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CREATING CULTURAL MONSTERS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF SERIAL MURDERERS IN AMERICA

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Julie Bethany Wiest
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ABSTRACT

Serial murder and serial murderers have been the subject of considerable attention in fictional crime shows (e.g., the various versions of "Law and Order" and "CSI") and movies (e.g., "The Silence of the Lambs"), as well as in the print media, since the term and profile for "serial killer" were developed by the FBI in the 1970s. White, American men are frequently identified as being over-represented as serial murderers, but no adequate sociological explanation has yet been developed for this. Biological and psychological explanations are deficient, and the cultural context generally has been ignored in previous studies.

Informed by a framework drawn from cultural sociology and gender studies, this study employs a qualitative content analysis of biographical narratives, newspaper articles, and legal documents regarding 15 serial murderers – nine who appear to characterize the "typical" serial murderer and six who each represent a variation of one of the prototypical characteristics – to identify the ways in which the American cultural milieu fosters serial murder and the creation of white, male serial murderers. A model is offered to illustrate the workings of culture and help explain the development of serial murderers in the United States. People utilize cultural values to construct lines of action according to their cultural competencies. American cultural values — especially as they emphasize competition and individual achievement; white, male privilege; and hegemonic masculinity — along with the emotional appeal of crime commission appear

to contribute to the development of serial murderers by making serial murder an available and desirable line of action for some men.

There appears to be more diversity in characteristics of serial murderers than popular profiles suggest, and implications of the exaggerated and apparently inaccurate representations of serial murder by the media and FBI are considered. In addition, commonly employed definitions appear to describe characteristics most associated with white, male serial murderers in the United States and exclude other cases of multiple murder and serial offending. Representations of serial murder reinforce and perpetuate the power structure in American society and related values, which sustains an environment for extreme violence and creates a cultural blindness to some perpetrators.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter **Page**

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
Rationale 2
Organization of Chapters 3

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 5
Defining Serial Murder 5
Common Characteristics of Serial Murderers 8
Race 12
Gender 14
Sexuality 16
Nationality 16
Other Possible Paths 19
Other Serial Crimes 19
School Shootings 21
White Supremacy 21
Public Interest, Media, and Culture 22
Explaining Serial Murder 25
Psychological Explanations 25
Social Psychological Explanations 29
Sociological Explanations 30
Research Questions 32

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 33
Cultural Sociology 33
Broadcasting Culture 35
"Tuning In" and Cultural Competencies 36
Contextual Features Suitable for Serial Murder 40
Violence 41
Individualism, Competition, and Privilege 43
Economic and Social Structures 47
Social Types 48
Representations of Crime in the Media 50
Masculinities 54
The Criminal Experience 61
Edgework 61
Seductions of Crime 64
Power and Control 65

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY 68
Qualitative Content Analysis 69
Defining Serial Murder 69
Sample Selection 70
"Typical" Group 73
"Atypical" Group 77
Data-Collection Sources 80
Biographical Narratives 80
Newspaper Articles 82
Court Cases and Legal Journal Articles 85
Official Confessions 86
Analytical Procedure 86

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS 89
Serial Murderer Characteristics 89
"Typical" Group 89
"Atypical" Group 95
Comparisons of Characteristics 99
Intelligence and School Performance 99
Employment 100
Sexuality 100
Age at First Murder 101
Previous Abuse 101
Criminal History 102
Military Service 102
Interest in Law Enforcement 102
Peer and Romantic Relationships 103
Failures 104
Trophies 105
Explanations Offered 105
Cultural Values Tuned In and Utilized 106
Success and Recognition 107
Violence 108
Portrayals 109
Social Types 114
Masculinities 122
The Criminal Experience 126
Thrill-Seeking and Risk-Taking 126
Power and Control 127
Skill or Accomplishment 128
Narrative of Serial Murder 131
Initial Reports 133
Notoriety and Record-Setting 134
Need to Know Why 136
Anniversary Stories 139

Missing Victims 140

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION 143
American Cultural Values 143
Desire for Power 143
Regard for Violence 144
Thrill-Seeking 145
Culturally Familiar Imagery and Social Typing 145
Model of Media Coverage 147
Cultural Competencies and Building Lines of Action 148
Variations of the White, Male Model 150
Representations of Serial Murder 151
Considering the Definitions 153

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS 155
Implications 156
Suggestions for Future Research 157

REFERENCES 159

APPENDICES 178
Appendix A: Tables 179
Appendix B: Data-Collection Sources 187

VITA 333

LIST OF TABLES

Table **Page**

Table 1. General Information About Serial Murderers in the Sample..... 180

Table 2. Number of Articles Found by Database and Search Term, and Number and Percentage Used in Analysis. 181

Table 3. Breakdown of Data-Collection Sources 182

Table 4. Findings – Characteristics of Serial Murderers in the Sample. 183

Table 5. Findings – Characteristics of Serial Murderers in the Sample (Continued). 184

Table 6. Determining Social Status of Serial Murderers in the Study..... 185

Table 7. Predictors of Media Coverage 186

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure **Page**

Figure 1. Model of American Culture, Phase 1 35

Figure 2. Model of American Culture, Phase 2 37

Figure 3. Model of American Culture, Phase 3 39

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, Ted Bundy, "BTK," "The Night Stalker," and "The Green River Killer." The names are familiar, the men infamous. They have appeared on television, in newspapers and magazines. Their faces are displayed on merchandise like T-shirts, trading cards, comic books, calendars, and action figures. Web sites and fan clubs are devoted to them. Serial murderers have become perverse icons in the United States – and American culture may facilitate their development, as well as intensive public interest.

The term "serial killer" was coined in the 1970s by Robert Ressler, former director of the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, and the FBI quickly became the foremost authority on serial murder, establishing the Behavioral Science Unit in 1974 (now made up of four branches collectively called the Behavioral Analysis Units) to specialize in profiling serial crimes and aid investigations. The FBI and its profilers, like the serial murderers they pursue, often have been the subject of considerable attention in fictional accounts of serial murder and in the print media. According to the FBI profile and others offered by social scientists, the vast majority of convicted serial murderers are white men, and the United States reportedly has the most serial murderers per capita of any country in the world. The over-representation of white, male, American offenders is often recognized by serial murder researchers (e.g., Holmes and De Burger 1988 and Douglas and Olshaker 1997), but without explanation. Estimates of the

percentage of white, male Americans responsible for serial murder offenses are much higher than recorded rates in homicide and violent crime in general, and this pattern cannot be explained by biology or psychology, or by the racial composition in the United States.

To understand distinctive behavior patterns, it is first necessary to consider the influence of culture to identify those components that affect thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. A study of serial murder must consider social and cultural factors. This study, drawing on theoretical arguments from cultural sociology and symbolic interactionism, identifies particular components of American culture that appear to contribute to the development of serial murderers and to which white men may be more susceptible.

Rationale

Sociology and criminology generally have neglected the phenomenon of serial murder, with psychology responsible for most of the current knowledge and perspectives. Criminologists spend much time investigating variations in patterns of minor offending (Messner and Sampson 1991:460), perhaps finding studies of frequently occurring minor offending to be more useful because of the generalizability of their findings. Although serial murder is a rare phenomenon within a rare type of offending (homicide), it warrants study because it is among the most serious types of offending – in terms of harm caused and public fear aroused – with a very limited understanding of its roots. Schlesinger (2000b:19) argues that despite its rarity, serial murder has a "major negative impact on society." It affects not just the actual victims, but also their families, friends,

the community, and sometimes the entire country. In addition, significant financial resources are dedicated to the investigation, apprehension, and legal proceedings of serial murderers. King County, Wash., officials interviewed for a *Seattle Times* article about the "Green River Killer" case compared the cost of the investigation, prosecution, and defense of suspect Gary Ridgway to the cost of recovering from a natural disaster, estimating it at $8 million to $12 million (Fryer and Ostrom 2001).

In addition, studying an extreme version of any phenomenon is useful in understanding more commonly occurring varieties. Studying serial murder not only serves to further our understanding of an atypical but very serious type of murder, but it can contribute to better understanding of ordinary murder and other types of violent behavior. Studying serial murder also may lead to a better understanding of cultural messages in the United States, how they are transmitted to the public through the mass media, how they influence violent behavior, and their possible consequences.

Organization of Chapters

This study is divided into seven chapters, including this brief introduction. The second chapter (literature review) discusses definitional considerations, common characteristics of serial murderers, representations of serial murder in the media and American culture, and frequent explanations for serial murder. I suggest here that explanations of serial murder are deficient and cultural considerations generally absent, and call for an examination of social influences in the development of serial murderers. The third chapter (theoretical framework) draws on theoretical arguments from cultural

sociology to develop a model that illustrates the workings of culture and demonstrate how that model may be used to explain the development of serial murderers. The fourth chapter (methodology) explains the methodology employed in the study, including an explanation of the qualitative content analysis method, the sample, data-collection sources, and the analytical procedure. The fifth chapter (findings) discusses findings of the study, and the sixth chapter (discussion) develops more in-depth connections among the findings, as well as arguments about their implications. The final chapter (conclusions) discusses implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on serial murder is full of inconsistency and discrepancy. No single definition of serial murder exists, which complicates efforts to determine its incidence. Profiles of serial murderers developed by social scientists differ from versions perpetuated in the media, where many of the killers receive celebrity status. Explanations of serial murder range from biological to sociological, with much of the research from a psychological tradition. The cultural context generally is neglected. This review of the literature organizes the divergent views of serial murder and identifies lacunae.

Defining Serial Murder

What constitutes murder and distinguishes it from natural death and other forms of violent deaths due to accidents or suicides are widely agreed upon, albeit less distinct in practice. Definitions of serial murder vary, however, with much of the discrepancy related to number of victims and distinctiveness of motivational factors. Less ambiguous is how serial murder differs from single murder and other types of multiple murder.

Serial murder is distinguished from single murder in several ways in addition to number of victims. Single murders are more likely than serial murders to be committed by intimates or acquaintances and to be motivated by hatred, anger, revenge, or rage. Most serial murder researchers (which include social scientists, law enforcement officials, and investigative journalists) concur that serial murderers almost exclusively

kill strangers, and serial murder victims often are members of vulnerable populations, such as children, elderly, prostitutes, runaways, and homosexuals (Fox et. al. 2005; Hickey 2006; Holmes and De Burger 1988; and Vronsky 2007). The most frequent victims are women (Hickey 2006; Kraemer, Lord, and Heilbrun 2004; and Schechter and Everitt 1997).

Serial murder also is distinguished from other types of multiple murder – mass murder and spree murder – by the timeframe in which the murders are committed. Mass murder is the killing of at least several people in one place at the same time, usually by one killer, and spree murder is the killing of at least several people within a short timeframe (during a period of hours or weeks) usually by one impulsive killer (Holmes and De Burger 1988:47).

Most serial murder researchers employ the Federal Bureau of Investigation definition or some close variation. The FBI defines a serial murderer as a person who has killed three or more people over a period of weeks, months, or years with an emotional cooling-off period between murders (Mueller 2005). This time duration qualification not only distinguishes serial murder from other forms of multiple murder, but it also addresses differences between serial murderers and other murderers. The National Institute of Justice and others include in the definition evidence of "sadistic, sexual overtones" in the commission of the murders (Schechter and Everitt 1997:311). Consonant with this qualification, serial murder is most often classified as "sexual homicide," with varying degrees of organization, by law enforcement agencies, including the FBI (Vronsky 2004:100) – even though the FBI does not include a sexual component in its definition.

Criminal profiler Turvey (1999:287) only requires "two or more related[1] cases involving homicide behavior." Social scientists frequently incorporate a number of motivational, behavioral, and psychological qualifiers. Holmes and De Burger (1988) define a serial murderer as a solo killer whose attacks are unprovoked and target those with whom he has little to no relationship, and they exclude murders committed for passion, profit, or other personal gain. Hickey's (2006:23) definition requires three or more victims killed "over time" and a pattern connecting the murders, but he includes murders for financial or personal gain and allows relationships between killers and victims. Egger's (1998:5-6) definition is particularly exclusive:

> A serial murder occurs when (1) one or more individuals (in many cases, males) commit(s) a second murder and/or subsequent murder; (2) there is generally no prior relationship between victim and attacker (if there is a relationship, such a relationship will place the victim in a subjugated role to the killer); (3) subsequent murders are at different times and have no apparent connection to the initial murder; and (4) are usually committed in a different geographical location. Further, (5) the motive is not for material gain and is for the murderer's desire to have power or dominance over his victims. (6) Victims may have symbolic value for the murderer and/or are perceived to be prestigeless and in most instances are unable to defend themselves or alert others to their plight, or are perceived as powerless given their situation in time, place, or status within their immediate surroundings, examples being (7) vagrants, the homeless, prostitutes, migrant workers, homosexuals, missing children, single women (out by themselves), elderly women, college students, and hospital patients.

Most definitions of serial murder exclude murders committed by a person serving as an agent of someone or something else, such as killings during military service,

[1] Related cases are those in which substantial similarities in modus operandi or crime scene characteristics are found such that the cases are considered by law enforcement officials as likely committed by the same perpetrator or perpetrators.

political terrorism, murder-for-hire, and organized crime (Heide and Keeney 1994; Ferguson et. al. 2003; and Walsh 2005).

Because of divergent definitions of serial murder and the relative invisibility of victims, the number of serial murderers identified varies widely. Estimates of the number of active serial murderers at any given time range from the low 30s to 100 or more (Holmes and De Burger 1988 and Caputi 1989). The U.S. Department of Justice approximates the number of active serial murderers at 35 and the number of annual victims at 540 (Schmid 2005:82). In the 1980s and 1990s, highly publicized estimates were much higher, chiefly because of an erroneous statement made at a 1983 news conference by then-director of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit (now the Behavioral Analysis Units) Roger Depue that serial murderers claim 4,000 victims each year (Schmid 2005:82). Since then, the estimated number of yearly victims has still often been reported as between 3,500 and 5,000 (Holmes and De Burger 1988), and the estimate of 4,000 is commonly cited in media reports (Schmid 2005). In perhaps the most comprehensive statistical study of serial murderers, Hickey (2006), whose definition of serial murder is among the most inclusive, analyzed cases of serial murder in the United States from 1800 to 1995, identifying 337 male serial murderers with a total of 2,613 to 3,807 victims and 62 female serial murderers with a total of 417 to 584 victims.

Common Characteristics of Serial Murderers

What we now call serial murder has occurred throughout the history of the United States and presumably the world, but law enforcement officials and social scientists

suggest that there appears to have been a surge in serial murders in the United States within the past 30 to 50 years (Holmes and De Burger 1988; Lane 1997; and Vronsky 2004), approximately the same time the phenomenon was labeled "serial murder" and gaining recognition through media coverage. The perceived surge could be explained by an increased awareness of the phenomenon, better record keeping, or increased media attention, as well as an increase in the number of serial murderers. Vronsky (2004:23) suggests that any rise in the number of serial murderers can be explained by a proportionate rise in the general population: "More people; more victims; more serial killers." The following presents relatively reliable information about the characteristics of identified serial murderers reported by social scientists and law enforcement officials.

Identified serial murderers are overwhelmingly white men and typically between the ages of 25 and 35, although the age range of their victims varies widely (Douglas and Olshaker 1997; Fox, Levin, and Quinet 2005; Holmes 1985; Holmes and De Burger 1988; and Vronsky 2004). Yet, serial murderers older than 35 exist. Adolescent serial murderers are rare, as single murderers younger than 18 are relatively rare; Myers (2004), for example, studied cases of serial murderers who were younger than 18 at the time of their crimes, identifying only six in the past 150 years.

Identified serial murderers apparently are of average intelligence (Fox and Levin 2005; Fox et. al. 2005; and Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas 1992), but the notion that they are extraordinarily intelligent has long been included in profiles and popular images of serial murderers.[2] They tend to have performed poorly in school and work as unskilled

[2] Vronsky (2004), an investigative journalist, is one of few serial murder researchers who still include "above-average intelligence" in the profile. Egger (1998) identifies the supposed high level of intelligence

laborers (Schechter and Everitt 1997). Serial murderers and their victims come from all social classes, though some argue they are mostly in the lower to middle strata (Holmes and De Burger 1988). They may have shown an interest in police work and security-type jobs (Holmes and De Burger 1998). Many have military experience (Castle and Hensley 2002 and Ressler et. al. 1992); according to the FBI, the majority receives other-than-honorable discharges (Ressler et. al. 1992).

Serial murder researchers often depict them as commonly from unstable and/or physically, psychologically, and mentally abusive families with histories of alcohol, drug, criminal, and psychiatric problems; have high rates of psychiatric problems; and frequently show an early interest in voyeurism, fetishism, and sadomasochistic pornography (Fox et. al. 2005 and Schechter and Everitt 1997).[3] Some serial murderers were raised by adoptive parents (Fox et. al. 2005), but no connection has been established. Three childhood "symptoms" allegedly appear in the backgrounds of many serial murderers: enuresis (bed-wetting), fire-starting, and sadistic activity (often in the form of animal torture) (Schechter and Everitt 1997). Some psychological studies have sought to identify a link between serial murderers and this triad of childhood activities (e.g., Singer and Hensley 2004).

To be a serial murderer, an offender by definition must avoid apprehension for a period of time, and researchers try to identify conditions contributing to serial murderers' ability to avoid detection. Serial murderers usually "maintain a low profile … and do not come across as 'crazies'" (Holmes and De Burger 1988:20). Some serial murderers hold

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and extraordinary ability of serial murderers to outsmart police and avoid capture as myths perpetuated in popular culture.

[3] These characteristics are not unique among offenders in general.

jobs, attend church services, and generally blend in as "normal" members of their communities. Others are highly mobile, and their crimes may be spread over years across several law enforcement jurisdictions, complicating detection. Because motives are often used to solve murder cases, an apparent lack of traditional motive may impede identification (Holmes and De Burger 1988). Serial murderers are often characterized as highly organized and not impulsive. (It should be considered, however, that only those killers with these characteristics reach the status of serial murderers because other, less-skillful or less-organized killers may be captured before killing enough people to qualify.)

Analysts often link the commission of serial murder to an exertion of power over the victim, ritualized performance, dehumanization of the victim, and sexually sadistic fantasy (Claus and Lidberg 1999 and Warren, Hazelwood, and Dietz 1996). Serial murderers usually do not appear to kill for financial or material gain. Holmes and De Burger (1988:50) explain:

> To the typical serial murderer, killing is simply *expressive* of the motivation to kill. For such a murderer, the gain is *psychological* and the more who are murdered, the greater is the buildup of psychological gain. This is a closed system of motivation in which killing is preceded and followed by homicidal fantasy that rewards, reinforces, and restimulates to further homicide.

Popular profiles of serial murderers such as Ted Bundy, Dennis Rader, and Gary Ridgway seem to differ to some extent from the characteristics reported by social scientists. Fictional representations and purported biographical accounts of actual killers frequently portray the investigation like a game of cat-and-mouse, with the killers frequently contacting police before their apprehension. The representations also depict

substantial contact with the media and exaggerate the killers' abilities and intelligence. Although some serial murderers do contact police and media and express feelings of enjoyment from doing so, social scientists apparently find these activities more the exception than the rule.

Race

Identified American serial murderers – and their victims – are overwhelming white (Holmes and De Burger 1988 and Vronsky 2004). The fact that most victims and perpetrators of serial murder are white corresponds to the long-documented trend of intraracial homicide (Garfinkel 1949) and social segregation in the United States, but explanations for white men's apparent over-representation as serial murderers have not been offered.

Fox et. al. (2005); Kraemer et. al. (2004); and Seltzer (1995) claim that the disproportionate percentage of white to African-American serial murderers is consistent with the racial composition of the United States. According to the 2000 Census, however, African-Americans made up 12.1 percent of the U.S. population, while non-Hispanic whites made up 69.1 percent. White men constituted almost 37 percent of the American population, yet represented a much higher proportion of serial murderers, estimated as high as 95 percent (Warren et. al. 1996). The proportion of white, male serial murderers also is higher than the typical racial and gendered patterns found in murder rates and other types of violence, in which men and African-Americans are over-represented (U.S. Department of Justice 2006). With homicide in general, men are over-represented as victims compared to women (U.S. Department of Justice 2006), but the opposite is the case for serial murder victims.

Several social scientists argue, however, that African-Americans constitute a larger percentage of serial murderers than most previous studies suggest. Walsh (2005) asserts that African-Americans are over-represented as serial murderers, "at a rate approximately twice one would expect based on the average percentage of African Americans in the population" (Walsh 2005:281). Hickey (2006:141) claims there have been 200 cases of African-American serial murder in the United States since the mid-1800s, and Vronsky (2004:8) argues that the number of African-American serial murderers is increasing rapidly, from 10 percent of the total number of serial murderers before 1975 to 21 percent now. Hickey (2006:141) suggests that cases of African-American serial murderers have not received a large amount of (or any) media coverage because black-on-black crime "doesn't sell papers."

The divergence in the number of African-American serial murderers reported may by explained by the employed definition of serial murder. The studies that find a higher incidence of African-American serial murderers seem to employ a definition that is on the inclusive end of the serial murder definitional spectrum. Conversely, the studies that find a lower incidence seem to employ a more exclusive definition. Further research is needed because definitions are not stated in all studies examined in this review.

African-American serial murderers have not received as much media attention as white serial murderers, and possibly in the past their murders more often were given scant attention by law enforcement and media, particularly if they murdered other African-Americans, but whether that has occurred or to what extent is unknown.

Gender

Estimates of the number of female serial murderers also vary because of definitional discrepancies. Women identified as serial or multiple murderers generally fit into one of three categories: those who kill family members, those who kill on the job (healthcare workers who kill patients or childcare workers who kill children), or those who kill with a male partner (often a husband or lover) (Davis 2001; Fox and Levin 2005; Hickey 2006; Schechter and Everitt 1997; and Vronsky 2004, 2007). When women are involved in partner serial killings, the man is almost always depicted as the "mastermind," while the woman is an accomplice or follower (Hickey 2006:194-195).[4]

Female multiple murderers kill family members more often than male multiple murderers (Hickey 2006 and Vronsky 2007). Female multiple murderers acting alone are most often found in hospitals or other healthcare or childcare settings (Hickey 2006 and Vronsky 2004). The reasons these women kill appear to be different than those of the prototypical male serial murderer. "These often fall into the category of either 'mercy homicide,' in which the killer believes he or she is relieving great suffering, or the 'hero homicide,' in which the death is the unintentional result of causing the victim distress so he (or she) can be revived by the offender, who is then declared a hero" (Douglas and Olshaker 1997:27).

Women's methods of committing suicide and killing tend to be different than males, and this is also true for serial murder. "A woman is unlikely to kill repeatedly with a gun or knife. It does happen with something 'clean' like drugs" (Douglas and Olshaker

[4] Well-known male-female serial-murderer teams in which the women were depicted as subservient include Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka; Fred and Rosemary West; and Doug Clark and Carol Bundy.

1997:27). Vronsky (2007:43) claims that female multiple murderers "overwhelmingly" choose poison as their killing method. Women's use of drugs and poison may imply that the act of killing itself is not the focus, but instead it is a means toward some ultimate goal, such as financial gain or others' recognition or sympathy (Douglas and Olshaker 1997 and Vronsky 2007). Vronsky (2007:33) suggests that the female multiple murderer is "all business," meaning they do not often participate in behaviors unnecessary to the killing itself, like kidnapping, confinement, rape, mutilation, cannibalism, sexual gratification, or necrophilia, which are more common with male offenders.

