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Criminal Minds

Route 66 - Season 9, Episode 5

First airing on CBS back in 2005, Criminal Minds is a police procedural television program that follows a team of profilers from the FBI’s (Federal Bureau of Investigations) Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) in Quantico, Virginia. The profilers analyze the country's most twisted criminal minds in an effort to anticipate their next moves before they strike again. Each team member brings his or her own area of expertise to the table as they pinpoint predators' motivations and identify their emotional triggers in the attempt to stop them. This show differs from most police dramas on air because it focuses on the victim and the criminal rather than on the crime itself. Its popularity also sits in that it closely resembles the actual steps taken to solve a crime or profile a criminal as they do in real life. The show’s accuracy in explaining what goes into profiling and the professional manner in which it does so contributes widely to the show’s eight-year success.

Route 66, an episode aired during season 9, follows the BAU as they investigate a missing teenager and look into her stepfather as a potential suspect in her disappearance. During the BAU's initial briefing for their latest case, Hotch[[1]](#footnote-1) collapses. He is rushed to the hospital suffering from complications resulting from his near fatal stabbing by George Foyet aka The Reaper[[2]](#footnote-2). Meanwhile, the rest of the team, while concerned for his life, are urged by Rossi[[3]](#footnote-3) to go to Wichita, Kansas to work on that case of sixteen year old Samantha Wilcox who was abducted by her ex-con father, Eddie Lee Wilcox. In the process, Eddie severely beat Samantha's boyfriend. Eddie had not been in contact with his ex-wife, Samantha's mother Melody Grimes, in quite some time, she who moved with Samantha to Wichita to get away from him. In reviewing evidence, the team believes Samantha may not have plotted with her father, but was a willing participant in their getaway. She is probably unaware however of her father's most recent past, which looks to include armed robbery, mob connections and murder, from which he is probably running. They're afraid that Samantha may not survive if Eddie is pushed into a corner.

The episode begins with two members of the BAU visiting the mother of the missing girl, Samantha. During this part of the show, I immediately reverted back to chapter 5 of our textbook, Psychology and the Legal system, and compared the training of police officers (how they handle crisis intervention) with what the unit did in the show. Although the show is praised for its accuracy, it did not delve deep into the steps necessary for the successful interview of Samantha’s mother. For example, chapter 4 of the textbook explains, “Police take a great deal of time investigating domestic disturbances… (93).” Although this can ring true, the show does not spend a great deal of time investigating the mother’s claims but rather just continuing on pursuit of the missing daughter and her father. Further investigation *before* the BAU took the claims of the mother seriously would have resulted in a different outcome in the show and may save the viewer time. Of course, this is the opposite of what makes for a successful television show but I shall explain why this is so later when I reveal the show’s ending.

Early into the show, the viewer is given information regarding the case that the members of the BAU have yet to discover. The missing girl, Samantha, although not aiding in the planning of the run, was a willing participant to running away with her father. She is seen various times throughout the episode, very comfortable with her father as they drive state to state towards his next “job.” Samantha is seen, also unknown, as very comfortable with her father’s very rugged and ex-con like (seen by the way he handles a gun or threatens to shoot the police) actions and is not at all in distress. This part of the show alerted me to chapter 2 in the textbook where a citizen’s sense of legality and morality are discussed. Samantha’s father pulls out a gun to shoot the police officer that he thinks is about to pull him over either for: (A) his plethora of legal issues and crimes committed beforehand or (B) for the “kidnapping” of his teenage daughter. In chapter 2, Greene discusses criminal intention and how “the Model Penal Code says that attempts should be punished the same way as completed ones (30).” It’s interesting how the study of this course has changed the way I view one of my favorite shows because at this point in the show, I wondered about how it would be handled if Eddie had indeed shot the officer or even, how it would be handled if the BAU knew half the details the viewers know.

Towards the middle of the show, the BAU is introduced to more details of the case and is brought a bit more up to speed with what is actually happening with this –

what they thought was – a kidnapping. There is a scene in a grocery store, where Eddie has just committed a murder, where the BAU is discussing this no longer being a kidnapping, but rather a father and daughter who have run away together. The dialogue between the people makes it apparent that they are psychoanalyzing Eddie’s behavior and where he is planning to go. This is where the show begins to dive deeper into criminology. During this conversation, the BAU discusses what I view as a threat assessment (57). They consider the nature of the threat, in this case, why Eddie has killed the gas station owner rather than just walking away and how risky he is planning on being, especially considering that he is travelling with his daughter whom he obviously cares about (they read the daughters text messages and found that he is very loving towards her).

