present sample, both statistically and qualitatively, women are seen less as perpetrators and more as victims. Inherently gendered crimes were described graphically or ignored by authorities in previous reporting, sexual motives were assumed when little evidence supported it, and female perpetrators were described as incapable of violent crime or crazy compared to their counterparts. While these examples are limited compared to the larger content of the sample, they hold implications that women are still described in the rigid boundaries they have been in historically. The cases of Jennifer Blackmon and April Pitzer tie together both the narrative of women as missing persons, or potential victims of violent crime, and the differences in the resources allocated to investigating and reporting their disappearances due to race.

While these mixed cases of "perfect victims" in the present sample are interesting in the broader societal implications, Table 1 shows that they are limited considering there were many victims who did not fit these such as white males, a Black woman, a multiracial male, and two Hispanic girls. Rather than all fitting the exact mold, pieces

such as racial differences in investigation and generalized victimhood of women were uncovered, and hold a similar weight when conveyed to the true crime podcast audience.

The relationship between the perpetrator and victim, if known to one another, is also developed through each episode. Some cases consisted of victims just present by chance, like those in "Eric Edgar Cooke," but almost all others had some sort of relationship with the perpetrator. The victim of "Hannah Mary Tabbs" was with her in an affair, the victims in "A Monster With A Secret" were the girlfriend of the perpetrator and her family, the victims in "166 - Respecting the History of Coins" were all married to spouses who asked for the perpetrator's assistance in receiving their life insurance money, and even the victims in "The Real Wolf of Wall Street" were approached in a business setting. This relationship with the perpetrator not only allowed for a more in depth narrative and description of the relationship, especially if it was abusive, but also fit a more realistic understanding of the reality of crime which is often committed by those known to the victim.

True Crime Podcast Similarities in Format

The general format of true crime podcasts in this sample and their commonalities in content exhibited important similarities, which provided valuable insight on the content of true crime podcasts, themselves, and insight for future research regarding specific aspects of the genre (True Crime Podcast Similarities).

All sample podcasts included a transition into the case, often providing a brief overview or setting the scene "leading up" to the crime. As applied to true crime podcasts, I define "lead up" as the initial portion of the podcast which provides background information and important context for understanding the motivations,

situations, and outcomes pertaining to important social actors. Podcasters often tell the life story of the perpetrator or victim and provide a timeline of suspicious events, evidence, and deaths leading up to the main crime or crimes discussed in the case. This lead-up orients the listeners to the setting, players, and possible motives for the crime if known, similar to a storytelling narrative. The main crime is then described in varying detail, depending on the format of the podcast. Some podcasts provided a more in-depth analysis of a case with details and potential theories, some were more conversational or even had a joking tone, and others only discussed the relevant facts of the case (Appendix C). If a case was unsolved, podcasters often discussed theories of the crime at the end and strongly encouraged the audience to send in information to the police if they have any on the case.

Some podcasters appeared empathetic to victims of crime, sometimes viewing the crime from the perspective of the victim, and provided pseudo-scientific evidence to substantiate their claims. Such an episode was "Eric Edgar Cooke," in which the podcasters discussed the widespread belief that serial killers are born, not made, and podcasters spoke about their fear of being murdered for life insurance benefits. Sharing their personal sentiments on victims of crimes they discuss as well as adding their own real world connections allows a unique layer of intimacy and was shown throughout the sample.

Some podcasters also used their episodes to highlight issues in the criminal justice system, like giving more attention to Black female victims in "MISSING: Jennifer Blackmon Is Missing" or showcasing wrongful convictions, like the one of JJ Velazquez. By focusing on the topics of Black female victims or wrongful convictions, both of these

podcasts work against common narratives presented both in legacy and new media surrounding crime. With white women often the focus of high-profile missing persons cases or criminal cases in general, more push has been made in recent years to treat women of color with the same attention and importance. With the development of DNA exoneration, wrongful convictions have also shown injustices in the entire criminal process which are often racially motivated, similar to the case of JJ. The countering of the common narrative that these podcasts utilize not only helps bring attention to marginalized groups seeking justice, but also show the discrepancies between the characterization and reality of crime.

Overall, the format of true crime podcasts showed to have many commonalities within the present sample that can be useful to further analyze in future research. However, in the context of the present research questions, more complex analyses into the way gender and race are discussed and if they accurately compare to reported crime statistics were the most notable findings.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study not only provide insights on the true crime genre, but they also show their unique flexibility in discussing a wide variety of cases and issues facing the criminal justice system and society, more broadly. The ability to discuss things such as the impact of race in offending, victimization, and wrongful convictions, the abuse of women, and white collar crime are all great strengths of this format. However, this small sample also suggests that some important stereotypes may permeate this content, making it limited in its comparison to demographic trends represented in crime statistics.