Social scientists who employ a more exclusive definition of serial murder assert that there are no known female serial murderers (e.g., Silvio, McCloskey, and Ramos-Grenier 2006), and others with more inclusive definitions claim that women account for 10 to 15 percent of known U.S. serial murderers (e.g., Seltzer 1995). Hickey (2006), who allows in his definition murders for financial or personal gain and relationships between killers and victims, identified 64 female serial murderers. Still others identify solo killer Aileen Wuornos as the only known female serial murderer (Shipley and Arrigo 2004 and Arrigo and Griffin 2004), but her serial murderer designation is disputed (Myers, Gooch, and Meloy 2005; Schechter and Everitt 1997; and Silvio et. al. 2006).

The existence of female serial murderers depends on the employed definition of serial murder (Schechter and Everitt 1997). The FBI's broad definition would include a number of women. If the National Institute of Justice's additional component of "sadistic, sexual overtones" is incorporated, then there are many fewer. If women who kill family members, women who kill for financial gain, women in the healthcare or childcare settings, and women who kill as part of a male-female team are excluded, the number

drops even further. No known female serial murderers match the popular portrayal of the "typical" serial murderer – "the lone psychopathic lust murderer, coolly stalking and snaring his victims, then butchering and mutilating them in a sex-crazed frenzy" (Schechter and Everitt 1997:311) – or most definitions of serial murder.

Sexuality

Defining serial murder in terms of sexual motive establishes a link between the killer's sexuality and the sex of the victims. The majority of identified serial murderers – about 86 percent – are heterosexual men and kill women (Schechter and Everitt 1997:120). Likewise, homosexual male serial murderers often kill males, typically other homosexuals (Schechter and Everitt 1997:120). When a heterosexual male serial murderer kills men, the male victims usually do not appear to be the killer's intended targets (i.e., their murder is a "necessity" to carry out the murder of the intended female target). Both male and female children also are victims of serial murderers (Fox and Levin 1998 and Hickey 2006). Children also may be sexual objects for some adults (Finkelhor and Araji 1986 and Freund and Watson 1990), and medical studies have found that pedophiles are less likely than other types of sex offenders to have a strong gender preference in victims (e.g., Freund et. al. 1991).

Nationality

The United States appears to have many more serial murderers than any other industrialized county (Egger 1998 and Newton 1991). Newton (1991) contends that 74 percent of all serial murderers in the twentieth century came from the United States. Vronsky (2007:32) sets that number at 76 percent, with 21 percent of serial murders occurring in Europe, where England claimed the majority of those with 28 percent,

followed by Germany with 27 percent and France with 13 percent. Jenkins (1994:41) qualifies that perhaps the rate of serial murder in the United States is merely a product of greater awareness of the offense, differences in the legal systems, and/or differences in media coverage. If the rate of serial murder is higher in the United States than in any other industrial nation, as it seems, no explanation has been formulated.

Several social scientists have compared characteristics and incidence of U.S. serial murder to those of other countries, often basing their studies on theories and perspectives developed in the United States, with mixed results. Capp (1996) studied serial murderers in seventeenth-century England, and Grover and Soothill (1999) studied serial murder in Britain from 1960 to the 1990s. In the latter study, Grover and Soothill (1999) applied the theoretical arguments of Elliott Leyton, a Canadian anthropologist recognized for his studies of American serial murder, and they concluded that his structural arguments and focus on socio-economic factors could not explain British serial murder. They did find similarities in American and British serial murder, including characteristics of offenders (overwhelmingly white, male, and of lower to middle social class) and type of victims (those in vulnerable groups, including prostitutes, children, young adults, gay men, and the elderly). Yet, they suggest a cultural difference, placing emphasis on Britain's supposedly harsher "engine of patriarchal capitalism" (Grover and Soothill 1999:13). They argue that British men who cannot compete in the economic system are "cast out" and subsequently provided "minimal social and economic protection" by the state "because it is thought such provision will merely exacerbate their 'idleness'" (Grover and Soothill 1999:13). "At this juncture, the inability of individuals to compete on the terms of patriarchal capitalism and a lack of social provision" contributes

to "'creating' serial killers who simply but grotesquely exploit many of the cultural meanings of a society" (Grover and Soothill 1999:13). They also suggest that pervasive homophobia and a "more exaggerated form" of oppression of homosexuals in Britain may explain instances of heterosexual serial murderers victimizing gay men in Britain (Grover and Soothill 1999:13).

Harbort and Mokros (2001) suggested similarities between characteristics of U.S. and German serial murderers, though there are far fewer of the latter, even relative to population size. Hodgskiss (2004:90) compared the characteristics of South African serial murderers with those of serial murderers in other nations, concluding that killers in South Africa are most similar to those in Europe, with both being distinguished from North American serial murderers because of a "seeming lack of sexually violent conscious fantasy."[5] Although Hodgskiss suggests that the presence of a sexual component is characteristic of serial murder in the U.S., not all researchers of American serial murderers include a sexual qualifier.

Finally, Hickey (2006) reviewed cases of serial murder in 22 countries besides the United States (including Canada, Germany, Britain, France, Hungary, Australia, South Africa, Russia, and Iran). He identified differences in the ways serial murder is defined and viewed, and argued that "cultural differences influence the methods and motives" (Hickey 2006:291) of serial murderers. Most notably, he found many similarities among

[5] Hodgekiss (2004:82) recognizes, then quickly dismisses, the possibility that this finding could be explained by an unwillingness of the offenders to express their desires to the researchers, arguing that "it does not explain why South African offenders would be systematically reticent about their fantasies, while admitting to a range of offences and freely discussing some of the most private areas of their lives."

industrialized nations and more discrepancy when comparing industrialized and developing nations.

Albeit with limited empirical support, there appear to be differences in cases of serial murder in the United States as compared to other countries, even those with similar economic and political ideologies. Cultural differences may underlie the disparities.

Other Possible Paths

It appears that particular deviant lines or action, or paths, are chosen by fairly homogeneous groups. Serial murder is one such path, which the literature indicates most frequently is chosen by white, working-class men. Many of the "typical" offenders in other deviant paths have similar characteristics and exhibit similar behaviors. Other deviant paths, like serial murder, may be fostered by similar contextual features of American culture, although that is beyond the scope of this study. Other scholars have discussed similarities between serial murderers and other types of offenders (e.g., Levin 2008). My goal in this section is to indicate that serial murder is merely one path to social goods among many – legitimate and deviant – in the United States.

Other Serial Crimes

Characteristics of serial burglars vary; the most frequently reported motivation is for material gain, but sexually motivated burglaries have been found in a small number of cases (Schlesinger 2000a). Schlesinger and Revitch (1999) identified 14 sexual murderers, including several serial murderers, who had a history of burglaries, including Richard Ramirez and Ted Bundy.

Lloyd-Goldstein (2000) argues that serial stalkers display similar behaviors to those associated with serial murderers, although the apparent motivations of serial stalkers appears more varied. Most serial stalkers are unmarried men in their mid-30s, with a higher-than-average education, unstable work history, and a poor ability to form and maintain relationships (Lloyd-Goldstein 2000), much like serial murderers. In addition, serial stalkers and serial murderers target similar victims; the most frequent victims of each are women, though serial stalkers usually know their victims (Lloyd-Goldstein 2000) while serial murderers most often do not, and homosexual men are much more likely to be victims than heterosexual men (Lloyd-Goldstein 2000). Also like many serial murderers, a large percentage of serial stalkers suffered a head injury at some point in their lives and served in the military (Schwartz-Watts, Morgan, and Barnes 1997). Most serial stalkers are not violent, but when they do assault their victims, they are unlikely to use a weapon, and the assaults are rarely sexual in nature (Lloyd-Goldstein 2000).

Serial arsonists are predominately white men (Lewis and Yarnell 1951) who, like serial murderers, display a need for ownership, power, and control (Brogan 2006 and Lewis and Yarnell 1951). In their study of 1,145 cases of males older than 15 who engaged in what they called "pathological firestarting," Lewis and Yarnell (1951) identified several common characteristics of serial arsonists: Most were below-average intelligence, between ages 16 and 28, frequently diagnosed with psychopathology or psychosis, frequently had physical defects, used alcohol, and had a difficulty maintaining relationships. Mavromatis (2000) compared serial arsonists with serial murderers, finding

similar apparent motivations and that several serial murderers were arsonists prior to killing.

In serial rape, women are the most frequent victims, and men – though not necessarily white – are the most frequent offenders (Goldsworthy 2006 and Palmer and Thornhill 2000). As in serial murder, serial rapists display a need for power and control, yet the average age of serial rapists is lower than that of serial murderers, and rage is more typical in serial rapists.

School Shootings

The "U.S. Secret Service Safe School Initiative Report" (National Institute of Justice 2002) found that there is no "typical" school shooter, though boys and young men still appear to be the primary offenders. The report indicates variation in socioeconomic background, age, race and ethnicity, family situations, academic performance, history of drug and alcohol abuse, and mental health history. School shooters share with some serial murderers an apparent desire for fame and/or recognition, as well as a need for power and control, and have little or no history of violent offending. In addition, both types of offending evoke community shock and command media attention.

White Supremacy

White supremacy differs somewhat from serial murder, in that it is group-oriented, though there appears to be an increasing push for members to carry out acts of violence on their own or in small groups (Ferber 2004). Also, members frequently are of a lower socioeconomic status, with sympathizers in all socioeconomic levels (Daniels 1997 and Ezekiel 1995). However, there are several similarities between the two types of offending. The white supremacist movement is almost entirely comprised of men

(Ezekiel 1995), and it is based on a desire for power and control and provides a means for white men to "prove their masculinity" (Ferber 2004 and Ferber and Kimmel 2004). Like serial murderers, white supremacists target members of vulnerable populations for violence, and they attempt to portray images of strength, bravery, and skill (Ezekiel 1995).

Public Interest, Media, and Culture

Widespread media coverage and intensive public interest are familiar themes in scholarly studies of serial murder (e.g., Grover and Soothill 1999 and Schmid 2005). Several social scientists have examined the media's treatment of serial murderers as celebrities and hypothesized possible implications. Fox and Levin (2005:14), for example, sound the alarm, stating that the consequences of granting fame to the killers "may be inadvertently providing young people with a dangerous model for gaining national prominence." Schmid (2005) argues that serial murderers are increasingly aware of their celebrity status, as well as the potential to capitalize from their fame through the market for "murderabilia."[6]

Fox et. al. (2005:108) urge a recognition of the ways in which Americans have transformed these killers into "attractive and appealing celebrities," arguing that "in some cases, serial killers have received more national publicity than rock stars or rap artists." High-profile offenders, including many serial murderers and killers like James Earl Ray

[6] Murderabilia refers to merchandise (e.g., T-shirts, trading cards, comic books, calendars, and action figures) related to murder and violent crime, especially serial murder, as well as products created by the offenders (e.g., artwork, jewelry, and musical recordings).

and Scott Peterson, get a substantial amount of letters, visitors, and even marriage proposals (Levin 2008).

Vronsky (2004, 2007) argues that the glorification of serial murderers in American culture is a relatively recent phenomenon, suggesting that a shift in the portrayal of serial murderers occurred in the 1970s. He argues that after Jack the Ripper's murders in 1888 in London, serial murderers were portrayed as "depraved monsters – freaks of nature – outcasts and drifters whose demented criminal features should have given them away" (Vronsky 2004:6). He identifies a shift in the typical portrayal with representations of serial murderer Ted Bundy in the 1970s, depicted as handsome, intelligent, charming, and sociable. Vronsky (2004:6) sees Bundy as the killer who defined the "new postmodern serial killer role model," which he argues is no longer a hideous, depraved monster, but more representative of an ordinary person. Vronsky (2007:137) elaborates on how he sees the serial murderer characteristics of industrial times, as well as what he means by "postmodern serial killer" in his description of Bundy:

> Bundy was not one of those solitary, backwoods, cellar-dwelling creatures hanging corpses by the heels on hooks in the mudroom or some twitchy, glassy-eyes vagrant trolling for hitchhikers and runaways behind the wheel of a Dumpster car full of crumpled beer cans and dirty rags. Bundy had his own upscale apartment with drawers full of fine linen, glassware, and ski sweaters. He was attractive, charming, well-mannered, and appeared to be ambitious – the quintessential 1970s yuppie.

Fox et. al. (2005) agree, calling the "human monster" image of serial murderers a "Hollywood stereotype" and claiming that a "more modern image describes these killers as unusually handsome and charming" (Fox et. al. 2005:107), an image that does not appear to be any more accurate.

Likewise, Vronsky (2007) suggests a shift in the portrayal of female multiple murderers, based on representations of Aileen Wuornos, from one of "respectable and sometimes attractive women who harbored homicidal intentions behind a façade of feminine mystique" (138) to one of an unattractive, hardened woman who is comfortable on the streets and promiscuous. He argues that this supposed shift "might be signaling the shape of things to come" (Vronsky 2007:138), suggesting that representations of female multiple murderers may become more similar to the male model.

Others remark on the contemporary ubiquitous presence of serial murder in American entertainment and popular culture (Beasley 2004; Caputi 1993; Eschholz and Bufkin 2001; Holmes, Tewksbury, and Holmes 1999; Jenkins 1994; and Schmid 2005). As evidenced by reading weekly program summaries and movie and book reviews, serial murder storylines are a mainstay of contemporary fiction, film, television crime drama, and true-crime narratives. Schmid (2005) argues that the serial murderer fulfills a "double need" in society: "the need for representations of death, and a need for celebrities" (17) and that the representation of serial murderers as celebrities may serve to ease our anxieties about death, as we are able to confront death by reading or hearing about it in a safe, controlled setting. Seltzer (1998) identifies widespread public interest in serial murder as part of America's "wound culture," which he explains as a distinctive preoccupation with violence, death, and destruction.

Explaining Serial Murder

Biological explanations of serial murder show up from time to time, but psychological explanations continue to dominate research on serial murder. However, serial murder researchers are increasingly examining social variables.

Arguments linking media consumption to aggression and violence are suggested in some of the serial murder literature. Psychologist Stanton E. Samenow (2004) and others argue that media do not *create* aggression or crime and that, if they did, everyone would be a criminal. People who are predisposed to and have at least nascent thought about committing a crime may gain ideas or confidence from media reports, but what is critical for the commission of a crime "is not what plays on the screen but what lies in the mind of the viewer. Television, movies, video games, magazines, or books will not turn a responsible person into a criminal" (Samenow 2004:7). The same could be said for the often-cited "facilitators" (e.g., alcohol, drugs, and pornography) that may precede serial murder (Vronsky 2004), in that they are not *causes*.

Vronsky (2004) and others claim that a person develops into a serial murderer through a combination of environmental factors, parental effects, and a biological and genetic predisposition that creates "a pattern of often violent fantasies and obsessive thoughts that the serial killer has difficulty separating from reality" (286). So media exposure alone does not lead to particular forms of antisocial behavior.

Psychological Explanations

Psychological researchers propose various configurations of causes, such as various combinations of social isolation, stress, sexual or physical abuse, parental

absence in early life, neglect, personal failures, and rejection as precipitators or causes of serial murder (Claus and Lidberg 1999). Drawing on attachment theory, serial murder may be explained as a product of the killer's failure to form symbiotic attachment with his mother as an infant. This mother-child relationship is "crucial" for the infant's development of a "stable ego structure" and learning (Claus and Lidberg 1999:430). "The serial murder(er) is therefore engaged in a delusive striving towards a pathological symbiotic unity with the victim" Claus and Lidberg (1999:430). Based on interviews with several serial murderers, Hickey (2006) in a similar vein concluded that serial murderers' predilection to kill grows out of an unstable, abusive, or otherwise dysfunctional childhood environment. Again drawing on attachment theory, Shipley and Arrigo (2004) argue that adolescent delinquency and adult criminality are related to childhood trauma and poor childhood attachments to parents.

The psychological explanations do not account for the over-representation of men as perpetrators in all violent crime, particularly serial murder, nor why only a small proportion of people who experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect as children become criminal offenders. Most people who grow up with strict, domineering, or even abusive parents do not become criminals, just as most people who grow up with easy-going, indecisive, or absent parents do not. Criminals often do come from volatile, abusive, or neglectful circumstances, but there likely is more to their stories (Samenow 2004:8-9).

Another frequent type of psychological explanation is that serial murderers are psychopathic, [7] sociopathic, psychotic, schizophrenic, or have some other psychiatric

[7] Although sociopathy and psychopathy are grouped with antisocial personality disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association 2000), some psychologists

disorder that propels them to kill (e.g., Fox et. al. 2005; Hickey 2006; Ramsland 2006; and Vronsky 2007, 2004). Most known serial murderers, however, are not classified as mentally ill, and even when they do show symptoms of mental illness, their disorders do not normally qualify them as insane (Fox et. al. 2005 and Holmes and De Burger 1988). Fox et. al. (2005) suggest that the majority of serial murderers are sociopathic, yet still may have a conscience and the capacity for remorse. By dehumanizing their victims (viewing them as less than human and therefore worthless and expendable) serial murderers may be able to lessen their feelings of guilt and may convince themselves that the killing actually is a good thing – or at least not that bad. Fox et. al. (2005) argue that compartmentalization allows the killers to divide the world into two groups of people – "those whom they care about and everyone else" (113). This process is used to explain how many serial murderers may also be kind and loving husbands, fathers, sons, and community leaders.

Others have used the dehumanization process to commit atrocities: During World War II, the Nazis thought of Jews as animals that should be exterminated for the good of society; in 2004, Iraqi militants dragged the mutilated and burned bodies of four American contractors through the streets and suspended them from a bridge as residents cheered; and reports emerged in 2004 of American guards brutalizing inmates at the Abu Graib prison in Iraq. Dehumanization of enemies is common, but the process also is evident in the cultural images of some vulnerable populations such as the poor, homeless

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argue that there are enough differences between the three disorders to maintain their separation (e.g., Skilling et. al. 2002). Fox and Levin (2005) argue that it is unnecessary to make distinctions among the disorders when trying to understand serial murder because the characteristics prevelent in serial murderers are common to all three, though they frequently refer to sociopathy in their research.

and elderly, sending the message that members of those groups can be seen as "asking for" victimization or undeserving of assistance. Thus, poor people may be chastised for accepting welfare or food stamps; homeless people may be overlooked or abused; and elderly people may be exploited or ignored.

Another segment of the psychological literature addresses criminal profiling. Various analytical methods are suggested as providing useful information for identifying a killer's motivations and behavior patterns, including examining serial murderers' victims (Godwin 1998), as well as body disposal sites (Godwin 1998 and Lundrigan and Canter 2001) and sites of initial killer-victim contact (Godwin 1998). Mott (1999) compares solved and unsolved cases of serial murder and suggests that particular variables distinguish serial murder cases in each of the two categories. Typologies of murderers in general (Wille 1975 and Lee 1988) and of serial murderers specifically (Holmes and De Burger 1988) are offered that generally classify differences in motivation and expected gains.

Consonant with their psychological orientations, various serial murder researchers argue that the gain for a serial murderer in killing others is purely psychological. For example, Skrapec (2001:49) contends that serial murderers kill "first and foremost for personal gratification." She urges the study of the individual, subjective experiences of these killers to understand the phenomenon and sees as less significant the "objective realties of his life or the evaluations we make of those objective realities" (Skrapec 2001:51). Some researchers suggest the killers may experience sexual satisfaction through the commission of murder. Drawing on 12 case examples of serial murderers, Myers et. al. (2006:902) concluded that they "reveal the positive feelings of sexual

pleasure, even exhilaration – rather than anger or other unpleasant states – are the driving psychological force in the crimes."

Based on interviews with 36 sexual murderers, most of whom were serial murderers, and other data, Burgess et. al. (1986) developed a motivational model for sexually oriented and sadistic violence, with five components: ineffective social environment; formative events (including trauma, developmental failure, and interpersonal failure); patterned responses; action toward others; and feedback filter (system for justifying actions). This model neglects contributing social factors beyond ineffective child-parent bonds. In a follow-up report based on the same data, Ressler et. al. (1992) consider the effects of social environment on the development of future serial murderers, though their arguments still ignore the cultural context.

Social Psychological Explanations

A social psychological explanation of serial murder is offered in the fractured identity theory developed by Holmes et. al. (1999). Drawing on Goffman and Cooley, they argue that some social event or series of events may occur in adolescence that result in a fractured personality for the future serial murderer. This fracture does not affect the entire personality and may not be recognizable by others, and after a killing, the fracture may become temporarily dormant, which addresses why serial murderers generally appear "normal" in everyday life. The sequence of social events and the timing of the fracture are identified as affecting whether a person becomes a serial murderer or develops some other pathology.

Drawing on Goffman, Levin and Fox (2007) have described serial murderers as especially adept at impression management. One of the reasons serial murderers are able

to avoid detection is because they "perform" ordinariness well. "They are seen as unusually capable of looking and acting beyond suspicion, of appearing to be more innocent than a truly innocent person, of being able to lure their victims with charm and cunning" (Levin and Fox 2007:5). They also point out that their heightened self-awareness and proficiency in managing impressions is not fundamentally different from the persuasive and sometimes manipulative tactics employed by salespeople and "successful" people in other culturally legitimate occupations, such as financial investors and politicians.

Although few social psychologists study serial murder, their studies of other phenomena can provide insights. Utilizing findings from his famous 1971 Stanford prison experiment and examinations of cults and the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuses, Zimbardo (2007) argues that anyone is capable of committing atrocities within certain social settings. Ordinary, good people "can be seduced, recruited, initiated into behaving in evil ways under the sway of powerful systematic and situational forces" (Zimbardo 2007:443). The social system can corrupt otherwise good people, instead of evil people corrupting the system. Zimbardo also argues that in particular situations and times, anyone is capable of committing acts of heroism. Most people do not enter a situation with any special attributes of evil or goodness, but some can be transformed by the situation into evildoers or heroes.

Sociological Explanations

Some serial murder researchers (Douglas and Olshaker 1997; Grover and Soothill 1999; Holmes and De Burger 1988; and Leyton 1986) urge the recognition of sociological variables in analyzing serial murder. Leyton (1986) proposed that serial

murder may be socially constituted, or a consequence of the social structure, and that studying serial murder within a sociological framework is crucial for better understanding of the phenomenon. Grover and Soothill (1999) argue that biological and psychological explanations for crime may be useful but are usually presented without regard to the potential effects of social and cultural variables. The historical and cultural contexts of crime typically are ignored.

Environmental influences and patterns of early interaction in the family setting are important (Holmes and De Burger 1988), as "many more serial killers are *made* than *born*" (Douglas and Olshaker 1997:20). Athens (1992) and Rhodes (1999) situate violence as an outcome of social experiences, arguing that, given suitable circumstances, virtually anyone can develop the capacity for violence.

Also, serial murder is framed as a consequence of a patriarchal culture. Caputi (1989, 1993) refers to serial murder as "sexually political murders" rooted in "a system of male supremacy." She sees America's fascination with serial murder, as evidenced by its vast presence in popular culture, as a way to "terrorize women and to empower and inspire men" (Caputi 1989:445). Similar arguments have been used by others to explain rape and domestic violence (e.g., Sheffield 2004).