The show climaxes at the point where the BAU brief the local police stations on what they have gathered on Eddie and Samantha’s whereabouts. This has always been my favorite part of the show but now, sitting with my textbook in hand, I find myself pointing out and gathering different types of information to draw a conclusion on the episode myself. I first analyzed whether or not the BAU in the show accurately completed the steps to criminal profiling. They did. Criminal profiling, or offender profiling, is the process of identifying the mindset and characteristics of an unknown criminal. Investigators examine the crime scene and the nature of the crime. The investigators attempt to determine the type of person the criminal is based on all the evidence and circumstances of the crime. Throughout the show, the BAU gathered all sorts of information on Eddie and when briefing the local police departments they made several conclusions. The briefing was very informal (which is opposite from what was explained in the text) which is one thing that I found inaccurate according to the book. They concluded that Eddie’s the type of criminal to switch from car to car, hoping to throw off the police this way. They also concluded that Eddie’s attempts at forging a relationship with his daughter is what this runaway is generally based off of. Finally, they concluded that Eddie’s mentality, when he realizes that he will get caught and that this isn’t the way to bond with his daughter, might result in him either ending his life by way of murder suicide or death by officer. The show uses a lot of terms mentioned in the text (sociopathic spree killer, career criminal, etc.) and I find that the show would gather more viewer interest and higher ratings if they spent more time on the content rather than the action.

As the show drew to a close, the action picked up as the police and the BAU closed in on Eddie and Samantha. At this point, Eddie has shot and killed two men, one in front of his daughter, and Samantha is beginning to lose trust and faith in her father. This, according to the BAU, will cause Eddie to act sporadically, especially considering his own tragic history with his father. As the case comes to a head, the local police trap Eddie and Samantha in a carnival. Eddie, as predicted by the BAU, takes Samantha hostage in an attempt to get away. According to Geene, Eddie does not exhibit the typical characteristics of an emotion driven criminal. Eddie’s actions in the show, probably to boost viewer rating of course (it is first and foremost a drama) are that of a scorned parent whose initial actions of that of criminal nature. In chapter 3 of the text, Eddie would be described as a criminal with psychoanalytical issues. “Psychoanalysts have suggested that criminal behavior is a means of obtaining substitute gratification of basic needs such as love, nurturance and attention that have not been normally satisfied within the family (66).” The show should have mentioned this (or delved deeper into the actual criminal rather than the actions) and this is where the show falters in my opinion. It is also where it becomes a bit unrealistic in nature.

The show ends with Samantha safe in the arms of the law and her father being arrested after a failed attempt at a, well predicted, suicide by police officer. Overall, I find that the show is very exciting and does its best to remain consistent and in line with how the real BAU would handle things. Although, several scenes in the show would lead to a better and less dramatic outcome if they were handled the way outlined in our text. One of the biggest mistakes according to the text was the way Samantha’s mother was questioned. It was very informal and done in her home. It also fed into the story of the show. If the show followed what was outlined in the text, then the BAU would have left the case for 24 hours (because Samantha would be considered a runaway) then picked up the case. Also, they would have investigated the relationship between Samantha and her father beforehand. The biggest inaccuracy in the show was the steps taken to solve the crime. Some were completely left out of the show – no doubt to up the drama – and to save time. All in all, the show is pretty accurate in regards to psychoanalyzing a criminal and criminal profiling by use of the text.

1. Aaron "Hotch" Hotchner is a fictional character from Criminal Minds, portrayed by Thomas Gibson. He is a Supervisory Special Agent within the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit, and has appeared from the series' pilot episode “Extreme Aggressor.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. George Foyet, a.k.a. "The Boston Reaper" or simply "The Reaper", was a prolific serial killer that Hotch had once hunted ten years before in Boston. He reappears in the Season Four episode Omnivore. He is best known for being the arch-nemesis of Aaron Hotchner. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David Rossi is a Supervisory Special Agent and Unit Senior Agent at the Behavioral Analysis Unit at Quantico, Virginia. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)