The focus on violent crime in true crime podcasts was prevalent in the sample.

This focus perpetuates a moral panic that violent crime is increasing when that is not the general trend in decades. It also perpetuates racial and gendered stereotypes associated with crime, criminality, perpetrators, and victims. Nonviolent crimes are often neglected as well, instead focusing on violent acts occurring in public by strangers. However, the inclusion of white collar crime is beneficial in educating the public on these types of crimes and the impact they have. Given that the present sample is small, there are likely other true crime podcasts that approach story-telling differently.

The findings for the gender and race themes have important implications. While some conversations surrounding gender were productive and beneficial, such as discussing the cases of missing women, others could have a negative influence on audience members and perpetuate the hypersexualization of women and the normalization of violence against women. The description and discussion of the act in "Eric Edgar Cooke" highlighted the sexualization of women as victims of violent crimes, how women fit into the narrative of a typical true crime podcast, and how podcasters discuss such acts. In contrast, the episode "Who Killed Donna O'Steen?" made dangerous and unnecessary assumptions about the experiences of a woman who could not speak for herself, reflecting Vitis's (2022) claim that victims may be used more as an avenue for societal messages. A narrow portrayal of female victims as targetted and used for sexual gratification perpetuates the belief that a woman's worth is defined by her innate sexuality. Applying this belief to a victim who was not sexually assaulted in "Who Killed Donna O'Steen" is particularly concerning, given that sexual gratification was presented as a legitimate motive (despite a lack of evidence to support this) if she were sexually assaulted.

Less obvious forms of sexualization also offer important indications of societal messages conveyed to podcast listeners. The objectification of women in "The Real Wolf of Wall Street" is demonstrated by treating women as sex objects in an environment of high testosterone, drugs, and criminal acts. While these acts took place in an office, this description dismisses the possibility that women existed within the work environment and any non-sexual contributions they might make. In the case of JonBenet, the hypersexualization of a young child is deeply disturbing and plays into the narrative of children as ideal victims. However, the podcasters explicitly shame this sexualization, and create an atmosphere for productive conversation.

As discussed in the victim theme, women are often presented as the ideal victim, as long as they follow strict social guidelines about how to prevent and react to victimization. Women are taught to "self-police" to prevent victimization, but this fallacy does not always have a protective effect (Vitis 2022). These conversations on self-protection and viewership of women as victims is especially noteworthy in missing persons. If women are "putting themselves in danger" prior to their disappearance, they may not gain as much attention on their case on top of the barriers already in place, specifically in regards to the intersection of gender and race. As shown in the recent Gabby Petito case and many others outside of it, missing white woman syndrome dominates discussion and action on missing persons cases as white women are seen as the ideal victim. The case of April Pitzer, though she held stigma as an addict, discussed her aspirations and focused on her physical appearance. She, like other missing white women, had more extensive coverage and resources allocated to her investigation compared to the case of Jennifer Blackmon, showing that this focus on white women

comes at the cost of all women of color, and as the podcasters state, investigations surrounding Black women are left in the dark for the public. Highlighting these disparities and pushing for more coverage of women of color, especially with the podcast *Black Girl Gone*, is a way true crime podcasts can uniquely cover these topics and push for social change surrounding missing women.

While other conversations surrounding race were haphazard, some podcasts provided more open conversations about everyday racism and disadvantages people of color face in the criminal justice system. For an example of this, the episode on Hannah Mary Tabbs included discussions concerning how Black women are the recipients of unwarranted blame and aggression, and also viewed as passive and incapable of violence, which is restricted to men. Such recognition could have aided her case and countered some stigma regarding her race.

When race was absent in the sample, the episodes also provided significant insights on how race and extremism can still tie into cases. Jordan Belfort reaped the benefits of the opposite end of the spectrum in which crimes committed by rich white men are treated as less damaging to its victims, and the hypersexualized and hypermasculine environment it creates are aspired to by other males in society. Jason Ready from "A Monster With A Secret" showed the continued prevalence of racism in our society and how it can be a motivating factor for crime, especially hate crimes or violent crimes against people of color. Although these discussions do not locate people of color as a focal point, they recognize the way race impacts one's experience with crime and the criminal justice system.