In addition to the disputes over the definition and characteristics of serial murder and serial murderers, the explanations of the phenomenon are seriously lacking. Biological and psychological explanations do not account for historical or cultural differences in the incidence of serial murder, nor for the preponderance of white, heterosexual males. While some social scientists and law enforcement officials encourage the examination of the role of social variables on the development of serial murderers, no

sociocultural model has been offered. We must examine cultural values transmitted through socialization to understand how American culture may foster the creation of the violent, white, male sexual predators depicted in the media and the media preoccupation with them. Accordingly, the following questions guided data analysis for this study:

Research Questions

1. In what ways does American culture provide a milieu conducive to the generation of serial murderers?
2. In what ways does American culture contribute to the over-representation of men in serial murder?
3. In what ways does American culture contribute to the over-representation of whites in serial murder?
4. In what ways do media portrayals of serial murderers shape public perceptions about serial murder and characteristics of serial murderers?

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study critiques modern American society for maintaining a culture that fosters serial murder. Particular aspects of American culture appear to contribute to the development of serial murderers or at least make serial murder an attractive prospect for some men. Aspects of American culture, including particular contextual features, masculine ideals, and elements of the criminal experience, are identified to explain why white men may be disproportionately affected. The theoretical framework presented here was drawn from my analysis – guided by theoretical arguments from cultural sociology and gender studies placed within the rubric of symbolic interactionism – to generate hypotheses and provide direction for future research.

Cultural Sociology

Denzin (1992:22) argues that culture is "the taken-for-granted and problematic webs of significance and meaning that human beings produce and act on when they do things together" and that culture "is shaped by the larger meaning-making institutions of society-at-large." Culture and forms of social power are bound to one another, as culture is constantly shaped and perpetuated by powerful institutions and groups in society. As a consequence, culture helps reproduce the power of the dominant class by offering support for dominant ideas, beliefs, and values through their perpetuation in cultural messages.

Culture incorporates language, ideas, beliefs, values, traditions, and a range of other vehicles used to experience and express meaning (Inglis 2005 and Swidler 1998). Culture influences thoughts and behaviors not only by providing messages about what people should value and strive for, but also by providing the "tools" people use to construct lines of action (Swidler 1998). People strive toward culturally valued goals that they have the cultural means – opportunities and know-how – to attain. Swidler (1998:174) argues, "To adopt a line of conduct, one needs an image of the kind of world in which one is trying to act, a sense that one can read reasonably accurately how one is doing, and a capacity to choose among alternative lines of action."

Culture is meaningful, in that it offers a means for people to understand, think about, and make sense of the world around them (Hall 1997 and Inglis 2005). Hall (1997:2) emphasizes meaning in the cultural "process," arguing, "To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other." Culture links people, events, experiences, and things to concepts people share about them through symbols (Hall 1997). Cultural messages contain "codes" that indicate meanings – linking the "thing" to its concept. The messages are "encoded" by the sender and then "decoded" by the recipient, producing meaning. Cultural values and meanings change over time, and inevitably so do symbols and codes. Hall (1997:62) argues that what is important is that cultural concepts and classifications "enable us to *think* about things, whether they are there, present, or not."

Culture influences largely without drawing attention, as it "reminds us more than it informs, and highlights more often than it galvanizes" (Schudson 1989:175). Culture's

influential power lies in its ability to produce shared meanings about cultural objects that become institutionalized and deeply part of the ways in which we think about our world.

Broadcasting Culture

Messages about cultural values are transmitted through a variety of social institutions, including the family, schools, the state, mass media, religious and community groups, and peer groups, but mass media have a distinctive ability to rapidly spread cultural messages to an enormous audience. The mass media constantly transmit cultural messages and, because of their substantial reach, constitute one of the central socializing agencies in the world. The cultural messages transmitted through mass media generally correspond with dominate cultural values, aiding in their acceptance (DeFrancisco and Palczewski 2007). To illustrate how it "works," we can think of culture as a "broadcast" of values transmitted especially through mass media (see Figure 1).

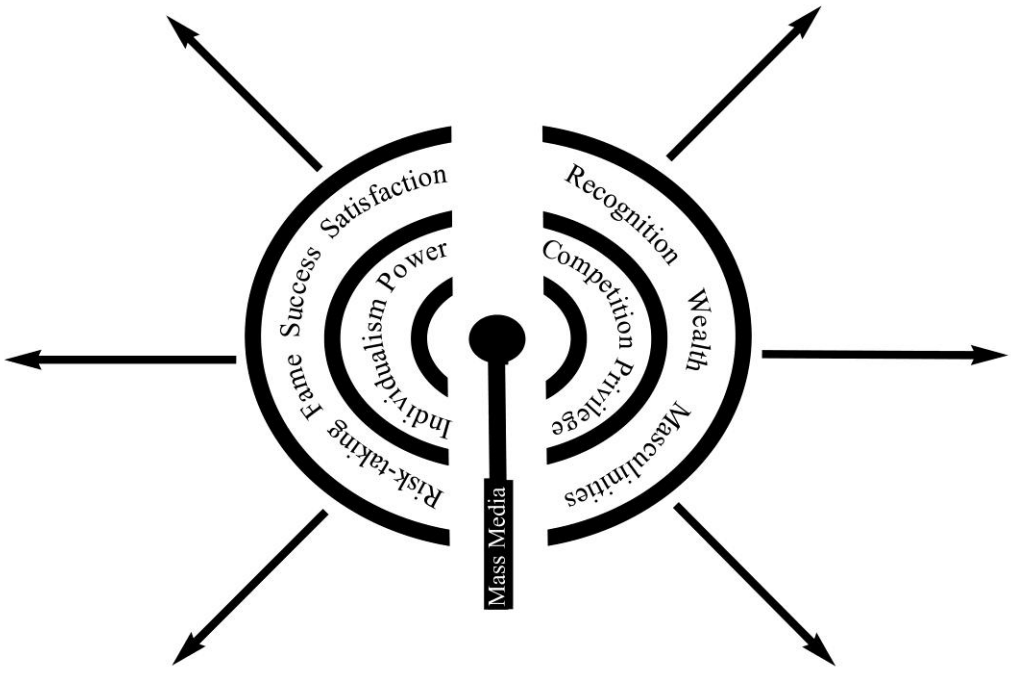


Figure 1: Model of American Culture, Phase 1

Mass media not only provide people with information about the world around them, but, because of their ubiquity, they influence how we think and behave. Along with messages about cultural values, we receive information about legitimate *uses* for those values. Decisions about what and how news is reported – including overt and covert valuations of events, people, and places in the news – are both *influenced by* culture and *influence* culture.

Media reports that draw intensive public attention – human-interest stories – usually cast the stories' main characters as "ideal" types that, good or bad, reinforce cultural messages. Fine and White (2002) argue that one of the appeals of human-interest stories is their ability to draw members of a public together to become a focused community able to express a unified perspective and shared values. When "everyone" is interested in a story, one who speaks of it participates in the community and expresses its values (Fine and White 2002).

"Tuning In" and Cultural Competencies

Despite their mass broadcast, values are not accepted by every person, nor employed in the same ways. We are aware of some objects more than others (Schudson 1989) and more or less likely to use some over others depending on our cultural competencies and which objects are useful for our purposes at the time. Being "culturally competent" means having the ability to understand the ideas, beliefs, and values held by dominant groups in society and incorporate them into daily life through culturally legitimate means. Variations in individual abilities, as well as access to power and other resources, help shape this capacity. In Figure 2, the thicknesses of the arrows represent the various quantities of values that may be drawn on, while the gray circle depicts a

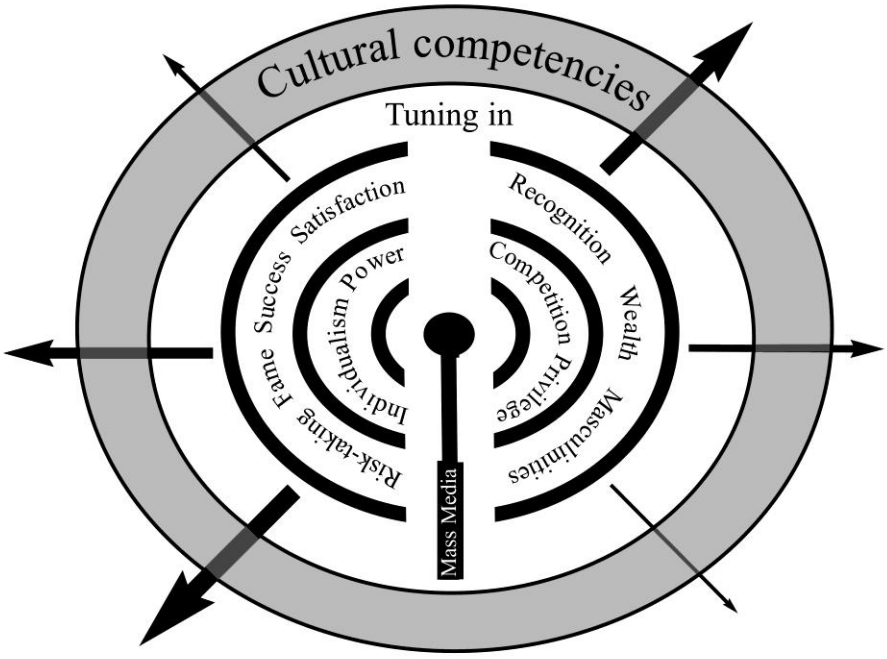


Figure 2: Model of American Culture, Phase 2

cultural competency "filter," through which the selected values then pass. The filter represents an individual's capacity for understanding and using dominant cultural ideas, beliefs, and values, so it may vary considerably from individual to individual.

People make various choices about which and how many values to "tune in" from the cultural milieu. Schudson (1989:160) explores the "conditions – both of the cultural object and its environment – that are likely to make the culture or cultural object work more or less." Specifically, he examines five dimensions of a cultural object that contribute to its strength or power: retrievability (the likelihood that the object will be drawn upon by an audience in a variety of situations); rhetorical force (the indefinable quality of the object that produces intensity, grabs attention, and generates beliefs); resonance (its utility or relevance to the audience); institutional retention (the production

of a set of concrete meanings people share about it); and resolution (its likelihood to influence action). The influence of culture varies with deviations in these dimensions – a cultural object may have a large impact on few people, a small impact on many people, a large impact on many people, or a small impact on few people (Schudson 1989).

Lieberson (2000) offers the "cultural surface" as a way to understand a culture as a representation of the many processes that result in the formation of the various cultural elements (i.e., ideas, beliefs and values) on which actors draw. Cultural elements come from different time periods for different reasons and have various shelf-lives: some survive, some disappear, and others lay dormant for a time (Lieberson 2000). Because there are a variety of related and unrelated elements from which to choose on the cultural surface, individuals may utilize particular ones at particular times for particular reasons. Which cultural elements they choose to acknowledge or utilize is influenced by various external and internal factors.

Although cultural messages impart what people *should* believe and think and how they *should* behave, people are differentially provided with the cultural competencies to build lines of action for reaching culturally valued goals. Not everyone adapts to the dominant culture in the same way, so various paths to social goods are possible. As cultural values pass through the cultural competency filter, their culturally legitimate uses may be distorted to build lines of action compatible with both the values and those competencies (see Figure 3).

Not only do cultural competencies vary, but cultural messages also may be inconsistent, helping to explain variations in ideas, beliefs, and values held by members of the same culture. To account for apparent contradictions in messages from various

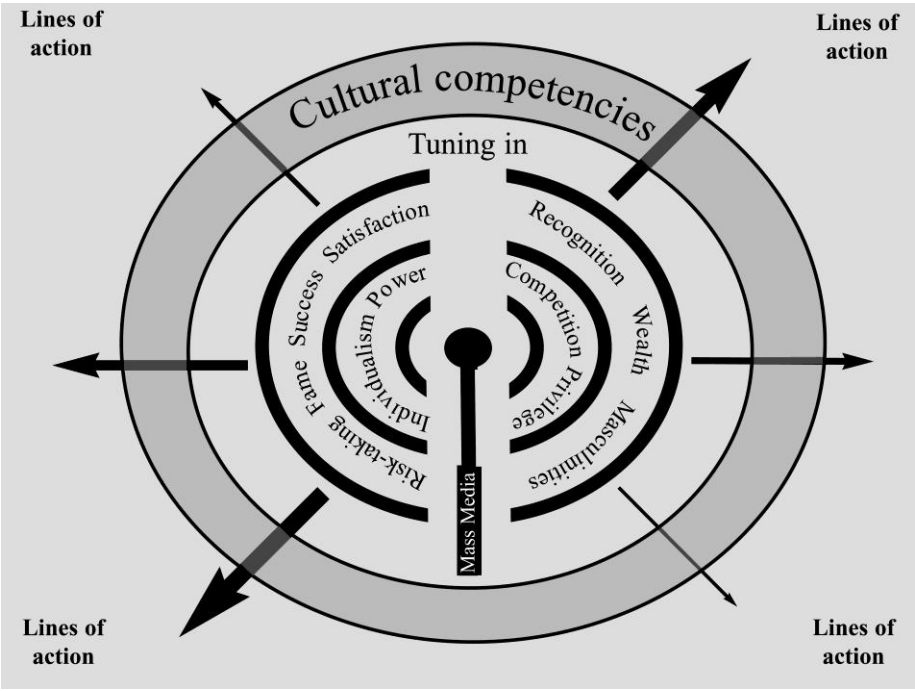


Figure 3: Model of American Culture, Phase 3

cultural values, we must recognize that not all cultural values are connected – some are, many are not, and some have only loose links.

Race, ethnicity, gender, and social class are important in studies of culture because they may affect how people receive, interpret, and respond to cultural messages. Because people form lines of action according to their cultural competencies, members of dominant and subordinate groups in society likely will respond to cultural messages differently.

This model of culture is employed generally in this study to demonstrate that deviant lines of action (e.g., serial murder) do not necessarily result from employment of divergent values. Instead, legitimate *and* deviant lines of action are outcomes of a cultural process that includes variations in the selection of dominant cultural values for use;

variations in competencies for using values in culturally legitimate ways; and variations in constructed lines of action according to those values and competencies. The theoretical framework offered here includes an examination of cultural values in three parts – contextual features suitable for serial murder in America; American hegemonic masculinity; and the criminal experience – all of which are related but influential in differing ways. Examining these pieces individually offers a deeper understanding of the messages and influential features of each, but combining them provides a powerful framework that can be used to understand how serial murderers are created in America.

While the values contributing to their creation are discussed in this chapter, variations in cultural competencies and building lines of action were developed throughout the analysis and therefore are discussed in the study's findings chapter.

Contextual Features Suitable for Serial Murder

Psychologists tend to downplay the effects of socialization in individual development and behavior patterns. Citing "attempts to improve the environment" like social programs designed to provide criminals with education, job training, or counseling, Samenow (2004) argues that such programs do not aid in rehabilitation because they do not change criminals' personalities or ways of thinking. In this way, Samenow and other psychologists for the most part discount the role of socialization in *shaping* the thoughts and behaviors of criminals. The argument that criminals grow up in all kinds of environments and that we therefore cannot pick out particular causal factors that determine criminality is shortsighted. Socialization is just one piece of the complex

interrelationship of components that influence behavior, which also includes psychological and biological processes and mass media.

Identifying the features of American society that make serial murder one path to social goods will contribute to an understanding of American culture and how people construct lines of action according to their cultural capacities. Holmes and De Burger (1988:44) argue that contextual features of American society "all too well serve the homicidal propensities of the serial killer." Features such as "redundant violence" and dehumanization, as represented in American popular culture; a cultural importance placed on individualism and competition; privilege associated with whiteness and maleness; an emphasis on thrill-seeking; situational justifications and the normalization of violence; increased anonymity and depravity in urban life; and spatial mobility (Holmes and De Burger 1988 and Jenkins 1994) are components of American culture and the nature of social life in American society that may increase the probability of serial murder (Holmes and De Burger 1988:44) and Americans' fascination with it.

Violence

Violence has long been a form of entertainment in many cultures, from public executions, to images in television and movies, to lyrics in popular music, to norms in sports. While many acts of violence are generally condemned (e.g., violent acts perpetrated on innocent victims, domestic violence, and indiscriminate violence), social groups construct circumstances in which violence is considered legitimate (Cerulo 1998 and Collins 2008). For instance, a degree of violence and deviant behavior is acceptable on Halloween (including vandalism, looting, and arson) and especially the night before, popularly known as Devil's Night. Violence is allowed in particular arenas, including

wild parties and mosh pits at hard-rock concerts. And deviant behavior is tolerated during mass celebrations, including Mardi Gras. Violence in sports is common. Some sports include elements of violence simply in the ways they are played, including contact sports like football, hockey, and rugby, and a degree of illegitimate violence also is pervasive in most sports, both by players (e.g., fouls, unnecessary roughness, and outright brawls) and by spectators (e.g., heckling, throwing objects, storming the field, or rioting in the streets) (Collins 2008).

Norms and boundaries associated with fighting in American culture distinguish fair fights from unfair fights (Collins 2008). Staged fights, whether planned schoolyard brawls or professional boxing matches, are often considered heroic for both the winner and loser, and dueling historically was seen as a display of risk and manipulation of danger. Gunfighting replaced dueling as a fair fight between two skilled opponents, but gunfighting became more associated with unfair fighting as it was no longer an activity of the elite class and often the fighting was not staged with implicit norms. Fights that are carried out because of a vendetta, those in which only one participant possesses a gun or other deadly weapon, and those that are numerically imbalanced are included in unfair fights and lack social support. Collins (2008) argues that vendetta fights engaged in by gangs are considered unfair and dishonorable by most people outside of the gangs but that vendetta fights engaged in by the Mafia are generally considered honorable or impressive, as they are related to careful, intelligent planning and a high degree of success, characteristics that are highly valued in American culture and associated with hegemonic masculinity.

Individualism, Competition, and Privilege

Individualism, competition, and personal achievement are highly valued in American society (Mount 1981; Reisman 1967; and Williams 1962) and often used as markers of a person's worth. Values such as cooperation, sympathy, and teamwork also are pervasive in American culture (Mount 1981) but generally not seen as means for idealized success.

The ordinary American is celebrated in popular culture, as well as the exceptional – good or bad – individual (Rossides 2003). Familiar stories like of the frontiersman, the outlaw, the rebellious loner, and the "self-made man" emphasize individualism as a path to success in the United States (Mount 1981). "Americans love to think of themselves as pioneers, men who have conquered a continent and sired on it a new society" (Cawelti 1984:86). While many point to the Western genre – with the long-celebrated American frontiersmen – as symbolizing American individualism, ruggedness, strength, and honor (e.g., Cawelti 1984; Collins 2008; and Slotkin 1992), these values also are manifest in modern forms of entertainment, including crime dramas, sports, and video games.

Recognition and celebrity are emphasized in American culture, as indicated by the notion that everyone deserves "15 minutes of fame" at some point in their lives. It matters little whether the fame is earned for positive or negative reasons, as "we accord status and recognition for both fame and notoriety" (Adler and Adler 1989:299). This is dramatically evident in the popularity of reality television programming, in which it is clear that being known for something – anything – is better than not being known at all. Every reality show has a villain, and even the worst singers on "American Idol" get recognition on prime-time television. Some of these reality programs have combined the

values of recognition and competition, with shows like "The Amazing Race," "America's Got Talent," "America's Best Dance Crew," and "America's Next Top Model." Recognition of talents, hard work, and accomplishments, however, is most important to Americans, and others' deference or esteem may be thought of as an end in itself (Goode 1978).

The most celebrated in American culture are those perceived as fighting the "good" fight, and these stories are especially poignant when the actors apparently conquered incredible odds. Stories about people taking on nature, outer space and aliens, war, bullies, or the frontier – and winning – are ubiquitous in popular culture, which also romanticizes fantasies of being captain of the ship, a military hero, or an astronaut. Popular television shows like "Survivor," "I Survived," "Man vs. Wild," and "Deadliest Catch" illustrate this well.

Individual accomplishment is well-regarded in American culture, whether it is through legitimate or illegitimate means. Entrepreneurs are praised for succeeding through hard work, perseverance, and having that extra something that boosted them above the competition. Others who achieve individualized success through deviant means may be admired if they or their offense are seen as somehow superior. Ted Kaczynski is known as much for his superior intellect as the destruction he caused as the Unabomber. Butch Cassidy and Bonnie and Clyde are legendary robbers, perceived as highly skilled and elusive. Charles Ponzi was perceived as a highly intelligent and skilled swindler, and Bernard Madoff, who pled guilty this year to perpetrating the largest Ponzi scheme in history, is regarded with awe because of the magnitude of his con and ability to avoid detection for nearly 20 years.

An emphasis on individual accomplishment also is evident in the ambivalence — and sometimes admiration — shown for a person who takes the law into his or her own hands by performing some justice-oriented deed through illegal means. Figures like Rambo and Robin Hood are exalted, despite their use of illegitimate means for good ends (Madsen 1998). Detectives, police officers, doctors, and lawyers in popular television shows and movies frequently are seen bending the rules to attain a desirable result.

Acknowledging an American aversion to authority and regard for frontiersmen and others who supposedly follow a "higher law," Graham (1970:79) argues that "it is not difficult to fathom why America – despite official rhetoric to the contrary – has never been a very law-abiding society." "The cultural emphasis on achievement, which promotes productivity and innovation, also generates pressures to succeed at any cost" (Messner and Rosenfeld 2001:7). The glorification of these traits fosters ambition and mobility, but the means to attain idealized success are not available for everyone – nor does everyone have the capacity.

Although there has been a perceived crisis in American moral values for a number of years (Baker 2005), which could be used to explain increases in crime, empirical evidence does not support this perception. Baker (2005), in a study of American values using World Values Surveys across two decades, concluded that traditional values about religion, morality, and national pride have not changed throughout time, that Americans still subscribe to the same values they did decades ago.

Men are generally held more accountable than women for achieving culturally defined success through values emphasized in American culture. Traditional gender role expectations hold men and women accountable for behaving in ways that are deemed

socially acceptable for each sex and that perpetuate socially defined masculine and feminine ideals (West and Zimmerman 1987). Men are expected to be unemotional and exhibit aggression, confidence, leadership, intelligence, and dominance, and women are expected to exhibit emotion, passivity, submissiveness, compassion, and nurturance (Connell 1987, 2002, and 2005; Henson and Rogers 2001; Jourard 1971; Reisman 1967; and Zuo and Tang 2000). Reisman (1967:41) argues, "Sex in the United States, like other statuses, often seems as much achieved as ascribed," in that men and women cannot assume that masculinity or femininity is biologically given, but must be "proved."

Because of these gendered expectations, men may experience enhanced pressure to "win" at all cost – to be smarter, faster, and better than others. Men are rewarded for individualistic and competitive behaviors, while women, who are expected to be more relationship-oriented, are discouraged from such behavior. Gilligan (1996:267) argues that, for men, the "patriarchal code of honor and shame generates and obligates male violence." Serial murder, in a perverse sense, may be one means for some men to prove their intelligence and strength – or their "manliness" – to themselves and others (e.g., their victims, law enforcement officers, or the general public) and secure honor, perhaps after they have repeatedly failed to do so in other ways. Other deviant means may include rape, domestic violence, organized crime, or participation in white supremacist groups.

But, as members of privileged groups in society – whites and men – some may have acquired a sense of entitlement to the rewards of privilege and become frustrated and angry when they do not reap the benefits (Irvine and Klocke 2001). "Just because a system is male-dominated doesn't mean all men are powerful. … Male dominance does mean, however, that every man can *identify* with power as a value that his culture

associates with manhood, and this identification makes it easier for any man to assume and use power in relation to others" (Johnson 2006:91). Men, especially *white* men, may feel more entitled to subordinate others to feel power – to which they are culturally entitled – when they otherwise would feel powerless because of their position in the social structure.

Economic and Social Structures

Several differences in the economic and social structures of the United States and other industrial societies have been cited as a reason for a higher incidence of violent crime in the United States. Income disparity has been cited as a cause of crime all over the world (Currie 1985; James 1995; and Sieber 2005), and the United States has a visible gap between the rich and the poor that is substantial and growing (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). In addition, the exclusionary nature of American society, according to Young (1999), is more severe than in Europe. Following the argument that equality of opportunity is key to the American Dream ideology, when people fail, it is blamed on individual qualities; in Europe, individual failures are seen more as the fault of the system. Many other industrialized nations operate under the ideology of mutual responsibility and social obligation and have well-developed social programs and policies that provide income and employment support (Currie 1985; Hickey 2006; and James 1995).

There also seems to be less cultural consistency in the United States compared to other industrial nations. For example, generally if a German follows expectations, he or she will experience success to some degree (Lehmann 2005), but there are so many contradictions in cultural messages in the United States that some people can experience

success by deliberately violating expectations. (e.g., outlaws, mobsters, and other famous criminals).

Some scholars studying serial murder blame the economic and social structures. Criminologist David Wilson (2007:23) argues that children, homosexual men, prostitutes, and the elderly – frequent victims of serial murderers – also are "generally the victims of a social and economic system that does not see value in their lives and routinely excludes them from the protection of the state." Discussing the prostitute victims of Gary Ridgway, journalism professor Tomás Guillén (2007:6) argued:

> Men simply saw the girls as objects to be used. Business owners along the airport prostitution strip tended to marginalize the victims, too, by seeing them only as a detriment to business. … The arrest and judicial process also reflected how law enforcement and society considered the missing women-turned-prostitutes as throwaway kids.

Criminal justice historian Peter Vronsky (2004, 2007) argues that there is nonchalance toward serial murder cases in which the victims are "society's throwaways."

Social Types

Social typing is ubiquitous in U.S. society and evident in all facets of its culture. Klapp (1972:2) argues, "In our society we do not have, as one might at first suppose, freedom *from* typing but a *choice* of type." We routinely attempt to "fit" people we meet and hear about into types, which are culturally defined and encompass groups of characteristics – desirable or not – that we use to understand others. Social typing also is employed to judge others and ourselves according to cultural ideals: Negative types are those that violate cultural values in some way, and positive types are those that uphold cultural values. Thus, we not only praise or degrade a person through the type applied, but we send messages to others about which characteristics and behaviors are approved

and which are unacceptable. We also type ourselves – our *self* is a type. Because we type ourselves and others, and others type us, we often develop at least two selves (Klapp 1972:5), the self we define and the social self defined by others.

Klapp (1972:16) identifies three main categories of typing – praise, condemnation, and ridicule – and three corresponding social types – heroes, villains, and fools. Most people want to be recognized as fitting the hero type and hope to avoid displaying characteristics of the villain or fool. Heroes are those who uphold cultural values, and thus are held up as good examples of appropriate ways to think and behave. Heroes deserve prestige because they are recognized as performing at the highest levels, who have talents and dedication reserved for only a few (Goode 1978). They may be "winners," "splendid performers," "heroes of social acceptability," "independent spirits," or "group servants" (Klapp 1972:27-28).

Klapp argues that, because of inconsistencies in messages in American culture, there may be uncertainty between classifications of heroes and villains. True villains lack redeeming characteristics, violate cultural values and social norms, and threaten the group the hero serves, yet some also have hero characteristics. Robin Hood, for instance, probably should be typed as a villain, but instead he is portrayed as serving a greater good. Klapp (1972:51) argues that the villain serves society as a scapegoat for aggression and as a hate symbol that builds support for law enforcement and reinforces dominant cultural messages in the community.

Finally, fools are targets of ridicule; they are portrayed as incompetent, "discounting types" (e.g., those who as a group tend to be discounted because of undervalued occupation, gender, age, ability, or some other characteristic), non-

conformers, over-conformers, and those used for comedic or tension relief (e.g., butts of jokes and the "clever fool") (Klapp 1972:69).

In reconciling the frequent confusion between hero and villain types, Klapp (1972) created what he describes as a contemporary hero type – the "corrupt hero," which includes the "tough guy," the "smart operator," the "wolf," the "bad-good guy," and the "false goodfellow." Lule (2001) identifies a similar type, calling it the "modern hero," and agrees with Klapp that this type is a product of contemporary culture. This contemporary hero type characterizes both hero and villain types in certain ways and is praised and degraded at times. Its pervasiveness in American cultural imagery indicates inconsistency in cultural messages and that deviance consequently may be rewarded in America.

Typing is a major component of storytelling, particularly when relating a version of a culturally familiar story, and the mass media, after all, are storytellers. The values and ideals of a culture are dramatized through its stories, and media perpetuate culturally familiar stories. Heroes are a mainstay in media reports, and their stories are told and retold through a familiar narrative: "the humble birth, the early mark of greatness, the quest, the triumph, and the return" (Lule 2001:23). Similar to Klapp's (1972) social types, Lule (2001) argues that the news media continually recount seven major myths in news: the "victim," the "scapegoat," the "hero," the "good mother," the "trickster," the "other world," and the "flood."

Representations of Crime in the Media

Most people do not have direct experience with violent offenders or their victims, but they receive media-mediated images of their social and psychological characteristics

and their typical behavior. The mass media are influential in our understanding of any phenomenon in which we have little direct involvement, including crime, and in shaping our perceptions of crime, criminals, and victims. Ideologies of crime and criminals permeate our culture and are "shaped by popular images about what is criminal, who is more likely to commit a crime and who is more likely to become a victim, what are the connections between criminals and victims, where and when is a crime more likely to occur, and what are the best ways to control or prevent crime" (Madriz 1997:342). Media inform us about who and what to fear and how we should handle that fear.

Media construct images of crime and criminals that may be distorted versions of reality. Colomy and Greiner (2008) found that continuous and prominent coverage in the 1990s by the *Denver Post* newspaper of a succession of unusual violent events created a sense in the community that a crime wave was taking hold that required urgent attention, yet no increase in violent crime was recorded during that time. Various reasons may account for why one event or type of event receives more media coverage than another. Media outlets, as for-profit businesses, are likely to cover events or issues that increase newspaper sales or draw an audience to the evening news, and they are cognizant that "crime news is an appealing commodity" (Colomy and Greiner 2008:142). Timing of the event or issue also affects its coverage – an event that occurs at a time in which much coverage is devoted to another event or issue (e.g., a national disaster or election) may be ignored because of constraints on the reporters' time, publication space, and other resources (Fine and White 2002). Conversely, if the event occurs during periods of "slow news," it may receive more coverage than it normally would be granted. For crime stories, perceptions of the innocence of victims, the seriousness of the offending, and

consumer perceptions of their likely victimization also contribute to the extensiveness of media coverage and public alarm (Colomy and Greiner 2008).

Violent criminals may be described in news reports and popular media as insane or out of control, with descriptors such as "monsters," "crazy," "insane," "mad," "maniac," "nuts," "cracked," "bizarre," and "weird" (Madriz 1997:346). Or they may be described as being animalistic or savages (e.g., Consalvo 2003). Portraying some people as "monsters" not only dehumanizes them, but it also separates them from "the rest of us" and casts them as "other." However, the public prefers that the "other" fit into a particular image already present in the culture; such classification seems less threatening because the public perceives that it knows what to expect from them. Individuals who seem to deviate from a known cultural type make the public more anxious.

Other cultural images of criminals include their supposed tendency to congregate in groups, that they often are immigrants (especially new immigrants), that they lack compassion or other human sentiments (descriptors like "cruel," "inhuman," "immoral," and "evil" are used), that they are poor and/or on welfare, and that they most often are strangers (Madriz 1997).

Representations of crime also include images of victims. Women are depicted as more likely than men to be victims of violence, even though the opposite is indicated in official reports (Andersen 2000). Women who more closely fit traditional gender expectations are seen as "ideal victims" – "those who, when affected by crime, are more frequently given the 'legitimate status' of victim" (Madriz 1997:343). Ideal victims are "symbolic icons of community life" (Colomy and Greiner 2008:153). They embody positive cultural values and personify innocence and morality (Colomy and Greiner 2008

and Madriz 1997). Women who violate traditional gender expectations (e.g., alcohol or drug users, strippers, prostitutes, runaways, single mothers, women who dress or act provocatively, or women who stay out late) do not fit the innocent-victim ideal and may be discredited or even blamed for the crimes committed against them. As the traditional image of femininity best applies to white, middle-class women, minority women and women in lower classes often are seen as non-ideal victims. "To be recognized as victims, black and Latina women have to show that they are better than the rest of their kind: better mothers, students, more religious, more virtuous, and so on" (Madriz 1997:350).

Images of offenders also tend to be racialized. The predominant images of criminals in American culture are young, African-American or Latino men, followed by "white trash" men (Colomy and Greiner 2008; Henderson 1992; Madriz 1997; and Young 1985). Colomy and Greiner (2008:153) argue that this racialization may create a heightened sense of alarm over violent white offenders and the "construction of a more ominous category" for them.

The contextual features of American society identified and explained in this section, along with components of American economic and social structures, the ubiquity of social typing in U.S. society, and representations of crime in American media, contribute to the establishment of a cultural environment full of inconsistent messages, adjustable boundaries, and contradictions that may be suitable for serial murder. American cultural values also frequently dovetail with traditional expectations of U.S. masculinity, and this connection may help explain why men and whites (as a component of American hegemonic masculinity) are over-represented as serial murderers.

Masculinities

Masculine ideals overlap with American cultural values in several ways, yet masculine ideals appear to be of greater consequence. Messages about gender in American culture are pervasive and constantly reinforced such that we begin to think of differences between men and women as natural, rather than social constructions. Therefore, we generally think of being an American as something one must work at, but being men and women as innate. Few men can achieve the idealized version of masculinity in American culture, yet men are nevertheless expected to strive toward the ideals to be considered masculine. With the patriarchal structure of American society, male dominance is a value in itself, broadcast with others that are compatible, such as individualism, competition, privilege, recognition, wealth, and success.

Egger (1984) encouraged analysis of "maleness and its socialization" in examining serial murder, which is an aim of this study. Although much social research examines gender differences with regard to social development and behavior, these studies infrequently examine *masculinities*. The masculinities perspective is grounded in the feminist notion of power, specifically that the essential nature of the relationship between men and women is one involving domination and oppression (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985:552). This relationship is imbedded in the structures of society, as well as its institutions: the family, schools, the political system, the economic system, mass media, and religion. Masculinities and femininities are constructed through gendered power relations that have a historical dynamic in society as a whole (Carrigan et. al. 1985). This conception of gender dimorphism posits that masculinity can only exist in

contrast with femininity (Connell 2005), and this relationship is continually reconstituted within the historic system in which dominance is generated (Carrigan et. al. 1985 and Savran 1998). One of the fundamental "facts" about masculinity is that "men in general are advantaged through the subordination of women" (Carrigan et. al. 1985:590).

Masculinities are not only constructed through gendered power relations, but also by their integral involvement with the division of labor and with patterns of emotional attachment (Carrigan et. al. 1985:591). It is crucial for this study, however, to differentiate between hegemonic masculinity and other forms of masculinities. Hegemony is historically mobile – not fixed – with some association between cultural ideals and institutional power (Connell 2005:77). Hegemonic masculinity, then, is a cultural ideal of what it means to be male, but it is a model that changes through time and is not achievable for most men.

Messerschmidt (1993) argues that gender intersects with race and class to create different notions of what it means to be male, thus creating different masculinities, or ways for a boy or man to "do gender." In this way, "masculine" not only means "non-feminine," but, by characterizing the ideal way to "do gender," hegemonic masculinity anchors one end of a continuum of masculinities that more or less fit that ideal.

In modern industrialized societies, hegemonic masculinity is realized through participation in the paid-labor market, the subordination of women, heterosexuality, heightened sexuality, and behavior that displays authority, control, competition, individualism, independence, aggressiveness, and the capacity for violence (Messerschmidt 1993:82). Carrigan et. al. (1985:594) argue that "hegemony means persuasion," and they point to the mass media as influences on conceptions of

masculinity and femininity. Advertising promotes ideals of masculinity via the amplification of traditional male gender role expectations (Carrigan et. al. 1985:594). Advertising is, of course, only one example; the mass media are continually reinforcing notions of masculinity and femininity through products and the messages attached to them, characterizing what is appropriate for "doing" maleness and femaleness. Of particular relevance to this study, Eschholz and Bufkin (2001:655) argue that media may be "influential in establishing values that accept violence as one means to accomplish masculinity."

Hegemonic masculinity is closely aligned with the division of labor, the way of defining what is considered "men's work" and "women's work," and the way of defining what work is more or less masculine than other types (Carrigan et. al. 1985:594). The gendered division of labor not only constructs this notion of "men's work" and "women's work," but it also leads to the view that each type of work is not only what men and women do, but actually part of *what they are* (West and Zimmerman 1987:138).

Hegemonic masculinity also is closely involved in and enforced by the state. The political system reinforces and encourages conformity to the hegemonic pattern through economic incentives (e.g., tax incentives and welfare rules) (Carrigan et. al. 1985:594). The media and the state are not the only societal institutions reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. The family, too, teaches and reinforces ideals of masculinity and femininity. Children learn what it means to be male or female from an early age in the home by the clothes they are given to wear, the toys they play with, the chores they are required to perform, and so on. But, although "people growing up in a gendered society unavoidably encounter gender relations, and actively participate in them" (Connell 2002:79),

participation varies, as does the extent to which messages about gender are consistent. Children encounter mixed messages about gender through parents, grandparents, teachers, classmates, and other peers and adults (Connell 2002:79-81). Therefore, in every period there is a hegemonic masculine ideal, but that ideal does not provide a clear-cut definition of what it means to be male for every boy or man, and boys and men for various reasons sometimes do not accept the hegemonic ideal.

Regardless of whether the hegemonic ideal is pursued, male dominance may be pursued. Men's domination over women and the domination of particular men over other men is "sought by constantly re-constituting gender relations as a system within which that dominance is generated" (Carrigan et. al. 1985:598). This reconstitution process is never a smooth one, however; the conditions for its development are ever-changing and foment a continuing struggle among subordinated groups. Gendered violence is one outcome of the power struggle among those seeking to achieve the dominance associated with the ideal of hegemonic masculinity (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Atkinson, Greenstein, and Lang 2005; and Carrigan et. al. 1985).

Men are encouraged to view their masculinity in relation to their position in the social structure and, therefore, their access to power and other resources (Messerschmidt 1993:119). For many men, their position in the paid-labor market is what they believe defines their masculinity in relation to women and other men. Because women have traditionally been segregated within or excluded from the workplace, paid labor has historically been a means for men to exert their dominance over women, for they hold the economic power and women must then rely on men financially. In the paid-labor market, hegemonic masculinity can be seen in how much power a man holds, which means men

in managerial and executive-level positions may be able to achieve masculinity in the workplace more easily than men in other white-collar positions and many in blue-collar positions.

Men do not need to attain high-status positions (e.g., executives) in the workplace to demonstrate masculinity. Particular types of employment – like firefighting, police work, military work, coal mining, factory work, and construction work – that presumably demonstrate endurance, strength, toughness, and bravery are considered "manly" and provide an alternative means for men to demonstrate masculinity (Connell 2005). Some men employ other methods of "doing" masculinity (Connell 2005 and Messner 1992). A sense of being "manly" may be reached through participation in activities that require skill and emphasize competition and/or aggression, including sports, video games, gambling, and some community organizations.

Many men are forced to construct alternative masculinities, which generally are considered subordinated to the hegemonic model. Researchers have examined how men form alternative masculinities in various social settings, the consequences of and the relationship between different forms of masculinities, and the relationship between masculinities and femininity. Beal (1996) examined alternative masculinities constructed by skateboarders in Colorado; Irvine and Klocke (2001) examined the construction of alternative masculinities in 12-step programs in New York; Sathiparsad (2008) examined the construction of alternative masculinities by men in South Africa as a strategy to address gendered violence; and Smith and Winchester (1998) examined how Australian men negotiate masculinities at work and home. Although these studies and others find that men in a variety of ways reconstruct and redefine masculinities in their daily lives,

their attitudes and behaviors still tended to be based on the hegemonic model and reproduce patriarchal relations. So alternative masculinities do not represent a rejection of hegemonic masculine ideals.

Race and class play a role in constructing alternative masculinities (Connell 2005). Although no "black masculinity" or "working-class masculinity" exists, masculinities constructed by marginal groups are related to their position in the social structure and the means available to them. While media may associate black masculinity with violence, irresponsibility, unintelligence, and laziness (Hatty 2000), many black men construct masculinities in opposition to this imagery and focus, at least in part, on "striving to emulate aspects of hegemonic white masculinity" within available means. Working-class masculinities may focus on self-respect (making an honest living) and being a family provider (Connell 2005). Although men construct and demonstrate masculinities in a variety of ways, they are produced in the same patriarchal cultural and institutional settings (Connell 2005) and are more or less valued according to how well they fit the ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987).

These masculine ideals mesh with American cultural values like individualism, competition, skill, and control. Positive portrayals of frontiersmen and "self-made men" indicate that men throughout their lives are tested on their individual abilities to prove their manliness. They must prove (mostly to other men) that they are contenders in achieving hegemonic masculinity, or a version close to it, and have the required self-discipline and control (Irvine and Klocke 2001).

Messerschmidt (1993) argues that when legitimate means for achieving culturally defined forms of masculinity are absent, illegitimate means, including criminal offending,

may seem a suitable alternative for some men. For these men, deviant means for asserting manliness may include subordinating women (through sexual harassment, domestic abuse, rape, or murder); demonstrating heterosexuality (through harassment, physical abuse, or murder of homosexuals); demonstrating uncontrollable sexuality (through rape, promiscuity, or adultery); or being aggressive and presenting a capacity for violence (through fighting, assault, burglary, rape, or murder). Others argue that aggression and violence are themselves part of hegemonic masculinity (Hatty 2000; Kaufman 1997; and Umberson et. al. 2003), which means men do not necessarily need any reason for aggression and violence other than it being a means in itself to achieve masculinity. Thus, whether aggression is associated with alternative masculinity or hegemonic masculinity, it is tied to masculinity.

Biological arguments frequently portray men as having an aggressive nature and stronger sexual drive than women and that such "naturally" stronger sexual drives require a "release" (Henderson 1992:136). Variations of this argument often appear in the rape literature. But biological arguments do not recognize the cultural ideals that promote aggression.

Traditional gender roles, hegemonic masculinity, and dominant-group privilege not only encourage particular behaviors and patterns of thinking for some American men, but they may *obligate* white, male violence. For a limited number of men, serial murder may be one channel for constructing and expressing masculinity when other channels have been blocked or found to be unsuccessful through repeated failure.

Serial murder may be an outlet for proving masculinity for some American men, as it can be seen as fulfilling complementary masculine ideals and cultural values such as

individualism, competition, dominance, aggression, violence, recognition or fame, and sense of accomplishment. The experience of crime commission is distinct yet also consonant with both American cultural values and masculine ideals.

The Criminal Experience

Components of the criminal experience – including risk-taking, thrill seeking, and a desire for power and control – are compatible with American values and masculine ideals. In the United States, thrill-seeking is associated with freedom and self-actualization, and those who take big risks that pay off are handsomely rewarded. Because these values mesh well with masculine ideals, men, who are encouraged to be aggressive, competitive, and willing to take risks to gain success, are particularly susceptible to messages about these values.

Although Lyng (1990 and 2005) and Katz (1988) do not address serial murder in their theoretical models, Lyng's (2005) concept of "edgework" and Katz's (1988) concept of the "seductions of crime" provide useful ways for conceptualizing the appealing and often thrilling nature of crime. Both attempt to "link an experiential understanding of crime with the structural conditions of modern social life" (Miller 2005:157).

Edgework

Lyng (1990) explores the appeal of risk-taking, whether partaking in adventures like rock climbing, skiing, or skydiving; financial risks like stock trading; or psychological risks like unprotected sex and sadomasochism, and attempts to explain

such high-risk behaviors "in terms of a socially constituted self in a historically specific social environment" (Lyng 1990:852-853). He argues that other models of risk-taking behaviors fail to explain why some people appear to "place a higher value on the *experience* of risk-taking than they do on achieving the final ends of the risky undertaking" (Lyng 1990:852).

A common characteristic of edgework activities is that they all include a clear, serious threat to the participant's physical or mental well-being; if he or she fails to meet the challenge, the consequences may include death or debilitating injury. But edgeworkers frequently claim a high level of expertise, or a heightened ability to maintain control in situations most people would classify as uncontrollable (Lyng 1990). To be successful in an edgework activity, participants must maintain constant control, even when faced with the unexpected.

Edgeworkers often describe their activities as constituting a "hyperreality," creating a sense of "self-realization," "self-actualization," or "self-determination," and contend that no words can truly explain the experience, so many will not discuss their activities in detail (Lyng 1990:860-861). Yet, they often feel a special bond with other edgeworkers, based on the belief that their activities require an extraordinary skill not possessed – or understood – by most people.

Edgeworkers do not participate in risky ventures to obtain some ultimate benefit; instead, the benefit is found in the experience itself. In edgework, "(t)he seductive quality is in the extreme rush experienced during the event and, subsequent to it, in the reflections on the accomplishments that have taken place under extreme conditions" (Milovanovic 2005:53). Participation in risky ventures induces an altered state for the

production of an adrenaline rush and is a means for proving skill and control. Edgework activities require planning, concentration, and flexibility, and edgeworkers view success as a mark of significant survival skills. As with most thrilling ventures, the excitement eventually lessens with repetition, and edgworkers need to periodically intensify the risk level to achieve the desired feeling.

Lyng (1990) argues that the alienating nature of modern, industrialized society leads some people to participate in "edgework" because it offers them the opportunity to feel they have greater control of their lives or a means to express their "real selves." Some people may only recognize their "real" selves in "moments of uninhibited behavior, emotional outbursts, or spontaneous expression" (Lyng 1990:864). Those bound by social constraints may seek spontaneous and emotional activities to "feel like themselves." Lyng (1990:871) argues that the constraining nature of contemporary work "offers none of the phenomenological experiences that define spontaneous, free activity," so "workers look to leisure time for experience that is self-determining and self-actualizing" and particularly activities that involve both risk and skill.

Lyng further argues that the modern world is full of uncertainty and dangers that generally are beyond people's control but that participating in edgework activities creates a sense of greater control in such a threatening environment. In addressing the apparent paradox of people participating in dangerous activities "as a response to the threats they confront in an already dangerous world," Lyng (1990:874) argues that "the absence of control experiences in institutional routines is the direct counterpart of the heightened sense of control experienced in edgework, even if the latter sensation is largely illusory." The sensation is termed "illusory" because many circumstances in edgework activities

cannot be anticipated and, therefore, cannot be controlled, but the edgeworker defines his or her skill in terms of the ability to plan for potential hazards, quickly compensate for unexpected events, and ultimately survive the experience unscathed.

Lyng briefly explores the particularly male preoccupation with skill and control — and edgework activities — and suggests that gender socialization may be responsible. Most edgeworkers tend to be young men, as "(m)ales are more likely than females to have an illusory sense of control over fateful endeavors because of the socialization pressures on males to develop a skill orientation toward their environment" (Lyng 1990:872-873).