Given the small sample size of this study, results are not generalizable to the true

crime genre. However, these findings are theoretically significant in that they develop a better understanding of the genre, as well as the way it may fail to reflect reported crime statistics and reinforces stereotypes of criminality and marginalized groups. The unique perspective of podcasters provides insight on the way the public views crime. The fact that there were no Black men in the sample was especially concerning, and the opportunity exists to highlight the racial disparities in mass incarceration and continued victimization by the criminal justice system. Some podcasts in the sample utilize this perspective to highlight other cases often ignored, like those of Black women, but many others clung to stereotypical narratives of race and gender, as they supposedly exist within perpetrators and victims. Podcasters share a responsibility to not only identify these systemic problems, but also push for change. For these reasons, podcasts may be used as a tool for challenging societal messages surrounding race, gender, crime, and the criminal justice system.

CONCLUSION

While true crime is a genre with a longstanding history, there is limited research available on its modern adaptations. In addition, scholarly inquiry in this area is particularly important given the rapid growth of true crime podcasts. This study served as a preliminary examination of true crime podcasts, with a particular focus on the topics of race, gender, and sexuality.

In this study, a qualitative content analysis was conducted for 10 true crime podcasts episodes using inductive coding techniques. Despite the small sample, findings suggest that the victimization and sexualization of women continues to be highlighted in the genre, while race is only overtly discussed when it is part of the podcast's theme or

somehow relevant to the crime being discussed. Therefore, while true crime podcasts allow an expanded and nuanced conversation on important topics, discussions surrounding these topics often fall short of their potential.

Future research should include a larger sample of podcast series and episodes in order to be able to generalize findings to the entire genre. Because this sample only consists of 10 podcasts and 10 of their episodes, findings may not be representative of all true crime podcast content. Future researchers should also focus on the role of sexuality in true crime podcasts. Although this study aimed to examine how LGBTQ+ people were presented in true crime podcast content, this was not discussed in any of the episodes drawn for this sample. However, it is likely that some true crime podcasts include the LGBTQ+ community. Future researchers in the area of true crime podcasts should not only examine how podcasters represent the race, gender, and sexuality of perpetrators and victims, but they should also pay special attention to the positionality of podcasters in terms of their own racial, gender, and sexual identification.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Final Podcast Sample

Podcast	Episode	Date	Episode Description
Not Another True Crime Podcast	"WTF Is Up With The Missing Idaho Kids?"	February 17, 2020	"NATC is going ripped from the headlines this week to investigate the whereabouts of JJ Vallow and Tylee Ryan, who have been missing since September from Rexburg, Idaho. Danny, Sara & Casey walk through the twisted web that is this family tree, complete with multiple "suspicious" deaths and a cult. Shouts out to East Idaho news for a very clutch & thorough timeline of this crazy case."
Unjust & Unsolved	"JJ Velazquez"	October 1, 2020	"In 1998, JJ was sentenced to life for the murder of a police officer in Harlem, New York. The twenty-one-year-old father had an alibi that day, yet was placed in a lineup and identified as the shooter despite the alibi disparity between the appearances and race of the witness descriptions and JJ. Since then, identifying witnesses have recanted their testimony that JJ was the shooter and there is no evidence placing JJ at the scene. In fact, new evidence points away from JJ. The real killer is still out there and JJ has been in prison for twenty-three years."
Black Girl Gone: A True Crime Podcast	"MISSING: Jennifer Blackmon Is Missing"	April 5, 2021	"In December 2020, Jennifer Blackmon vanished from River Rogue, Michigan. Jennifer has now been missing for 3 months and her family is desperate to find her."
True Crime All The Time	"Eric Edgar Cooke"	May 5, 2019	"Eric Cooke was an Australian serial who operated in the area of Perth, Western Australia, predominately in the early 1960s. This was a man that committed his crimes because in his words he wanted to hurt people. Cooke has the distinction of being the last man hanged in Western Australia. Join Mike and Gibby as they discuss the life and crimes of Eric Cooke. An abusive alcoholic father and head injuries mix to form a bad childhood. But is that what turned Eric Cooke into a killer? What was it that fueled this man's need to hurt, maim and kill? This case is interesting on a number of levels but particularly for the fact that two innocent men served lengthy sentences for Cooke's murders."
Jensen and Holes: The Murder Squad	"Who Killed Donna O'Steen?"	May 24, 2021	"In Seattle on November 8, 2001, Donna O'Steen took her daughter to a piano lesson before school. When she didn't return to pick her up, the piano teacher and Donna's daughter went to the house to look for her. Inside an unknown offender had stabbed Donna over 10 times and stole random items. The case remains unsolved today."
Sistas Who Kill: A True	"Hannah Mary Tabbs"	May 21, 2021	"Stop letting yall kids listen to this podcast! First person to correctly email us how many "The Color Purple" quotes/phrases were used in this episode