The need to express a "real self" outside of an alienating labor force does not push everyone into edgework, and some lower-income edgeworkers may gravitate to high-risk subcultures (e.g., biker groups) or work in high-risk occupations (e.g., police work, firefighting, and combat soldiering) (Lyng 1990:876). Other people may experience self-actualization in "their commitment to family, occupation, or an ideology like Christian fundamentalism" (Lyng 1990:879). However, Lyng (1990:882) argues, "The fact that many people find this type of experience alluring and seek to repeat it as often as possible is an important statement on the nature of modern social life."

Seductions of Crime

Katz (1988) urges the examination of crime by attempting to understand the *criminal experience*. He focuses on the "seductive," or attractive, components of crime, which can be "moving" and "thrilling" for some. Katz (1988) urges an examination of criminal activity as an emotional process that offers its perpetrators distinctive rewards and sensations. "From this perspective, crime is seen as a powerful, seductive, emotional

experience that allows social actors to transcend their otherwise routine, mundane lives" (Miller 2005:155-156). The recognition of the criminal experience as an emotional, thrilling practice provides another perspective for understanding serial murderers.

Power and Control

Many serial murderers have described murder as thrilling and providing a great sense of power and control, whether over their victims, by instilling a sense of fear in the community, or by outsmarting police for a time (Fox et. al. 2005; Levin and Fox 2007; Levin 2008; Ramsland 2006; and Martingale 1993). Levin (2008) suggests that serial murderers contacting the media and taunting police are evidence of a desire to establish an image of power and dominance. Some may consider serial murder a path to fame, giving them a sense of domination and immortality. Indeed, several (e.g., Jason Massey and Colin Ireland, neither included in this study) expressed a desire to be known as a serial murderer or, in Massey's case, the "world's worst serial killer" (Ramsland 2006:50). Confessing to or claiming exaggerated numbers of victims also occurs (Ramsland 2006) and is "associated with one-upmanship and the desire for historical notoriety" (Ramsland 2006:48).

Another means for acquiring power is demonstrating control or dominance over others. Capitalist societies are stratified by privilege and power, with a small dominant group holding the most power and the rest of the population more or less marginalized, at least partially based on gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In the U.S. patriarchal society, nonwhites, those in the working or poor class, homosexuals, women, children, and the elderly hold less power than white, middle-class, heterosexual men. Given their relative powerlessness and in some cases higher accessibility (because of a

tendency for some to spend more time on the streets), vulnerable-group members make convenient targets for crime. Serial murderers who target members of vulnerable groups may have more control than if they targeted members with equal or higher social status, who may be more difficult to access.

Popular images of those in vulnerable populations frequently are negative, given the tendency to attribute their status to individual flaws or mistakes and to place less value on their lives (Guillén 2007; Sheffield 2004; and Wilson 2007). Members of vulnerable populations sometimes are dehumanized or objectified in American culture, making their victimization seem less important. Serial murderers commonly describe their victims as less than human (Levin and Fox 2007 and Martingale 1993), and law enforcement officials and journalists have long been accused of devoting less time and fewer resources to cases in which the victims are vulnerable-group members. These cultural messages may increase the likelihood of victimization for particular segments of the population.

The components of this theoretical framework can help explain why white men in the United States have a greater propensity for serial murder. Emphases in American culture on individualism, competition, and white, male privilege; a strong cultural push for men to strive toward the ideals of hegemonic masculinity; the potential emotional appeal of crime commission; and inconsistent and contradictory cultural messages may contribute to the development of serial murderers by making serial murder a path to desired social goods for some men. Additionally, economic and social structures that marginalize particular populations and stereotypical representations of crime, criminals, and victims in American media create an environment in which some offenders (e.g.,

those who do not fit the “ideal criminal” image) may be overlooked or differently regarded and some victims (e.g., those who do not fit the “ideal victim” image) may be ignored or blamed for their victimization. The three parts that make up this theoretical framework separately offer a deeper understanding of the cultural messages broadcast in the United States and their particular influence on men, yet they are intrinsically intertwined and together may be used to explain the development of serial murderers in America.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Studies of culture examine the symbolic-expressive dimension of social life and view culture as a distinct aspect of social reality (Wuthnow et. al. 1984). Wuthnow et. al. (1984:259) argue that a chief aim of cultural analysis is "to identify empirical regularities or patterns in this dimension of reality" and identify features of those regularities that make them meaningful. This can be accomplished by examining the "recorded culture," which "encompasses all the things that record in some way how people thought and felt" in a particular time and place (Inglis 2005:17). These cultural records, including newspapers, magazines, advertisements, films, government documents, diaries, and letters, offer extraordinary insight into the lived culture of a particular group (Denzin 1992).

To identify aspects of American culture that foster a milieu suitable for serial murder and that influence the reported over-representation of men and whites in serial murder, I employed a qualitative content analysis. A variety of cultural records – including biographical narratives, newspaper articles, court cases, legal journal articles, and official confessions – regarding 15 serial murderers were analyzed. Secondary data were used for this study because the representations of serial murder in American culture were of principal interest. The use of primary data could have aided in identifying characteristics of the killers but was unnecessary given the wealth of secondary data

available.[8] This analysis was informed by the theoretical framework explained in the previous chapter.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative content analysis approach is commonly used in the analysis of documents and comprises a search for underlying themes in the materials under study (Bryman 2001:381). In contrast to quantitative content analysis, the process used in a qualitative approach is to extract themes in texts often left implicit, and the processes of conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and interpretation do not necessarily follow a well-defined structure (Bryman 2001:381). Coding of themes evolves, with the researcher "discovering" themes through analysis, rather than seeking data to fit into predetermined categories. By reading and rereading documents, the researcher tries "to pin down (the) key themes and, thereby, to draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which the textural material is a specimen" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:870). The researcher begins with research questions and loose categories, which may be revised, abandoned, or augmented throughout the research process.

Defining Serial Murder

Because of variation in the definition of serial murder, it is necessary to establish the definition employed here. Based on the FBI definition, as well as common characteristics established in the literature, serial murder is defined in this study as three

[8] Primary-data collection also was not possible or feasible in all cases because several of the killers included in this study are dead, and others are known for their unwillingness to discuss their offending.

or more homicides that were intentionally committed by a single offender acting alone for sexual or other personal gratification over a period of weeks, months, or years. The motivational qualifier I included is commonly found in social scientists' definitions of serial murder and helps distinguish serial murder from homicides motivated by material or financial gain, sympathy, revenge, passion, or temporary rage, which I believe can be demonstrated to be qualitatively different types of homicide. A serial murderer is defined as a person who has been convicted of serial murder, as defined here. Among types of killers that may be considered serial murderers elsewhere but are not included in this definition are those who have been suspected but not convicted of at least three murders; those who murdered family members or other intimates; those who killed as part of a partnership; and healthcare or childcare workers who killed in those settings or while on duty. These offenders appear to differ in killing methods, targeted victims, and apparent motivation from the "typical" serial murderer[9] and generally are treated as atypical in popular portrayals.

Sample Selection [10]

The number of serial murderers identified varies widely depending on the chosen definition of serial murder, and a comprehensive list of known serial murderers is difficult to compile. By culling information from various books that purport to be

[9] A "typical" serial murderer, as suggested by the previous studies, is considered to be a white, American man of middle to low socioeconomic status who killed alone; was convicted of killing at least three people previously unknown to him on separate occasions; and who did not steal items of value from his victims or kill for any apparent reason other than personal gratification.

[10] See Table 1 in Appendix A for a breakdown of general information about the serial murderers in the sample.

comprehensive information sources of serial murder, like *The A to Z Encyclopedia of Serial Killers,* and the Crime Library, which includes information about known serial murderers and breaks down the list into categories including "Most Notorious," "Sexual Predators," "Truly Weird & Shocking," "Unsolved Cases," "Partners in Crime," and "Killers in History," I developed a list of 141 serial murderers.

This list is not exhaustive, and several reasons can account for the discrepancy between estimates of the number of serial murderers and the number included in popular sources. Serial murder sources that are produced for the public generally include cases that are well-known (i.e., received vast amounts of media coverage), exceptional in some way, or about which there exists an abundance of information. In addition, information about cases prior to 1960 (before the so-called surge in serial murder) is difficult to find, and some cases from all time periods likely are never documented. (Convicted murderers who would fit the definition of a serial murderer may not have been identified as such, some serial murderers are never apprehended, and variations of record keeping and quality of records may have kept some veiled from public knowledge.) Finally, most "comprehensive" sources of serial murder are compiled and produced in the United States and include mostly American cases; only the most notorious non-American serial murderers are included.

From the 141 serial murderers identified, I extracted the killers who appeared to characterize the "typical" serial murderer. "Typical" serial murderers were identified as those who fit my definition of serial murderer (explicated in the previous section), as well as common characteristics established in the literature. This meant excluding unsolved cases; those who were not convicted of at least three murders on separate occasions;

those who killed with a partner; those who killed family members, people in their care, or other people who were previously known to them; those who appeared to kill for burglary, sympathy, revenge, or reasons other than personal gratification; and those who were not white, male, and American.[11] After these exclusions, the new list was composed of 22 serial murderers. I selected my "typical" group of nine serial murderers[12] from this list, looking for variety in timeframe, geographic location, and type of victim. I also ensured that the final sample included a nearly equal mix of notorious[13] and lesser-known murderers.

Comparison groups are useful for better understanding of a phenomenon in which one is interested (Bryman 2001; Creswell 1998; and Denzin and Lincoln 2005), because contrasting similar groups can help reveal characteristics and variations of the phenomenon that may be difficult to distinguish otherwise. Denzin and Lincoln (2005:451) emphasize the importance of selecting cases that offer an opportunity to learn, arguing that "sometimes it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a seemingly typical case." Examining serial murderers who do not fit presumably prototypical characteristics may lead to better understanding of the influence of those characteristics within the American cultural context, as well as a revelation of additional

[11] No sexual orientation was established as "typical" in the literature, though all serial murderers in the "typical" group fit identified patterns of sexuality in serial murder.

[12] The qualitative researcher often must use her or his judgment, based on a set of criteria, to select a sample size that will aid in understanding (Creswell 1998 and Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Based on my prior knowledge and research, and given the large volume of data available, I felt that nine serial murderers would compose a small enough group to be manageable yet large enough to get a good sense of the phenomenon, how it is represented in American culture, and possible variation.

[13] Notorious serial murderers are those who attained celebrity status through large amounts of media attention and broad public recognition. They continue to be widely recognized long after publicity subsides and often after death. They are referenced in media accounts of current serial murderers and often used as a measuring stick by which other offenders are judged. They also are included in a number of compilations, such as truTV's "Crime Library" list of the "Most Notorious" or "Truly Weird & Shocking" crimes.

characteristics or variations. The inclusion of a comparison group also aids in a critical analysis of those characteristics and their status as typical. I selected six serial murderers[14] for a comparison group, using Internet resources and books and looking specifically for cases that differ by nationality, race or ethnicity, sex, and social status. Each killer in this "atypical" group represents a variation of one of these characteristics, but I did not seek to include all variations of all characteristics.

The inclusion of divergent serial murderers in this study aids in the understanding of presumably prototypical white, American, male serial murderers. But, as only 15 serial murderers are included in the sample, findings from the proposed study will not be generalizable to the serial murderer population, but will contribute to an understanding of this population and how culture influences its development.

"Typical" Group

Robert Berdella

Bob Berdella murdered six men by torture, suffocation, and drug injections from 1980 to 1984 in Kansas City, Missouri. He killed his victims in his home after extensive torture, then dismembered the bodies and put the body pieces out with the trash. He was caught after one of his victims escaped and notified police. In a plea bargain, he confessed to the murders on December 19, 1988, and received a life sentence. He died of a heart attack in prison on October 8, 1992.

[14] For reasons stated previously, I felt that six serial murderers composed a reasonable group in size and offered enough variation to aid in understanding the phenomenon.

Carroll Edward Cole

"Eddie" Cole confessed to murdering 13 women by strangulation from 1971 to 1980 in Dallas, Texas; San Diego, California; and Las Vegas, Nevada. He killed each victim either in her home, leaving the body there, or outside, finding a disposal site a short distance from the murder. He was tried for five murders total, three in Dallas and two in Las Vegas. He pled not guilty to the Dallas murders but was found guilty on April 9, 1981, and sentenced to life in prison. He pled guilty to the Las Vegas murders on August 16, 1984, and received another life sentence and a death sentence. He was executed on December 6, 1985.

Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer

Jeffrey Dahmer murdered 17 men and boys by strangulation from 1978 to 1991 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He killed his victims in his parents' home, his grandmother's home, or his apartment, depending on where he was living at the time of each murder, and dismembered the bodies, which he then either saved or disposed of by burying under his parents' or grandmother's house (when he lived there), putting the body pieces out with the garbage, or storing the body pieces in a vat of acid. He was caught after one of his victims escaped and notified police. He pled guilty, though claimed insanity, to 15 murders on July 13, 1992, and received 15 consecutive life sentences. He was beaten to death in prison on November 28, 1994.

John Wayne Gacy

John Gacy murdered 33 boys and young men by strangulation from 1972 to 1978 in Chicago, Illinois. He killed all of his victims in his home; he buried most of the bodies in the crawl space under his home or elsewhere on his property and dumped several in

nearby rivers. He was caught when police searched his house after his last victim went missing and found items they considered suspicious and noticed a foul odor emanating from the crawl space. He pled not guilty by reason of insanity but was convicted on March 13, 1980, and sentenced to death. He was executed on May 10, 1994.

Keith Hunter Jesperson

Keith Jesperson murdered at least four women (he confessed to 160) by strangulation from 1990 to 1995 in Oregon, Wyoming, Washington, and possibly Florida and California. He killed one victim in his home and the rest in his truck, then dumped the bodies outdoors. He was caught when he called police from a truck stop to turn himself in for one of the murders. He pled guilty to one murder in Washington in October 1995 and received a life sentence; pled no contest to two murders in Oregon in November 1995 and received a life sentence; and accepted a plea deal and pled guilty to one murder in Wyoming in June 1998 and received another life term. He is serving his sentences in the Oregon State Penitentiary.

Dennis Lynn Rader

Dennis Rader murdered 10 men, women, and children by strangulation and stabbing from 1974 to 1986 in Wichita, Kansas. He killed the victims in their homes, gaining access by breaking in while they were not home and waiting; pretending to be a police officer or work for the phone company; slipping in through an unlocked door; or, in one case, throwing a concrete block through a plate glass window. Police traced a computer disk he sent to a local television station to a church where he was congregation council president and made a familial match of his daughter's DNA obtained from a subpoena of medical records with the DNA in semen found at one of the murder scenes.

He was captured in February 2005; pled guilty on June 27, 2005; and received 10 consecutive life sentences. He is serving his sentences in Kansas.

Gary Leon Ridgway

Gary Ridgway murdered 48 women (mostly prostitutes and teenage runaways) by strangulation mostly from 1982 to 1984 and also in 1990 and 1998 in Washington. He killed his victims in his home or outdoors and dumped all of the bodies outdoors, many in or near the Green River. He was a suspect in the murders since 1983 but was not captured until November 2001 after DNA analysis of hair and saliva samples he provided to police in 1987 matched DNA found in semen left on several victims. He accepted a plea deal, pled guilty on November 5, 2003, and received 48 life sentences. He is serving his sentences in Washington.

Joel David Rifkin

Joel Rifkin murdered nine women (mostly drug addicts and prostitutes) by strangulation from 1989 to 1993 in New York City. He killed his victims either in the home he shared with his mother and sister or in his vehicle, dismembered the bodies, and scattered the body parts throughout the city. He was caught in June 1993 when he fled in his pickup truck from a police officer attempting to pull him over for missing license plates and crashed into a utility pole, at which time the officer discovered the body of his last victim in the bed of the truck. After several trials, he was convicted in 1994 and sentenced to 203 years to life in prison. In 2000, he was transferred from Attica State Prison to Clinton Correctional Facility at Dannemora.

Dayton Leroy Rogers

Dayton Rogers murdered seven (possibly eight) women by stabbing in the 1980s in Oregon. He killed all but one of his victims in his vehicle or outdoors and dumped the bodies in the Molalla Forest. He was captured when witnesses saw him attack his last victim while parked in a parking lot and provided his license plate number to police. He pled self-defense but was convicted of one murder in 1988 and sentenced to life in prison. He then was convicted of six murders on June 7, 1989, and sentenced to death. The death sentence was overturned in 2000, but he again was sentenced to death in 2006.

"Atypical" Group

Robert Black

Robert Black represents a case that differs by nationality. A white, Scottish man, he murdered at least three girls (and is suspected of more) by strangulation from 1982 to 1990 in Scotland and England. He abducted his victims from public areas, killed them in his van, and dumped the bodies outdoors. He was captured during a failed abduction attempt. He was convicted on May 19, 1994, and received a life sentence with the possibility of parole.

Theodore Robert Bundy

Ted Bundy represents a case that differs by socioeconomic status. A white, upper-middle-class man, he murdered at least three (but is credited with approximately 35) women by strangulation and bludgeoning from 1974 to 1978 in Washington, Utah, Colorado, and Florida. He killed some of his victims in their homes, leaving the bodies there, and others outside, in his vehicle, or in some unknown location, dumping the bodies in remote outdoor areas. He was arrested in Utah in August 1975 for failing to

stop for a police officer and for possession of burglary tools. He was convicted of kidnapping, sentenced to 15 years in prison, and then extradited to Colorado to face a murder charge. He escaped custody in Colorado in June 1977, was captured six days later, and escaped again in December 1977, this time making it to Florida. He killed two women and one girl and severely wounded three other women before being captured for good after a traffic stop. He was convicted of two murders in Florida on July 23, 1979, and sentenced to death twice. He was then convicted of one murder in Florida in February 1980 and sentenced to death. He was executed on January 24, 1989.

Richard Munoz Ramirez

Richard Ramirez represents a case that differs by ethnicity. Born in El Paso to Mexican immigrants, he murdered at least 13 women and men by shooting and/or stabbing from 1984 to 1985 in southern California. He killed all his victims in their homes after breaking in at night. Several of his victims did not die and were able to give descriptions of their attacker which were used, along with fingerprints lifted from a stolen car and distinct shoe prints found at several of the murder scenes, to identify Ramirez as the suspect. His photograph was printed and broadcast through mass media, and citizens recognized him in the street, captured him, and waited for police to arrive. He was convicted on September 20, 1989, and received 19 death sentences. He awaits execution at San Quentin State Prison.

Henry Louis Wallace

Henry Wallace represents a case that differs by race. An African-American man, he murdered at least nine (but admitted to 10, including one prostitute) young African-American women mostly by strangulation but also stabbing from 1992 to 1994 in

Charlotte, North Carolina. He killed his victims, all of whom were acquaintances, either co-workers or friends or family of people he knew well, in their homes and either left the bodies there or dumped them outdoors. He also raped and robbed most of his victims. He was captured after police found his fingerprints on a car stolen from one of the dead women and discovered that Wallace knew most of the victims. He promptly confessed to the murders after his capture in March 1994, but at trial, his attorneys argued that he suffered from mental illness. He was convicted of nine counts of first-degree murder, as well as additional charges including rape, and sentenced to death in January 1997. He awaits execution at Central Prison in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Coral Eugene Watts

Coral Watts represents a case that differs by race. An African-American man, he murdered at least 14 (but admitted to more than 80) white women by drowning, stabbing, hanging, or strangulation from 1974 to 1982 in Houston, Texas, and Michigan. He killed his victims in their homes or outdoors and left the bodies where they were killed. He was caught when neighbors called police while he attempted to kill two women after breaking into their apartment. In 1982, he received an unusual deal in Texas in which he confessed to 12 murders in exchange for immunity, pled guilty to "burglary with intent to commit murder," and received 60 years in prison. As he was on the verge of being released in 2004 because of an appellate court ruling and mandatory release laws, Michigan charged him with first-degree murder, and he was found guilty on November 18, 2004, and sentenced to a life term. On July 27, 2007, he was found guilty of a second Michigan murder and received another life term. He died September 21, 2007, of prostate cancer.

Aileen Carol Wuornos

Aileen Wuornos represents a case that differs by sex. A white woman, she murdered at least six men by shooting from 1989 to 1990 in Florida. Working as a prostitute, she was picked up by her victims and driven to remote locations, where she killed her victims in their vehicles or outdoors and left their bodies. She was identified after crashing and abandoning a car belonging to one of her victims; witnesses provided descriptions of Wuornos and a female companion (whom she lived with and also was in the car when it crashed), others who had seen the pair driving the car provided their names, police found her palm print on the car; and her fingerprints were found on pawned items belonging to her victims. She was convicted of one murder on January 27, 1992, and received a death sentence. On March 31, 1992, she pled guilty to three murders and received three death sentences. Then, in June 1992 and February 1993, she pled guilty to two more murders and received two more death sentences. She was executed on October 9, 2002.

Data-Collection Sources [15]

Biographical Narratives

Biographical narratives of serial murderers in this study were obtained from the truTV[16]-run Web site "Crime Library," which has been shown to be a dependable resource for detailed accounts of crimes, offenders, and related analysis (Gniewek and

[15] See Table 2 in Appendix A for a breakdown of data-collection sources for each serial murderer in this study.
[16] At the time of data collection, this channel and corresponding Web site were known as Court TV. The name change occurred January 1, 2008.

Moore 2006), as well as books, written by journalists (usually the reporters assigned to cover the cases), law enforcement officers, and academics based on interviews with law enforcement officials, attorneys, victims' families, surviving victims, the murderer's family, and often the murderer. These narratives provide information about the serial murderer's personal life; dates and locations of the murders; victim background and cause of death; previous arrests and convictions; and details about trials, their time spent in prison, and executions. They also include direct quotations from the killers, which provide insight into how they thought about cultural values, how they understood their cultural competencies, and how they accordingly constructed lines of action.

One Crime Library article (15 total) and at least one book (21 total) were used for each killer in this study, except Black. For the lesser-known serial murderers, few books – in Black's case, none[17] – had been published. For the more notorious, there often were several books available, and two or three were selected for analysis. Selection was based on the perceived credibility of the authors and the integrity of the publishers (e.g., overly sensationalized books or ones written by relatively unknown authors were generally not selected).[18] Although different books about the same killer contain a considerable amount of repetitive information, using more than one book when available was useful, as it provided a more complete account of the case.

While analyzing these data, I looked for information about each murderer's upbringing, relationships, goals and outcomes, occupations, and pastimes, as well as

[17] No book was found that was exclusively about Black, yet one focused on British serial murderers devoted substantial space to his case.
[18] Convenience and availability also were considered in the selection process, so books that were not selected for analysis did not necessary fail to meet these criteria.

information about the social environment during his or her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. I also looked for evidence of perceived failure (e.g., in school, relationships, or occupations), evidence of a desire for power or domination or for fame or distinction, a tendency for violent behavior, risk-taking behaviors, and interest in military or law enforcement. These were general categories I kept in mind while also remaining receptive to emerging patterns and themes.

Newspaper Articles

The mass media are an important transmitter of cultural messages, and my analysis relied heavily on newspaper reports. Newspapers, through a complex process of cultural production and consumption, do not just report news, but they "make news meaningful" (Hall 1975:21). Cultural values are evoked and narrative structure employed, along with a variety of verbal, visual and typographical means, to create "signifying meaning-structures" (Hall 1975:21) through which people understand their world and construct meanings about it (Lule 2001). It is important to not only look at *what* newspaper stories say, but also *how* it is presented, as well as how it shapes and is shaped by culture (Hall 1975). Examining media representations of serial murderers aided in understanding the relationship between dominant cultural values and representations of serial murder, as well as the ways in which cultural values are transmitted via these cases and how they may be interpreted in different ways.

A variety of articles published in newspapers across the nation was used for analysis and gathered through three databases of national and international newspapers available through the University of Tennessee libraries: Dow Jones Factiva, Newsbank

Inc.**,** and ProQuest Historical Newspapers.[19] A search of each database was conducted for each killer using his or her given name.[20] For the seven killers who had a well-known nickname associated with the murders, a second search was conducted using that nickname;[21] results of both searches were then compared and duplicate articles thrown out. A total of 50,252 articles were found: in the "typical" group, 86 for Berdella, 41 for Cole, 12,896 for Dahmer, 4,905 for Gacy, 529 for Jesperson, 2,745 for Rader, 4,816 for Ridgway, 974 for Rifkin, and 433 for Rogers; and in the "atypical" group, 806 for Black, 10,339 for Bundy, 6,598 for Ramirez, 453 for Wallace, 459 for Watts, and 4,172 for Wuornos.

To select a sample of articles from the total number found, I looked for variety in information covered,[22] geographic location of the publications, and newspaper size. The

[19] See Table 3 in Appendix A for a breakdown of the number of articles found and selected for the sample, organized by database and search terms.

[20] The first and last names were entered into the search field as a nonphrase, thereby retrieving articles that contained both names but not necessarily appearing consecutively. This search method made it possible to find articles that contained variations of the killers' names (i.e., inclusion of a middle name or nickname that separates the first and last names). However, this search method also produced unrelated articles that also included both names anywhere in the text; those articles were excluded from the study and from the article totals reported herein.

[21] Using a well-known nickname as a search term made available articles published about the murders before the killers were identified. For those without a well-known nickname, no pre-apprehension coverage could be found. However, for most of the killers without a nickname, their murders had not been detected until their apprehension, making it unlikely that much or any pre-apprehension coverage exists. Before being identified as a serial murderer, Bundy was simply called "Ted," the name reported by witnesses and too ordinary to be used as a search term. However, a number of articles were available starting from when he was arrested on an unrelated charge and first became a suspect in the serial murders.

[22] Because many newspapers use wire services (e.g., Associated Press or Reuters) as a news source, the same article frequently appeared in multiple publications. Therefore, on significant dates in the cases, a widely distributed article from a wire service was published by multiple newspapers, and it was unnecessary to include all of these versions. Although not every article about every key development in the case was selected, the sample includes at least one article about every key development (as defined by information about plea deals or significant dates in the trial – jury selection, opening arguments, presentations of evidence, key witness testimony, closing arguments, conviction, and sentencing – and other new information that generates large amounts of publicity, like the discovery of additional victims, courtroom outbursts, or new explanations offered). In some cases, multiple versions of a wire-service article were included if it was significantly altered by one or more newspapers or if it appeared in vastly different newspapers (in size or geographic location). Altered articles indicate differences in story valuation

sample covers the entire coverage time period produced through the database searches. My aim was to get a sense of the overall picture that emerged from media coverage of serial murderers in America, so it was important to choose as wide a variety of publications as I could find using the databases to which I had access. A total of 1,192 articles were included in the sample: in the "typical" group, 22 for Berdella, 17 for Cole, 149 for Dahmer, 187 for Gacy, 71 for Jesperson, 67 for Rader, 64 for Ridgway, 103 for Rifkin, and 66 for Rogers; and in the "atypical" group, 35 for Black, 117 for Bundy, 60 for Ramirez, 111 for Wallace, 65 for Watts, and 58 for Wuornos.

In my analysis, I examined how much coverage each serial murderer received (as measured by numbers of published articles found[23]), how each was portrayed by the coverage,[24] and patterns in how the information was reported. Also important was considering what appeared to be missing from the reports; media's omission of information indicates value judgments about what is considered unimportant to narratives of serial murder. I also looked for information about how the killers responded to media coverage, as well as whether they apparently sought the coverage.

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among newspapers, and examining article publication by geographic location or newspaper size indicates similarities in story valuation despite differing audiences. The cases with the smallest numbers of articles in the sample are those with the largest numbers of articles containing duplicate information.

[23] I am interested in determining whether the amount of coverage is related to culturally influenced judgments made in media about the "newsworthiness" of the murders. The number of published articles found is a crude measure of the amount of coverage received by each killer, primarily because the amount of time that lapses between the media's awareness that a serial murderer is out there and his or her capture likely skews the volume of articles published – a longer timeframe likely means more articles and a shorter timeframe likely means fewer articles. In addition, more articles may be published about the killers who sought the coverage by calling or sending letters to the media, and some articles may have been excluded from the databases for various unknown reasons.

[24] As newspaper reporters typically are assigned a "beat," or area of specialty, the same reporter often writes many of the stories published about a serial murder case in a particular source. Although enough variety of sources is used to avoid a singular portrayal of each killer, the portrayals may represent fewer perspectives than seems apparent, especially because articles from wire services are included.

Court Cases and Legal Journal Articles

Legal documents, including court cases and legal journal articles, also are rich sources of cultural understandings and transmission. In the courtroom, people may be punished for violating the most strongly held values and norms in society, and examining legal documents points to the strong influence of culture in our ways of thinking about the world and our judgments of others.

Federal and state court cases and legal journal articles were obtained from the LexisNexis Academic database available through the University of Tennessee libraries. Searches were conducted for each killer using his or her given name and nickname, where applicable, with duplicate results thrown out, as described for the newspaper articles. Every unique court case that was produced was included in the analysis, and a selection of legal journal articles was included, based on their usefulness in contributing to a cultural argument.[25] A total of 107 court cases were included: in the "typical" group, 8 for Berdella, 2 for Cole, 10 for Dahmer, 10 for Gacy, 7 for Rifkin, and 4 for Rogers; and in the "atypical" group, 22 for Bundy, 18 for Ramirez, 14 for Wallace, 6 for Watts, and 6 for Wuornos. No relevant court cases were found for Jesperson, Rader, Ridgway, or Black. A total of 18 legal journal articles were included: in the "typical" group, 4 for Berdella, 3 for Jesperson, 3 for Rader, 5 for Ridgway, and 3 for Rogers; no relevant legal journal articles were found for Cole, Dahmer, Gacy, or any of the killers in the "atypical" group.

[25] Creswell (1998) provides a rationale for this selection.

Official Confessions

Two official confessions were found,[26] those of Rader and Ridgway. The confessions include not only information about the murders and the killers' attempts to offer explanations and justifications for the killings, but those explanations and justifications incorporate cultural images and indicate the killers' cultural understandings. This discourse provides insight into how the serial murderers thought about cultural values, how they understood their cultural competencies, and how they accordingly constructed lines of action.

Analytical Procedure

For the initial stages of analysis, I established general areas of inquiry based on the information I sought (explained previously by data-collection source) and shaped by the theoretical framework. I intended to pay close attention to their social environment from childhood up to the time before their first murder, any evidence of cultural values or familiar imagery conveyed through the documents, and the killers' own explanations and apparent cultural understandings. I then carefully read the Crime Library narratives and books first, then newspaper articles, then court cases and legal journal articles, and finally confessions, highlighting and making notes about information that appeared significant. Patterns and themes began to emerge throughout this process, and I created the following loose categories:

- Relationships with family members

[26] Transcripts of court proceedings frequently are available only to those who request them in person from the appropriate courthouse. The documents used in this analysis are scanned copies obtained from The Smoking Gun Web site, www.thesmokinggun.com.

- Relationships with friends
- Goals and their outcomes
- Perceived failures (e.g., in school, relationships, and occupations)
- Favorite pastimes
- Social environment (during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood)
- Evidence of a desire for power or domination
- Evidence of a desire for fame or distinction
- History of violent behavior
- Evidence of risk-taking behavior
- Interest in military service or law enforcement
- Claims made by prosecution before, during, and after trials
- Claims made by defense before, during, and after trials
- References to killers in unrelated newspaper articles or court cases
- Portrayals in newspaper articles, especially through social typing
- Characteristics of the cases that were considered newsworthy or not
- Use of a nickname in newspaper coverage
- Whether and how killers sought media coverage
- Killers' responses to media coverage
- Killers' attention to other serial murderers
- Evidence of feelings of superiority
- Explanations offered by killers
- In confessions and direct quotations, evidence of killers' cultural understandings (how they understood their cultural competencies and subsequent construction of lines of action)

Next, I re-read each document and entered relevant information into computer files separated by the newly formed categories. Further analysis led to the revision, abandonment, and augmentation of the categories. The revised set of coding categories included the following:

- Serial murderer characteristics and comparisons[27]
  - Intelligence and school performance
  - Employment
  - Sexuality
  - Age at first murder
  - Previous abuse
  - Criminal history
  - Military service
  - Interest in law enforcement

[27] Tables were created based on data in this category which are discussed in the next chapter and appear in Appendix A.

        - Peer and romantic relationships
        - Failures
        - Trophies
        - Explanations offered
    - Cultural values tuned in and utilized
        - Success and recognition
        - Violence
        - Portrayals
        - Social types
            - Fools
            - Villains
            - Corrupt hero
    - Masculinities
    - The criminal experience
        - Thrill-seeking and risk-taking
        - Power and control
        - Skill or accomplishment
    - Narrative of serial murder

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Themes and patterns emerged throughout the analysis that are descriptive of the cultural context in which serial murder is represented. To establish a foundation for comparison, characteristics of serial murderers (mostly drawn from biographical narratives) are first presented separately.[28] Comparisons are then made regarding those characteristics, followed by thematic findings from all data-collection sources.[29]

Serial Murderer Characteristics

"Typical" Group

Bob Berdella

In biographical narratives, Berdella was described as highly intelligent and performed well in school. He attended art school after high school but dropped out. He worked as a cook before opening a curio shop, selling mostly rare artifacts, replica skulls, lava lamps, incense, and the like. The business was only moderately successful, and he periodically worked a second job as a cook. He was homosexual, never married, and had no children. He started killing men at age 41. He had no known history of abuse. Prior convictions were for drug offenses. He never served in the military or showed interest in law enforcement work.

[28] See Tables 4 and 5 in Appendix A.
[29] For full citations of data-collection sources, see Appendix B.

Berdella was described by family members, neighbors, and former classmates as a loner and outcast as a child, who had difficulty relating to his peers and did not participate in school or community activities. As an adult, however, he was described as a community leader who was instrumental in revitalizing his neighborhood and forming a crime watch group, though he had few friends.

Berdella took photographs of his victims throughout the torture he inflicted and after their deaths; kept journals and audio cassette tapes documenting the torture and deaths; and saved two heads as souvenirs, or trophies. He blamed the movie "The Collector" for influencing his desires to kill.

Eddie Cole

Cole was described as highly intelligent but with poor school performance (he dropped out of high school). He was employed inconsistently but at the time of his apprehension, worked in a Toys "R" Us warehouse. He was heterosexual and divorced at the time of his apprehension, with no children. He started killing women at age 33. He had various prior convictions, mostly for property and conduct offenses. He was dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Navy and showed no interest in law enforcement work.

Cole was described as a loner and outcast as a child, who had difficulty relating to his peers and did not participate in school or community activities. He was abused by his mother as a child and was not enrolled in school until he was 7 years old, putting him a year behind his peers. He said he killed as a form of revenge against his abusive and adulterous mother. He did not keep trophies of his murders.

Jeffrey Dahmer

Dahmer was described as average in intelligence with poor school performance. He briefly attended college, dropping out after failing his first quarter. He was employed inconsistently but just prior to his apprehension worked at a chocolate factory. He was homosexual, never married, and had no children. He started killing men and boys at age 18. He had no known history of abuse. Prior convictions included sexual offenses – indecent exposure and sexual assault. He served in the Army but was honorably discharged because of his alcoholism. He showed no interest in law enforcement work.

Dahmer was described as a loner and outcast as a child, who had difficulty relating to his peers, would often act out to gain their attention, and appeared indifferent toward school and community activities. He also appeared to have difficulty building and maintaining close relationships as an adult. His murders were explained at trial as due to a fear of abandonment and insanity. He saved photographs and body parts as trophies.

John Gacy

Gacy was described as average in intelligence with poor school performance, although he did attend business school after high school. He had a fairly consistent work record and at the time of his arrest owned a profitable construction business. He was often described as homosexual, though he said on several occasions that he was bisexual. He was divorced at the time of his apprehension and had children who lived with their mother. He started killing young men at age 30; had no known history of abuse; and had various prior arrests and convictions – for sodomy (an arrest that he indicated deeply embarrassed him), breaking and entering, conspiracy, assault, disorderly conduct, battery and aggravated battery, and reckless conduct. He did not serve in the military and showed

no interest in law enforcement, except to occasionally pose as a police officer (he drove a late-model black Oldsmobile, equipped with a red light and police radio scanner, and often carried handcuffs and a phony police badge) to lure victims.

As a child, Gacy was described as well-behaved with good relationships with his teachers and other children. He was a Boy Scout, an active member of the Jaycees, and later a Democratic precinct captain. He claimed mental illness and also explained the murders as ridding society of its "bad element" (Fritsch 1980a). He kept small personal items from his victims, such as wallets and clothing.

Keith Jesperson

Jesperson was described as being of average intelligence with poor school performance. He said that he wanted to go to college after high school but his father refused to pay for it. He worked as a long-haul truck driver. He was heterosexual, divorced at the time of his apprehension, and had children who lived with their mother. He started killing women at age 35. He has no known history of abuse and no prior convictions. He never served in the military but as a boy dreamed of joining the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Jesperson was described as a loner and outcast as a child, who was socially awkward and had difficulty relating to his peers. He joined the football team at school but quit after a short time, complaining of cruelty from the coaches and other players. He said he killed as a form of revenge against his former wife. He did not keep trophies of his murders.

Dennis Rader

Rader was described as being of average intelligence with average school performance, and he eventually earned a criminal justice degree from Wichita State University. He had previously worked for a home security company but was employed as a community compliance officer at the time of his apprehension. He was heterosexual and married with grown children at the time of his apprehension. He started killing mostly women at age 29. He had no known history of abuse and no prior convictions. He served in the U.S. Air Force and showed an interest in law enforcement work, evidenced by his college major and employment.

Rader was described as socially awkward as a child, with difficulty relating to his peers. As an adult, he became active and well-known in his community. He was a Boy Scout leader and congregation president at his church. He kept a diary of his murders and collected newspaper clippings about his and other serial murder cases; he also took photographs of his victims and kept small items like driver's licenses. He blamed a "demon" or "dark side" inside of him for the murders.

Gary Ridgway

Ridgway was described as having low intelligence with poor school performance. He worked as a truck painter for Kenworth Truck Company for 32 years, acquiring that job after his release from the U.S. Navy and keeping it until his apprehension. He was heterosexual and was married at the time of his apprehension with one child. He started killing women at age 33. He had no known history of abuse and had previous convictions for patronizing prostitutes. He showed no interest in law enforcement work.

Ridgway was described as a loner and outcast as a child, who had difficulty relating to his peers and did not participate in school or community activities. He was held back two grades in high school, embarrassing him and making him feel like a failure. In explaining his murders, Ridgway claimed to be cleaning up society by ridding it of prostitutes, whom he saw as trash. He took photographs and personal items from his victims but did not keep them very long.

Joel Rifkin

Rifkin, adopted as an infant, was described as highly intelligent with poor school performance. He attended college but dropped out. He owned an unprofitable landscaping business. He was heterosexual, never married, and had no children. He started killing women at age 40. He had no know history of abuse; he had a prior conviction for patronizing a prostitute. He never served in the military nor showed any interest in law enforcement work.

Rifkin was described as socially awkward as a child, with difficulty relating to his peers. He found some acceptance after joining the track team in school but did not stay a member long. He said he began patronizing prostitutes after high school as a way to gain sexual experience without being rejected by women he knew. He said he killed as a form of revenge against his biological mother, whom he believed to be a prostitute, and said the movie "Frenzy" further influenced his desire to kill. He saved personal items from his victims, such as driver's licenses or other identification cards, credit cards, clothing, and jewelry.

Dayton Rogers

Rogers was described as highly intelligent with poor school performance (he dropped out of high school). He owned an engine-repair business, but, despite his company's profitability, he was deeply in debt. He was heterosexual and married at the time of his apprehension with one child. He started killing women at approximately age 27.[30] He was physically abused by his father as a child and had been accused of rape and violent assaults as a young adult. He did not serve in the military and showed no interest in law enforcement work.

Rogers was described as a loner and outcast as a child, who had difficulty relating to his peers and did not participate in school or community activities. Little explanation was offered for his murders, but he claimed self-defense at trial for one of them and suggested that his strict religious upbringing may have been influential. He kept victims' clothing and jewelry as trophies.

"Atypical" Group

Robert Black

Black was described as being of average intelligence with average school performance. He was adopted as an infant after being abandoned by his biological mother. When his adoptive parents died, he was sent to a children's home. He was expelled for unclear reasons and then sent to a home for male juvenile offenders. The school helped him get a welding apprenticeship, which he lost before starting, and he had an inconsistent employment history until becoming a delivery driver for Poster Dispatch and Storage. He was heterosexual, never married, and had no children. He began killing

[30] The date of his first murder is unknown.

female children at age 35. He claimed to have been sexually abused by male staff member at the boys' home, and he had prior convictions for pedophilia, theft, auto theft, and assault. He did not serve in the military and showed no interest in law enforcement work.

As a child, Black was described as a loner and socially awkward. He was a good athlete but had difficulty relating to his peers. In explaining why he killed the children, he said he wanted to molest them without "hurting" them. He did not keep trophies from the murders.

Ted Bundy

Bundy was described as highly intelligent and performed well in school. He earned a college degree in psychology and attended law school for a while. He had worked on local political campaigns, for a crisis hotline, and for a while as a campus security guard, but he had a fairly inconsistent employment history. He was heterosexual, never married, and had no children. He started killing women at age 28. He had no history of abuse, though he discovered while in his 20s that who he thought was his sister was really his mother and that who he thought were his parents were really his grandparents. He was arrested on suspicion of burglary during his killing spree but otherwise had no prior history of arrests. He did not serve in the military and showed no interest in law enforcement work, except to occasionally pose as a police officer to lure victims.

Bundy was described as a loner and socially awkward, with difficulty relating to his peers. He was a good athlete and joined the football team at school, but he quit after a short time because of a lack of interest. As an adult, he was a Republican campaign

worker and crisis counselor and generally described as well-adjusted. No explanation was offered for his murders, and he did not keep trophies.

Richard Ramirez

Ramirez was described as being of average intelligence with poor school performance (he dropped out of high school) and no legitimate employment history. He was heterosexual, never married, and had no children. He began killing mostly women at age 24. He had no history of abuse and had prior convictions for theft and auto theft. He did not serve in the military and showed no interest in law enforcement work.

Ramirez was described as a loner and social outcast as a child and did not participate in school or community activities. No explanation was offered for his murders. He stole items of value from his victims, such as jewelry and money, but he did not keep trophies.

Henry Wallace

Wallace was described as being of average intelligence with poor school performance. He attended college for a while but failed out twice. He worked at various fast-food restaurants. He was heterosexual, never married, and had no children. He started killing women at age 27. He had no history of abuse and a prior arrest for rape. He served in the U.S. Navy and showed no interest in law enforcement work.

Wallace was described as a loner and social outcast as a child and appeared to have difficulty building and maintaining close relationships as an adult. Insanity was alleged as an explanation for his murders. He did not keep trophies.

Coral Watts

Watts was described as being of average intelligence with poor school performance. He started college but dropped out three months into his first semester. He worked as an automobile mechanic. He was heterosexual, divorced at the time of his apprehension, and had one child whom he had abandoned. He started killing at age 21. He claimed to have been abused by his stepfather as a child and had prior convictions for harassment, theft, and assault. He did not serve in the military and showed no interest in law enforcement work.

As a child, Watts was described as a loner and socially awkward. He was a good athlete but had difficulty relating to his peers. He appeared to have difficulty building and maintaining close relationships as an adult. He said he killed his victims because they had "evil eyes," and he took small personal items, which he disposed of within days of the murders.

Aileen Wuornos

Wuornos was described as being of low intelligence with poor school performance (she dropped out of high school). She began working as a prostitute as a young teenager and continued prostitution until her apprehension. She was a homosexual, divorced from a man and involved with a woman when she was apprehended, and had one child as a young teenager whom she immediately gave up for adoption. She started killing men at age 33. She was sexually and physically abused by her grandfather, whom she thought was her father (she, like Bundy, had been told that her mother was her sister and her grandparents her parents). She had prior convictions for disorderly conduct,

DUIs, and weapons offenses. She reportedly tried to join the military and become a corrections officer.

Wuornos was described as a loner and social outcast as a child who had difficulty relating to her peers and would often act out to gain their attention. She also appeared to have difficulty building and maintaining close relationships as an adult. She explained her murders in terms of her prior victimization but also argued that they were all committed in self-defense. She stole items of value from her victims, such as cars, jewelry, and money, but did not keep trophies.

Comparisons of Characteristics

The following sections compare characteristics identified for the serial murderers in this study and, where applicable, contrast them with purported characteristics of "typical" serial murderers, as reported in the literature.

Intelligence and School Performance

Consistent with findings of other studies – but contrary to the popular profile that includes high intelligence – most of the killers in this study were described as having average intelligence. Four in the "typical" group (Berdella, Cole, Rifkin, and Rogers) and one in the "atypical" group (Bundy) were described as highly intelligent. A couple – one in the "typical" group (Ridgway) and one in the "atypical" group (Wuornos) – were described as having subpar intelligence. All of the nonwhite serial murderers and the female serial murderer were described as either average or below-average in intelligence. Regardless of intelligence, most performed poorly in school. Berdella ("typical" group)

and Bundy ("atypical" group) did well in school, and Rader's ("typical" group) performance was average. Both – Bundy and Rader – earned college degrees.

Employment

Those who were employed held working-class occupations (e.g., factory work, warehouse work, auto mechanics, delivery driver, construction, and painting). Other studies have reported that serial murderers have difficulty maintaining a steady work history, often moving from job to job with long stretches of unemployment, which generally was found in this study. In the "typical" group, Ridgway stands out for his long tenure with the same company, and four others – Berdella, Gacy, Rifkin, and Rogers – were business owners. In the "atypical" group, female serial murderer Wuornos, a prostitute, was the only killer in this study whose occupation is considered illegal, and Mexican serial murderer Ramirez was the only one with no legitimate employment history.

Sexuality

Race, gender, and nationality were selection criteria for this study, but sexual orientation was not. Most of the serial murderers were heterosexual men who killed women. Of the men who targeted other men – Berdella, Dahmer, and Gacy (all in the "typical" group) – all were homosexual or bisexual. In the "atypical" group, Mexican killer Ramirez was heterosexual and killed men generally as a necessity to carry out murders of the intended female targets; Scottish killer Black, a heterosexual male, killed female children, who also are frequent victims of serial murderers; and Wuornos was a homosexual female who killed heterosexual men.

Age at First Murder

Age at first murder also was not part of the selection criteria for this study. When compared to previous studies, which have found that serial murderers typically begin killing when they are between the ages of 25 and 35, the age at first murder of the killers in this study was stretched somewhat at both ends, but not substantially. Ten of the serial murderers in this study started killing between ages 25 and 35, but all were between young adulthood and early middle age. Two, both in the "typical" group (Berdella, age 41, and Rifkin, age 40), were somewhat older, and three – one in the "typical" group (Dahmer, age 18) and two in the "atypical" group (Ramirez, age 24, and Watts, age 21) – were younger.[31]

Previous Abuse

Inconsistent with findings of other studies, abuse was not a characteristic shared by many of the "typical" serial murderers in this study. Just two (Cole and Rogers) said they were abused as children, though three in the "atypical" group (Black, Watts, and Wuornos) claimed to have been victims of abuse in childhood. Ridgway ("typical" group) had a strained relationship with his mother, finding her overbearing and difficult to please, and Gacy, Rifkin, and Jesperson (all in the "typical" group) had arduous relationships with their fathers, but this does not seem unusual when compared to the general population.