Crime Podcast			will win a prize."
American Greed Podcast	"The Real Wolf of Wall Street"	September 9, 2018	"Infamous stockbroker Jordan Belfort, a.k.a. "The Wolf of Wall Street", pleads guilty to fraud and does jail time. When Hollywood turns his life of sex, drugs, and crime into a blockbuster, his victims feel cheated again. This is the true story. (Original television broadcast: 3/5/2015)"
Morning Cup of Murder	"A Monster With A Secret - May 2 2021 - Today's True Crime"	May 2, 2021	"Jason Todd "J.T." Ready Kills (2012) Dangerous men tend to escalate. On May 2nd 2012 a man many knew as dangerous would take the lives of people he claimed to love. People who knew he was escalating but could do nothing to save themselves before the unthinkable happened."
My Favorite Murder with Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark	"35 - A Small Foreign Faction"[a]	September 22, 2016	"This week on My Favorite Murder, Karen and Georgia reflect and ruminate on the circus surrounding the life and death of JonBenét Ramsey. Pop culture gone mad."
	"166 - Respecting the History of Coins"	March 28, 2019	"Karen and Georgia cover the Cincinnati Who Concert Stampede and Glennon Engleman."
Disappeared	"Mojave Mystery"	August 26, 2021	"After six months in the Mojave Desert in 2004, following the custody loss of her children in Texas, 30 year-old April Pitzer is ready to come clean and return home. But when her past comes back to haunt her, the young mother of two is nowhere to be found."

[a] Episode excluded from sample and replaced by the following episode of the same podcast

Appendix B: Type of Crime Discussed and Location by Podcast Episode

Podcast	Episode	Crime Type	Offense	Location	Year
Not Another True Crime Podcast	"WTF Is Up With The Missing Idaho Kids?"	Violent	Murder	Rexburg, Idaho	2019
Unjust & Unsolved	"JJ Velazquez"	Violent	Murder	New York, NY	1998
Black Girl Gone: A True Crime Podcast	"MISSING: Jennifer Blackmon Is Missing"	NA	Missing, possible murder	River Rouge, Michigan	2020
True Crime All The Time	"Eric Edgar Cooke"	Violent and Nonviolent	Petty theft, vandalism, burglary, arson, breaking and entering, motor vehicle theft, sexual assault, rape, attempted murder, murder	Perth, Australia	1949-1963
Jensen and Holes: The Murder Squad	"Who Killed Donna O'Steen?"	Violent	Murder	Seattle, Washington	2001
Sistas Who Kill: A True Crime Podcast	"Hannah Mary Tabbs"	Violent	Accessory to murder	Philadelphia, PA	1887
American Greed Podcast	"The Real Wolf of Wall Street"	Nonviolent	Money laundering, securities fraud	New York, NY	1998
Morning Cup of Murder	"A Monster With A Secret - May 2 2021 - Today's True Crime"	Violent	Domestic violence, murder	Gilbert, Arizona	2012
My Favorite Murder with	"35 - A Small Foreign	Violent	Murder	Boulder, CO	1996

Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark	Faction"[a]				
	"166 - Respecting the History of Coins"	Violent	Murder	St. Louis, MO	1958-1980
Disappeared	"Mojave Mystery"	NA	Missing, possible murder	Newberry Springs, CA	2004

[a] Replaced in sample by following episode

Appendix C. Format and Prevalence of Themes by Podcast Episode

Podcast	Episode	Format[a]	Sexualization or Victimization of Women	Race of Those Involved and How It Impacted the Case
Not Another True Crime Podcast	"WTF Is Up With The Missing Idaho Kids?"	In-depth	Absent	Absent
Unjust & Unsolved	"JJ Velazquez"	Factual	Absent	Present
Black Girl Gone: A True Crime Podcast	"MISSING: Jennifer Blackmon Is Missing"	Factual	Present	Present
True Crime All The Time	"Eric Edgar Cooke"	In-depth	Present	Absent
Jensen and Holes: The Murder Squad	"Who Killed Donna O'Steen?"	In-depth	Present	Absent
Sistas Who Kill: A True Crime Podcast	"Hannah Mary Tabbs"	In-depth	Present	Present
American Greed Podcast	"The Real Wolf of Wall Street"	Factual	Present	Absent
Morning Cup of Murder	"A Monster With A Secret - May 2 2021 - Today's True Crime"	Factual	Present	Present

My Favorite Murder with Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark	"35 - A Small Foreign Faction"[b]	In-depth	Present	Absent
	"166 - Respecting the History of Coins"	In-depth	Absent	Absent
Disappeared	"Mojave Mystery"	Factual	Present	Absent

[a] In-depth: Podcast expanded upon the events and theories of the case or it had a conversational tone; Factual: Podcast narrative based on facts of the case with little personal interpretation. Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive; some podcast episodes met criteria for both but are listed by dominant format.
[b] Replaced in sample by following episode