[31] Cole said he first killed when he was 8 years old, when he drowned a neighborhood boy for teasing him about his "girly" name, but he did not kill again until he was 33.

Criminal History

Most had prior criminal histories, generally for petty offenses, but several served time in prison for more serious offenses. Three – two in the "typical" group (Dahmer and Gacy) and one in the "atypical" group (Scottish killer Black) – had been convicted of sexual offenses, and two others – one in the "typical" group (Rogers) and one in the "atypical" group (Wallace, an African-American) – had been accused of sexual offenses but not convicted.

Military Service

Other studies have reported that many serial murderers serve in the military and most of those who do are dishonorably discharged, but the findings in this study do not concur. While five of the serial murderers in this study (four in the "typical" group and one in the "atypical" group) served in the military, only one – Cole ("typical" group) – was dishonorably discharged.

Interest in Law Enforcement

Also inconsistent with findings of other studies, little interest in law enforcement work was found. Rader ("typical" group) earned a criminal justice degree and had been employed as a compliance officer;[32] Female serial murderer Wuornos ("atypical" group) tried to become a corrections officer; and Jesperson ("typical" group) as a child dreamed of joining the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or becoming a game warden. Two others – one in the "typical" group (Gacy) and one in the "atypical" group (Bundy) – posed as

[32] Rader did not accept this title and become indignant when people referred to his position as such because he considered himself closer to a law enforcement officer (Smith 2006:194).

police officers to lure their victims, but this does not necessarily indicate an interest in police work; instead, it suggests a cultural awareness of obedience to authority.

Peer and Romantic Relationships

All except for Gacy ("typical" group) were described by family members, neighbors, and former classmates as loners or outcasts as children. Most were described as socially awkward, with difficulty relating to their peers, a lack of ability for participating in socially valued activities (e.g., athletics or clubs) or indifference toward such activities. Dahmer's ("typical" group) father, Lionel Dahmer, explained:

> Jeff seemed unable to pursue even the most casual interests. He never read anything other than the books assigned in school, and science fiction and Alfred Hitchcock's book called *Horror Stories for Children*. Although he participated in the school band for a time, he showed no interest in music, no interest in art. Even worse, he showed no interest in other people. And even though he considered a neighborhood boy, Greg, as his closest friend until they drifted apart at age fifteen, he never developed relationships with his fellow schoolmates. (Dahmer 1994:78)

Several did participate in socially valued activities as children or teenagers, but they still often reported feeling ostracized by their peers – although this feeling is not uncommon among teenagers. Two in the "atypical" group (Black and Watts) were good athletes, and Rifkin ("typical" group) found some acceptance after joining the track team. Bundy ("atypical" group) and Jesperson ("typical" group) joined their football teams but quit after a short time, complaining of cruelty from the coaches and their own general lack of interest. Gacy ("typical" group), a Boy Scout, active member of the Jaycees, and a Democratic precinct captain, and Bundy ("atypical" group), a law student, former Republican campaign worker, and crisis counselor, were described as well-adjusted young adults.

As is reported in previous studies, most of the serial murderers in this study appeared to have difficulty building and maintaining close relationships as adults, although marriage was common. A few remained loners into adulthood, and none had more than a couple of close friends at one time. Three (one-third) of the "typical" group members (Rader, Ridgway, and Rogers) were married at the time of their arrest. Three more (another third) in the "typical" group (Cole, Gacy, and Jesperson) and two (one-third) in the "atypical" group (African-American Watts and female Wuornos) had been married and divorced at least once before. Five (all in the "typical" group) of those currently or previously married had children, but two (Gacy and Jesperson) were divorced at the times of their arrests and did not have custody. In the "atypical" group, Watts and Wuornos had children but never had contact with them.

Failures

Many of the serial murderers in this study experienced a sense of failure throughout their lives that they described as being deeply affective. Ridgway ("typical" group) said he always felt "slower" than the other children in school (which is consistent with his apparently lower intelligence) and that it bothered him "a lot" (Prothero and Smith 2006:366). He was held back two grades in high school, embarrassing him and making him feel like a failure, and Cole's ("typical" group) mother did not enroll him in school until he was 7 years old, putting him a year behind the other children. As adults, most from both groups had been fired from multiple jobs, and approximately half discussed post-high school scholastic failures. In the "typical" group, Berdella dropped out of art school; Rifkin dropped out of college where he had been studying to be a photojournalist; and Dahmer dropped out of college after failing his first quarter.

Jesperson's father refused to pay for him to attend college, though he expressed interest and his three siblings all attended higher education. In the "atypical" group, Bundy dropped out of law school; Black lost a welding apprenticeship; Wallace failed out of two colleges; and Watts dropped out of college three months into his first semester.

Trophies

Theft is uncommon before, during, or after the commission of serial murder, and only "atypical" group members Ramirez (a Mexican) and Wuornos (a female) stole items of value from their victims. Collecting trophies, however, was common among the white, male serial murderers. Eight – seven in the "typical" group and one in the "atypical" group – took what could be considered trophies of their murders: usually small items of little to no monetary value that would remind them of their victims, including photos, driver's licenses or other identification cards, credit cards, clothing, and jewelry. Berdella and Dahmer (both in the "typical" group) saved body parts.

Explanations Offered

Most of the serial murderers in this study, consistent with findings in other studies, discussed the murders in depth after their arrest, frequently with little prompting by officials; only Rogers ("typical" group) refused to talk about them at all, and Bundy ("atypical" group), while maintaining his innocence until just before his execution, spoke about his murders abstractly, pretending to speculate about someone else's actions. The most common explanations offered by the serial murderers of both groups in interviews or during trials was insanity, although the alleged mental disorders varied and not all of

the killers using this defense agreed with it.[33] A few in the "typical" group – Cole, Jesperson, and Rifkin – claimed to kill as a form of revenge against a powerful female (domineering mother, ex-wife, and biological mother, respectively). Prior victimization was another justification, used by Cole ("typical" group) and female Wuornos ("atypical" group). Wuornos also claimed self-defense for all of her killings, and Rogers ("typical" group) is the only man to claim self-defense, though in just one of the murder charges. Berdella and Rifkin (both in the "typical" group) blamed media (the movies "The Collector" and "Frenzy," respectively) for influencing their desires to kill. Gacy and Ridgway (both in the "typical" group) claimed to be cleaning up society by ridding it, in Gacy's words, of its "bad element" (Fritsch 1980a). Rifkin ("typical" group) considered himself a failure even in serial murder, saying that he did not learn anything from repeated efforts and was never confident nor proficient in killing. Two in the "atypical" group – Bundy and Ramirez – offered no explanation.

Cultural Values Tuned In and Utilized

All of the serial murderers in this study to some extent were active participants in their culture, recognizing cultural values and striving for culturally valued goods, yet many appeared to lack the cultural competencies to achieve their goals. The goals they expressed appear ordinary, as they were pulled from the cultural milieu and are shared by much of the population.

[33] Gacy expressed displeasure with an insanity defense (see Fritsch 1980g).

Success and Recognition

All except for Ramirez ("atypical" group) sought employment as a means for gaining income, respect, and success; Ramirez tried to acquire these through burglary and theft. With the exceptions of Ramirez and Berdella ("typical" group), all sought relationships with the opposite sex at some point. Several expressed long-held dreams of success, fame, and fortune. Bundy ("atypical" group) hoped for success in politics and strove to become a governor one day, yet he said he always felt ostracized from members of higher social strata:

> I felt inferior, in part because of the money thing. My family didn't have money problems per se, but I was always envious of the kids who lived in all those brick houses where the executives and doctors lived. I felt kind of deprived, at a disadvantage to those people who had the money, the successful parents, all the goodies. (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:25)

Since she was a young girl, Wuornos ("atypical" group) dreamed of becoming a movie star or singer. She apparently always believed she would do something extraordinary, once telling a hotel owner: "There'll be a book written about me one day" (Russell 2002:139).

Jesperson and Rader (both "typical" group) actively sought attention from the media by sending numerous letters to media outlets and, in Rader's case, threatening to kill more if he did not see news coverage of his killings. After his confession, Rader said: "I feel like a star right now" (Smith 2006:305). Cole ("typical" group) signed autographs for prison guards, and Bundy ("atypical" group) discussed others' apparent fascination with him: "They all want to see Bundy. A lot of 'em do. 'Where's Bundy?' I'll hear. 'Let's go see Bundy.' They'll drift by. There've been a lot of 'em" (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:294).

Although they did not actively seek coverage, Rifkin ("typical" group), Bundy ("atypical" group), and Ramirez ("atypical" group) apparently enjoyed the attention they received from the media and the many women who sought them out after their arrests, and Watts ("atypical" group) was delighted to have police investigators' attention. The learned enjoyment of celebrity status was observed in college athletes by Adler and Adler (1989) in their concept of the "glorified self," which is an identity that is formed through forced fame. They argue that it "arises when individuals become the focus of intense interpersonal and media attention, leading to their achieving celebrity" (Adler and Adler 1989:299). Some of the serial murderers, like the athletes, did not seek fame but learned to play, and enjoy, the celebrity part.

Again with the exception of Ramirez ("atypical" group), who did not appear to have a desire to "fit in" or achieve culturally valued success, these killers tried and failed repeatedly to achieve culturally valued goals through legitimate means, although some had had what could be considered success. Their commitments indicate that they continued to adhere to cultural values and the culturally valued means for achieving goals, yet, based on the gap between their cultural competencies and their dreams, they formed alternative lines of action.

Violence

Many of the serial murderers in this study indicated a high regard for violent acts as a means for gaining money or power, as well as an enjoyment of violence in popular culture. Female killer Wuornos ("atypical" group) had a longtime fascination with Bonnie and Clyde-type stories, and Cole ("typical" group) enjoyed "gruesome horror shows" at the movies (Newton 1994:59). Both in the "typical" group, Rifkin and Berdella

claimed that their murders were in some ways inspired by violent films: For Rifkin, it was the 1972 Alfred Hitchcock film "Frenzy," in which a serial murderer stalks women in London and kills them through strangulation with a necktie, and for Berdella, it was "The Collector," in which a man kidnaps a woman to hold her hostage in his house for his own enjoyment, though she eventually dies.

Most who had criminal histories committed minor property offenses, but several were convicted of violent acts before they started killing, and Gacy ("typical" group) and Wuornos ("atypical" group) were known for violent tempers. In addition, Cole, Dahmer, and Jesperson (all in the "typical" group) abused and killed animals while children.

Despite several of the serial murderers indicating that they targeted particular victims because of their resemblance to someone against whom they sought revenge, none had a history of committing domestic abuse. Only Cole ("typical" group) ever targeted the original source of his anger when he attempted to kill his first wife by setting her hotel room on fire (she escaped) and did kill his second wife by strangulation.

Portrayals

Initial media reports after the killers' apprehension include reactions from neighbors, family, and friends, who overwhelmingly describe the killers as being "normal" and kind, though loners. Later stories portray the killers less often as "normal" but more often as deranged and less than human. There were no apparent differences in the portrayals of those in the "typical" group when compared to portrayals of those in the "atypical" group. These stories, from the start of coverage to the end, frequently employ culturally familiar imagery in descriptions of the killers and their murders. Coverage of Cole ("typical" group) appears to be an exception, as most articles merely provided

general information about progress made in the case or trial, with little specific information about him, those who knew him, or his victims.[34]

Berdella ("typical" group) was described as a "neighborhood leader" (Hughes 1988a; Hughes 1988b; and "Suspect in K.C. Skull Case was Regarded as Leader" 1988) who was instrumental in revitalizing the area and forming a crime watch group. Though also described as having a "gruff, no-nonsense demeanor" (Hughes 1988b) and occasionally being abrupt and critical (Hughes 1988b), he was seen as "real pleasant," funny, considerate, helpful, and generous (Hughes 1988b). Early articles (e.g., "Killer Pleads Guilty to 5 More Murders" 1988; "Skull Unearthed After Captive in Pet Collar Flees" 1988; Hughes 1988a; and "Suspect in K.C. Skull Case was Regarded as Leader" 1988) describe Berdella's business, Bob's Bizarre Bazaar, as "a shop that sold art objects and antiques" and "a curio shop," but a shift occurs in the way later articles describe the shop: "a boutique that sold occult artifacts" (e.g., "Slaying Site Haunts Neighborhood" 1992).

Dahmer ("typical" group) was repeatedly described as "normal" and a loner in published comments by community members. His former apartment manger said, "He didn't associate with many people, kind of a loner" ("The World has Enough Misery" 1991). A neighbor said, "When I saw him, he always acted like a normal person" (Sandin 1991). A police officer who visited Dahmer's apartment shortly before a murder said, "He appeared to be a normal person" (Holewa 1992f and "Dahmer 'Appeared Normal'"

[34] It is possible that personal information was difficult for journalists to find, because Cole moved from state to state frequently, had no contact with family members, and had no close friends. It also would be worthwhile to examine what other events were covered by news media at the time, as it is possible the news focus was elsewhere. Fine and White (2002) emphasize the importance of timing in the amount and type of news coverage an event is likely to receive.

1992). And Dahmer's last victim, who escaped and survived, said, "He seemed so normal. He turned from Mr. Right to Mr. It … It was like I was confronting Satan himself" ("Families Struggle to Understand as Dahmer Details Grisly Deaths" 1991). In one article, Dahmer's actions are compared to a popular movie: "It was like something out of 'The Silence of the Lambs' – only it was horrifyingly real" ("Movie Thriller Can't Match Real-life Horror" 1991).

Gacy's ("typical" group) ex-wife testified that he was warm, understanding, brilliant, and a good father (Fritsch 1980e), and his mother said he was helpful and kind (Fritsch 1980f). One neighbor said Gacy was "better than just a neighbor, he was a good friend" (Fritsch 1980c). Neighbors described him as "a friendly, hard-working businessman who was popular for entertaining children in a clown costume" (Hirsley 1978).

Rader ("typical" group) was described by those who knew him as well-liked and a community leader who also was a church elder and a Boy Scout leader – only one article suggests that his neighbors did not like him (Twiddy 2005a). After his apprehension, those who did not know him described Rader as "devoid of soul and human feeling," a "monster," and "a mutant whose head should have been pinched off at birth" (Thomasson 2005 and "'Monster' Gets 10 Life Terms" 2005). Rader's murders also were frequently compared (by different writers for different newspapers) to terrorism (e.g., "Wichita Strangler Surfaces in Letter" 2004; "BTK Killer Could Be Back After 30 Years" 2004; Hegeman 2005g; Huffstutter and Simon 2005; and Langdon 2005; and "Wichita Strangler Sends New Letters to Police, Media" 2004), as were Ramirez's ("atypical" group) murders (e.g., Elber 1991 and "National Briefs" 1996) and Watts' ("typical"

group) murders (Sinclair 2007), as their respective communities were "overcome" with fear (e.g., "California Community Lives in Fear of Stalker" 1985).

Ridgway ("typical" group) was described as an "ordinary Joe" ("Green River Killer Suspect Ordinary Joe" 2001). Descriptions of his physical appearance – thick glasses, thinning hair, and slight build (e.g., Johnson 2003b and Johnson 2003e) – are unflattering in relation to ideal masculine characteristics but may have contributed to the "ordinary Joe" characterization.

Rifkin ("typical" group) was described by neighbors as "quiet," "respectful," "pleasant," and someone "who was never in any trouble" but also "someone who kept to himself" (Sullivan 1993). Though he also was described as "a loner and a high school 'geek' and 'loser' who still lives with his mother" ("Man Described as Loner Linked to Six Slayings" 1993), he was generally seen as on the right track. According to one article:

> Joel Rifkin was raised on middle-class values and grew up in a middle-class neighborhood of neatly landscaped homes. After school he worked in the local library, and his high school yearbook shows he was a member of the debating team, the winter track squad and the photography club. His father was a construction engineer and after he died several years ago, a room in the East Meadow Public Library was named in his honor for his work as a library trustee. So the news of Mr. Rifkin's confessions yesterday to at least a dozen murders of prostitutes in Manhattan has caused neighbors to question how little they really knew about him. (Sullivan 1993)

Rogers ("typical" group) was described as "thoughtful and religious," and his roles as husband and father were frequently mentioned.

Bundy ("atypical" because of higher social status) was depicted as an "all-American boy," someone who appeared to epitomize American values. He was frequently described as "good looking," "clean-cut," "cool," "bright," and "confident"

(e.g., Powell 2000 and Nordheimer 1978). His status as a former law student was mentioned in nearly every report, and one referred to him as "Kennedyesque" (Nordheimer 1978).

In contrast to most of the other serial murderers in this study, Ramirez ("atypical" because of ethnicity) was never described as "normal" or as having any valuable qualities, though similarly he was described as being a "loner." Both before and after his apprehension, he was described as "evil personified," "brutal," and "cold-blooded" (Roeper 1996 and "'Stalker' Manhunt Launched" 1985). In addition, his criminal history and link to devil worship were indicated in most of the media reports.

Wallace ("atypical" because of race) was most often described as a drifter and crack addict, but also a good neighbor, charming, attractive, and popular with women. Sometimes both portrayals were evident in the same article (e.g., "Dances with Werewolves" 1994).

Watts ("atypical" because of race) was described as ordinary, "pleasant but standoffish" (King 1982b), and a loner, though somewhat popular with women. Watts was the only serial murderer in this study to never be called a "monster" in any of the analyzed data.

Two competing portrayals were offered in news accounts of Wuornos ("atypical" because of gender): that of a cold-blooded, greedy, evil woman, and that of a desperate woman who had been victimized most of her life. Heavy emphasis was placed on her prostitution and childhood abuse and neglect. Her claims of self-defense in the murders were frequently included in news reports, and these typically included her commentary

on gender in society, such as the following complaint about her treatment by the media and criminal justice system:

> (This treatment) is sending society a message that a woman who defends herself is likely to end up on Death Row … They're saying that male dominance is OK and woe be to the woman who takes action against a violent man. ("Woman Gets Death Penalty in Florida Highway Killings" 1992)

Social Types

Both the serial murderers and other people recognized social types and drew from culturally familiar imagery and well-known characters in popular culture in their descriptions of the murders. The killers were thus cast into roles that were easily recognized and for which expectations were understood. Elements of all three of Klapp's (1972) types – the (corrupt) hero, villain, and fool – were evident.

Fools

The fool type was least frequently found and mostly evident in newspaper reports published soon after the killers' apprehension, when personal information was first being reported. Most of the serial murderers were typed as loners, nerds, "squares" or losers, characteristic of this type and subject to ridicule (in quoted comments from members of the public, as well as editorial commentary and letters to the editor). Once those types were explicated, frequently no other description was offered, which is evidence of the salience of the fool type – it is unnecessary to state defining characteristics of the fool, as most people understand that it includes social awkwardness, unkempt appearance, and friendlessness.

Villains

Serial murderers were consistently typed as villains in all data-collection sources. Although dehumanizing types (such as monster, animal, and beast) were commonly used to classify the killers as villains, a serial murder type (with negative connotations) was evident. The killers were frequently compared to an apparently widely understood set of criteria, presumably drawn from popular images of serial murderers. A newspaper account of Rader's ("typical" group) trial offers models for what the serial murder type is (disenfranchised loner, secret monster), as well as what it is *not* (a churchgoing, married father):

> The allegations that a churchgoing, married father of two was Kansas' infamous BTK murderer have shaken the Hollywood image of the serial killer as disenfranchised loner, and it has people wondering just how many of their mild-mannered colleagues, spouses and fellow parishioners might secretly be monsters. (Breed 2005)

In many cases, the serial murderer type was evident in descriptions of the killers' seeming divergence from it. A description of Ridgway ("typical" group) offers criteria of the serial murderer type and an exemplar of serial murder for comparison:

> Gary was not acting like the unfeeling, conscienceless, degenerate serial killer he was supposed to be, at least if one believed in the popular image of such predators. This was definitely not Hannibal Lector. (Prothero and Smith 2006:36)

Ridgway himself indicated that he did not fit the serial murderer type and thought it was one of the reasons he was able to kill so many women:

> The women, they underestimate[d] me. I look like an ordinary person … I acted in a way with the … with the prostitutes to make 'em feel more comfortable. And I got in their comfort zone, got into the … ah, 'Here's a guy, he's not really muscle-bound, he's not, ah, [doesn't] look like a fighter, just an ordinary john,' and that was their downfall … my

> appearance was different from what I really was. (Smith and Guillen 2004:520)

The contradiction between portrayals of Bundy ("atypical" group) and of "typical" serial murderers was acknowledged:

> The stereotype of mass killers – with minds bedeviled by tumors or hallucinations – is all too familiar to the American public. They were the drifters, the malcontents, the failures and the resenters. Ted Bundy, for all appearances, no way resembled any of them. He had all the personal resources that are prized in America, that guarantee success and respect. He loved children, read poetry, showed courage by chasing down and capturing a purse snatcher on the streets of Seattle, rescued a child from drowning, loved the outdoors, respected his parents, was a college honor student, worked with desperate people at a crisis center, and, in the words of one admirer, 'Ted could be with any woman he wanted – he was so magnetic!' He wanted to become an attorney or a politician, to do something with his life to help others. (Nordheimer 1978)

In typing himself, Bundy compared his image before the arrests to the serial murderer type, explaining why he was not an early suspect:

> Which one do you pick? Do they pick the law student with no criminal background, who was probably even known by some of the prosecutors working the case? Or are they going to go after the types, you know, the guys in the files … the real weirdos? The guys going around exposing themselves or whizzing around in a Volkswagen saying, "Hey baby, you want to go for a ride up in the mountains with me?" (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:138-139)

Agreeing with others' typing of him, Rifkin ("typical" group) referred to himself as a sometime monster during his sentencing: "You all must think I am nothing but a monster, and you are right. Part of me must be" (Mladinich 2001:207). Rader ("typical" group) made a similar statement in describing one killing to a detective: "I'm sorry. I know this is a human being, but I'm a monster" ("Focus: BTK Killer a 'Monster' Describes Terror Reign" 2005 and Hegeman 2005g).

Social typing was widespread in the courtroom, and the imagery used by the prosecution and defense was nearly identical in each killer's case. The prosecution discounted suggestions of insanity and described the defendants as being evil, manipulative, calculating, coldblooded, brutal, and savage, conjuring the image of a monster or beast. The defense frequently claimed insanity or at least mental illness and tried to portray the killers as victims themselves – of their mental illness, prior abuse, the exclusive social structure, the criminal justice system, or a number of other people, including family members, friends, and co-workers. The defense, especially, used culturally familiar imagery to cast their clients in an easily understood role. Gacy's ("typical" group) defense attorney quoted from "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," likened the trial to the atmosphere surrounding the Salem witch trials, and said: "A man does not have to look like a bulging-eyed monster to be insane. … Mr. Gacy is not an evil man. He has done some evil things" (Fritsch 1980h).

Corrupt Heroes

As Klapp suggested, portrayals of the killers frequently lacked distinction between the villain and hero types. Many of the killers were both praised (characteristic of the hero type) and condemned (characteristic of the villain type) at various times and sometimes simultaneously.

The complicated reconciliation of these two types occurring simultaneously sometimes was acknowledged. Usually, this resulted in a "split personalities" characterization – the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde imagery was most common, as well as imagery of a masked figure:

> By day, while his mask of sanity was firmly in place, he appeared to be a loving husband and father, a highly skilled, intelligent, and respected businessman in his community. By night, however, when the mask came off … Rogers became a sexual sadist, a brutal fetishist bent on inflicting horrendous pain and suffering on his victims before finishing them off in the most dreadful ways conceivable to a normal mind. (King 1992:19)

The characterization of serial murderers fitting two supposedly incongruent types simultaneously is compatible with Klapp's (1972) "corrupt hero" type and Lule's (2001) "modern hero" type. This contemporary hero is both praised and degraded at various times, and frequently attains celebrity status.

The large amount of news coverage most of the killers receive and intense scrutiny of their personal lives is indicative of an elevated status, as well as the longevity of the coverage. Even after their convictions and/or deaths, they live on in the press.

Nearly 12 years after his death, Bundy ("atypical" group) was featured in an article in which he was called "one of the most notorious serial killers the world has known" (Powell 2000). In a brief story published nine years after his death, Bundy was used as a measuring stick by which other killers would be compared: "A 69-year-old woman accused of killing eight of her infant children is a mass murderer just like Ted Bundy and should not be allowed back on the streets, prosecutors argued" ("Woman Described as Killer Like Bundy" 1998). Bundy's case apparently was the career highlight of the judge who presided over his trial, as evidenced by the first sentence of a story announcing the judge's death: "Judge Edward D. Cowart of Dade County Circuit Court, whose regretful postsentencing remarks to serial slayer Theodore R. Bundy were widely noted, died of a heart attack at Coral Reef Hospital early today" ("Edward D. Cowart, 62, Judge in Florida Trial of Ted Bundy" 1987). Ramirez ("atypical" group) was similarly

mentioned in a story announcing the death of the prosecutor in his trial: "Retired Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney Phil Halpin, the prosecutor in the murder trial of 'Night Stalker' Richard Ramirez and in the 'Onion Field' retrial, has died after a lengthy battle with cancer" ("Former Los Angeles Prosecutor Phil Halpin Dies at 65" 2003).

After the verdict and sentencing, stories about the killers potentially profiting from the notoriety of their crimes (e.g., through books and movie deals, artwork sales, and media interviews) are frequent, as are later stories about other people profiting from the crimes (e.g., selling action figures, trading cards, comic books, autographed photos, and letters). One article addresses the need for notoriety or celebrity status in order to profit from so-called murderabilia, or artifacts of serial murderers:

> But guys like (Jerome Henry) Brudos, or "Happy Face Killer" Keith Jesperson, relatively unknown outside the region, don't sell as well. (One major collector and seller) posted a Jesperson envelope for $9.99 last month and didn't get a single nibble – perhaps because the prolific, confession-prone Jesperson is the opposite of "hard to get." A letter from Molalla Forest killer Dayton Leroy Rogers drew no takers last week. "They want Dahmer," (the collector and seller) said. "They want Gacy. They want Berkowitz. They want Manson." (Wilson 2000)

As Schmid (2005) suggests, the killers appeared to recognize the media as an available outlet for fame, and some (only in the "typical" group) used the media to attain recognition and seek celebrity status. Those who sought public recognition of their accomplishments contacted the media, but even those who did not seek fame knew they were likely to receive it after their apprehension. Before apprehension, Ridgway ("typical" group) sent a letter to a local newspaper about his murders, and Rader and Jesperson (both in the "typical" group) each sent numerous letters to media outlets taunting police and seeking media coverage. Rader threatened to kill more people if he

did not receive media coverage, and Jesperson threatened to cancel "future news conferences" if *The Columbian* did not publish an anti-death-penalty essay he wrote (Westfall 1995b).

After sentencing, Jesperson continued to contact the media, apparently attempting to keep his name in the news. With requests from big-name national news outlets, Bundy ("atypical" group) decided to grant an interview to the *New York Times*, the outlet he considered the most prestigious (Rule 2000:480). Bundy explains his awareness of media as a means for gaining fame and the power it gave him:

> I'll probably use the press again – not for money. God knows I've been offered a lot of money to do things, make appearances on TV and the like. What's that going to get me? Maybe some better reefer, maybe some unneeded enemies in here. No help on the legal front. But there will come a time … and I'll be calling *Time* or *Newsweek* or CBS news. And they'll come, gladly, mark my words. (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:160)

The celebrity status of some serial murderers was acknowledged by the courts in their references to the killers in unrelated cases (including a range of case types, from insurance lawsuits to other serial murder cases) and in the ways in which the killers were described. In three separate court cases regarding Dahmer's case, Dahmer ("typical" group) was described as "well known," "infamous," and "legendary in the annals of serial killers in America." The substantial publicity surrounding the accused killers' actions was acknowledged in several court cases, particularly those in which a change of venue had been requested:

> This case had enormous pretrial publicity. The newspapers, magazines, TV and radio were filled with daily accounts of the recovery of bodies from Gacy's crawlspace and other places where he had put them. … It would have been difficult to find any venue in which the facts of the case were not common knowledge, since the publicity was national. Two of the jurors mentioned on voir dire that they had read about the case in *Time* and

> *Newsweek*. (*United States of America, ex rel. John Gacy N-00921 v. George Welborn, Warden, Menard Correctional Center, and Roland W. Burris, Attorney General of the State of Illinois*).
>
> The court described the news coverage of this case as "saturation, as much as they possibly can give," but noted that this was not the only case in Los Angeles that had received such extensive news coverage (*The People v. Richard Ramirez*).

In other cases, the killer's widespread public recognition was apparent by the court's use of his nickname, as in the case of Ramirez ("atypical" group): "The Superior Court of Los Angeles County, California, sentenced defendant to death for the so-called Night Stalker murders" (*The People v. Richard Ramirez*). In the more notorious cases, the nickname of the killer appears to become a cultural reference point on its own, as illustrated in a reference in a legal journal article comparing Rogers' murders to Ridgway's (both in the "typical" group): "Oregon seemed to have its own 'Green River killer,' dubbed by the press the 'Molalla Forest killer,' in its midst" (Long 2002).

Degradation is routine in the treatment of corrupt heroes, and this was especially evident in judges' opinions. Unlike journalists, judges are not required to strive for objectivity in writing opinions on cases, and in several instances, they expressed their repugnance toward the killers' violations of cultural values. Court records for one of Gacy's ("typical" group) hearings include the judge's acknowledgment and quick dismissal of Gacy's culturally valued characteristics:

> The murders of thirty-three young men are hardly offset by the fact that the murderer has had some good relationships with some of his own family members and has engaged in business and civic activities. There would be a strong danger of losing the jury's attention by emphasis on the "good" qualities of petitioner, which, after all, were not all that remarkable. (*United States of America, ex rel. John Gacy N-00921 v. George Welborn, Warden, Menard Correctional Center, and Roland W. Burris, Attorney General of the State of Illinois*)

Masculinities

All of the male serial murderers displayed masculine characteristics but also saw themselves as failing in masculinity. Black's and Watts' (both in the "atypical" group) athletic abilities were outlets for displaying their masculinity; Jesperson ("typical" group), at 6 foot 6 inches tall, was big and physically powerful; Berdella, Gacy, and Rogers (all in the "typical" group) were business owners; and Bundy ("atypical" group) frequently was described as physically attractive, strong, charming, and sexually appealing.

Several in the "typical" group, including Berdella, Gacy, Jesperson, and Rifkin, expressed a desire for their fathers' attention and approval, yet frequently did not receive it. As a child, Jesperson dreamed of becoming someone who fits the ultimate ideals of hegemonic masculinity:

> I'd pretend to be a miner or a heavy-equipment operator. I would take my bow and arrow and be a great white hunter in Africa. I stood along our creek and fired torpedoes at enemy U-boats, created the ocean in my mind and sent destroyers off to war. When I finally got my own BB gun, I became a sniper shooting at the enemy. I saw myself as an enforcer for good, a war hero, *superboy*! Keith would save the world. (Olsen 2002:46)

This dream probably paralleled those of many boys striving to be masculine.

Whether or not they felt they could achieve masculine ideals, they were aware of them and strove toward them. All but Ramirez ("atypical" group) sought legitimate employment; Berdella, Gacy, Rader (all in the "typical" group), and Bundy ("atypical" group) held positions of leadership in their communities; several regularly displayed aggression and violence; and most sought relationships with – and control over – women. Cole ("typical" group), whose mother was a frequent adulterer, remembered when he was

in high school talking to his father about male domination over women and judged his father a failure in this aspect of masculinity. He said his father told him: "No matter what, don't ever let a woman dominate you," and he replied, "And how can *you* say that, for Christ's sake?" (Newton 1994:77). Taken aback, his father then punched him in the face. Cole later wrote of that incident: "I feel shame and sorrow now, but at the time I hated him. Not because he hit me, but because he let me down. To this day, I regret that night, because I think he really knew about my mother's infidelity" (Newton 1994:77).

The masculinity of the male serial murderers in this study was challenged in various ways. Berdella ("typical" group) and Black ("atypical" group) claimed to have been raped or sexually assaulted by men when they were children. Two in the "typical" group (Jesperson and Rifkin) and one in the "atypical" group (Bundy) said they were self-conscious about lacking athletic ability. Bundy said:

> I always felt I was too small. This feeling began to emerge in junior high school. That I didn't have the weight or physique for sports. It wasn't true, but I never pushed myself. … I attempted to get on the school basketball team and a couple of baseball teams, but I failed. It was terribly traumatic for me. (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:22).

Rather than his large size being a means to display masculinity, Jesperson ("typical" group) was teased by other children and called names such as "sloth," "monster man," "fatty," "hulk," and "tubby." Jesperson and Watts ("atypical" group) both experienced severe and prolonged illnesses as children that made them feel weak and excluded from others. Rifkin ("typical" group) endured nearly constant bullying from other male children, and Cole ("typical" group) was involved in numerous fights in school and frequently was teased for his "feminine" first name (Carroll). A 1961 psychiatric report about Cole details his struggle with masculine ideals:

> His neurotic conflicts center about three main areas: (1) conflict with authority figures which appears to be a generalized response learned from his interaction with his father; (2) a masculinity conflict where he feels the need to constantly prove to himself and others that he is a "man." This conflict not only is revealed by the testing results, but is reflected in his need to display tattoos on his arms, and the Don Juan behavior with girls that never results in anything but infantile sexplay and flirting; (3) a dependency conflict where he is attempting to give the impression of being independent but wishing to maintain childlike dependency. (Newton 1994:101)

Masculinity includes the ability to form and maintain relationships with the opposite sex, but many failed in this regard. In several cases, the serial murderers blamed themselves for their relationship failures. Jesperson ("typical" group) and Bundy ("atypical" group) expressed devastation resulting from breakups as young adults; Rifkin ("typical" group) said he was more comfortable with prostitutes because they never rejected him; and Black ("atypical" group) said he was unable to form close relationships, though he strived for them. Both in the "atypical" group, Black and Bundy, respectively, articulated this self-blame:

> I've always felt I wanted to be married, have a family. And I tended to look at every relationship as a potential marriage. Whether I put out those sort of vibes or talked about it … it put the girls off, you know? (Wyre and Tate 1995:125)

> Her name is Stephanie, and I haven't seen her for a long time. She's living near San Francisco, and she's completely beautiful. She's tall, almost as tall as I am, and her parents are wealthy. She's never known anything but being rich. I just couldn't fit in with that world. (Rule 2000:30)

Gender was rarely explicitly discussed, except in relation to Wuornos – the only woman included in the study. Her status as a *female* serial murderer was frequently emphasized in the newspaper articles, and court cases and journal articles about Wuornos addressed

gender issues and compared her with her male counterparts, comparisons she also made herself:

> She explained that she already had five death sentences and complained that male serial killers only received about two death sentences. … We have read the record of the proceeding and do not find that … she had been unfairly subjected to more trials than male serial killers such as Ted Bundy, among other matters. (*Aileen Carol Wuornos v. State of Florida*)

Depictions of Wuornos in court cases use culturally familiar gender imagery, casting her as either fitting with traditionally feminine characteristics such as being victimized and vulnerable and in need of help from others, or as a traitor to her gender with depictions of her being aggressive, violent, foul-mouthed, manipulative, greedy, and coldblooded.

> The facts here present two quite different pictures of Aileen Wuornos. One of these pictures is of a woman who has lived a horrible life of victimization, violence, and little help from anyone, who later lashed out at one of her victimizers. The other is of a cold-blooded killer who lured men to their deaths to steal their property. … In too many ways our society has yet to confront a serious problem arising from women who are forced into prostitution at a young age. Such women typically enter into prostitution as the only possible means of escaping an abusive home environment. The tragic result is that early victimization leads to even greater victimization. And once the girl becomes an adult prostitute, she is labeled a criminal and often is forced into even more crime, as the only means of supporting herself. … Finally, some might characterize trials such as Wuornos' as social awareness cases, because Wuornos herself unquestionably has been victimized throughout her life. … Whether Wuornos were male or female, the facts remain that the State's theory of this case is sufficiently supported by the record. (*Aileen Carol Wuornos v. State of Florida*)

None of the court case or legal journal articles addresses gender issues or gender imagery for any of the male serial murderers.

The Criminal Experience

Thrill-Seeking and Risk-Taking

Two of the serial murderers in this study, both in the "typical" group, made comments that showed interest in thrill-seeking activities before they started killing. Jesperson was fascinated with Evel Knieval and was excited to watch him complete a daredevil stunt, while Rifkin expressed interest in learning to skydive. Most evidence of thrill-seeking and risk-taking behaviors, however, was in their descriptions of murdering their victims. Similar to descriptions of edgeworkers, Rifkin discussed having "heightened senses" while killing: "Yeah, it's heightened sense. It's just not your everyday thing" (Mladinich 2001:130). Black ("atypical" group) described killing as a "rush of blood" (Wyre and Tate 1995:48). Bundy's ("atypical" group) risk-taking was well-documented; he tried on at least two occasions to outrun police officers trying to pull him over and escaped from jail twice. Bundy described an incredible rush he felt when he escaped from jail in 1977 in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, while awaiting a murder trial:

> It felt just right – the whole time, just perfect. You see, there was nothing clever about the escape. Nothing clever about the engineering. In fact, it was sloppily done. In Ann Arbor, it was just *boom, boom, boom!* I was just cool. I was talking to people in bars. Oh, I felt good! I felt the drive, the power. I had what it took. I lost that. … It slipped away from me a few days later in the bus station in Atlanta. … I was waiting for a bus (to Tallahassee) in the Omni (Auditorium), watching a convention on the main floor there. There were these people – these people who had *real* lives, backgrounds, histories, girlfriends, husbands and families. Who were smiling and laughing and talking with each other. Who seemed to have *so* much of what I wanted! (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:30-31)

Three members of the "atypical" group (Bundy, Ramirez, and Watts) and one in the "typical" group (Rader) took increased risks by killing in their victims' homes rather than taking them to a location where they may have had more control.[35] Similarly, Dahmer, Rifkin, and Ridgway (all in the "typical" group) killed in homes they shared with family members, increasing their risk of being caught. Speaking abstractly about himself as a killer, Bundy ("atypical" group) described taking risks:

> The boldness was probably a result of not being rational. Of just being moved by a situation – not really thinking it out clearly, and not even seeing the risks. But just overcome by that boldness and desire to accomplish a particular thing. Only in retrospect would he wonder how he managed to succeed in spite of some of those rash and bold acts. (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:151)

Ridgway and Rogers (both in the "typical" group) took risks by continuing to leave bodies in the same locations after some had been discovered and the locations were under surveillance.

Power and Control

All of the serial murderers demonstrated a desire for power, dominance, and control, mostly over their victims, but also over the community and people who were significant in their lives. Many described this desire in terms of regaining power after they perceived it was taken away from them. Ridgway ("typical" group) complained of being "pushed around" by women and said that "I never stand up for myself" (Prothero and Smith 2006:196) and that he felt in control when he killed his victims, all of whom were women. Berdella ("typical" group) also felt that he regained power and control through killing: "Possibly the way I handled situations prior to this, I saw myself in a

[35] Wallace also killed his victims in their homes, but, being acquainted with all of his victims, he in most cases had been in the homes before.

weak state. This was a way where I was no longer weak and helpless" (Jackman and Cole 1992:257).

Ridgway ("typical" group) and several other killers referred to victims as "property" or "possessions" and, in Ridgway's official confession, he said he "placed most of the bodies in groups which I call 'clusters.' I did this because I wanted to keep track of all the women I killed" (*State of Washington v. Gary Leon Ridgway*). He also expressed a sense of loss when the police found the bodies and removed them. Similarly, Jesperson ("typical" group) said he would do something unique to the bodies or leave them in a particular way to prove that "she was my kill and not someone else's" (Olsen 2002:178). Rader ("typical" group) admitted that he started communicating with the media again after a long period of quiet because he heard that someone was writing a book about his murders and he could not let the author tell "his" story (Smith 2006:307).

Skill or Accomplishment

Most of the serial murderers in this study saw their killing as requiring an abundance of skill and not something of which anyone was capable. Ridgway ("typical" group) saw serial murder as his "career" and the thing he did best. He said during sentencing: "Choking is what I did, and I was pretty good at it" (Johnson 2003f). They described the knowledge, planning, and effort necessary to successfully kill repeatedly and were proud of the accomplishment. Ridgway, who removed clothing, took jewelry, and clipped the fingernails of victims in an effort to avoid capture, said: "Well I was, in a way, a little bit proud of not being caught doing … like removing the clothes. Not leaving anything …and fingerprints on it, using gloves … Not bragging about it. Not talking about it" (Smith and Guillen 2004:520).

They expressed feelings of invincibility and superiority. Bundy's ("atypical" group) bragging was particularly extreme:

> I think that at last I have perspective. And a sort of self-confidence. It may be borne, in part, out of this immense publicity. I don't know. I'm recognized in a terribly bizarre kind of way. I feel immune. I feel nobody can hurt me. (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:32)

> You have to remember, I was on the run, so I couldn't truly be myself. If I was truly shrewd and in control of myself, I would not have done the things that I did, which were terribly stupid. (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:32)

> (Other prisoners) may talk a lot. But they won't say anything to my face. The reputation stops 'em. They're afraid I'll do something to them. And I probably would, if it came down to it. It may be the way I handle the authorities. The way I fucked with them. The way I made them pay to get me. (Michaud and Aynesworth 2000:34)

Some apparently received a great deal of satisfaction from perceiving they outsmarted those in law enforcement. Ann Rule, a true-crime writer and former friend of Bundy's described his feelings of superiority:

> He had been telling me, and I'm sure a number of other people, how much more he knew about serial murder than anyone else did. (Rule 2000:512)

> The surveillance has become a game to him. He found the men tailing him clumsy and awkward and was taking delight in losing them. (Rule 2000:191)

> He was beginning a pattern that he would repeat again and again, a kind of arrogance toward those designated by the state to defend him; if he could not have what he considered the best, then he would go it alone. (Rule 2000:246)

Rader's ("typical" group) boasting also was well-documented. Discussing his second commission of murder, during which one of the two people he attacked survived, he said that "if I had brought my stuff and used my stuff, Kevin would probably be dead today. … I'm not bragging on that. It's just a matter of fact." (*The State of Kansas v. Dennis L.*

Rader, p. 16-17) Gacy ("typical" group) made a game out of the surveillance placed on him just before his arrest, introducing the officers as his "bodyguards," often giving them directions to his next destination, sitting with them at restaurants, and inviting them inside his home.

Several considered themselves experts on serial murder and offered lessons and advice. During his guilty pleas, Rader ("typical" group) refers to serial murderers as "my kind of person" and calmly explained to the judge how serial murderers choose victims:

> Well, I don't know. If – you know, if you read much about serial killers, they go through what they call the different phases. That's one of the phases they go through is a – as a trolling stage. You're lay – basically you're looking for a victim at that time, and that can either be trolling for months or years. But once you lock in on a certain person then you become stalking, and that might be several of them, but you really home in on that person. They – they basically come the – that's – that's the victim, or at least that's what you want 'em to be. (*The State of Kansas v. Dennis L. Rader*, p. 30)

While still maintaining his innocence, Bundy ("atypical" group) sent a letter to the Green River Taskforce offering his expert advice in solving the "Green River Killer" case. And Black ("atypical" group) offered his assistance in solving the 2007 disappearance of 3-year-old Madeleine McCann.

It appears that other people see serial murder in this way, as well. In his testimony during Wallace's ("atypical" group) trial, FBI profiler Robert Ressler criticized Wallace's technique: "If he elected to become a serial killer, he was going about it in the wrong way" (Michaud and Hazelwood 1998:29).

As any rising athlete, actor, singer, or professional does, most of the serial murderers in the "typical" group and at least one in the "atypical" group studied and appeared to admire other serial murderers, while some were striving to beat current

"records" (e.g., most victims or greatest amount of publicity). Berdella ("typical" group) kept a folder filled with news clippings about other serial criminals, including Elmer Wayne Henley of Texas, Charles "Tex" Watson of California (one of the Manson Family members), and Kansas City's "Westport rapist" James Maynard. Cole ("typical" group) said the Boston Strangler case "stimulated me beyond description" (Newton 1994:119), and he collected news clippings about it. While in prison, Jesperson ("typical" group) attempted to become penpals with other serial murderers, though he received little reception from them. Ramirez ("atypical" group) recognized one of the detectives he met as being instrumental in the capture of two other serial murderers. Rifkin compared himself to Ridgway (both in the "typical" group), though his name was not yet known:

> I think I imitated what I read, because a lot of what I told [the psychiatrists] is almost lifted page by page from the [Green River] book. He buried one, I buried one. He went from water to land, I went from water to land. He placed one by an airport, I place one by an airport. He did things in clusters, I did things in clusters. (Mladinich 2001:93)

Narrative of Serial Murder

Many social scientists have theorized about the importance of storytelling as social and cultural phenomena (Berger and Quinney 2005; Ewick and Silbey 1995; Griffin 1993; Harvey 1996; Hollander and Gordon 2006; Maines 1993; Maines 1999; Maines 2000; Maines and Ulmer 1993; McAdams 2001; Ochs and Capps 1996; and Stanley 1993). Stories serve as a fundamental means for, not only making sense of our lives, but also for transmitting meaning to others. Given their key role in transmitting

culturally valued messages and their massive audience, media may be the ultimate storytellers.

American culture emphasizes the importance of storytelling and establishes what constitutes a "good" story. Through socialization, we learn not only how to tell a story, but also how to evaluate one. Stories have apparent and persistent features that we anticipate and that provide us the tools for interpreting meaning. A story has a distinct beginning, middle, and end, and within the story, a plot is established, characters are introduced, complications arise and are resolved, and some message is transmitted.

Media use narrative tools to draw the public's attention and aid in their understanding and acceptance of the story. News reports – especially human-interest stories – include elements of any good story: an intriguing setting, a compelling cast of characters, conflict, resolution, and significance. Lule (2001) identifies a particular narrative structure commonly used in news stories about heroes: the humble birth, the early mark of greatness, the quest, the triumph, and the return.

There was an apparent and consistent narrative structure in the biographical narratives and newspaper articles about the serial murderers. There is a distinct beginning, middle, and end; an established plot; cast of characters; complications and resolutions; and messages produced. This structure is apparent within in-depth articles about the cases and descriptive of the overall coverage.

Initial Reports

The media first reported the murders when it was established that they were part of a series[36] or when a defendant became a suspect, either by confession or accusation. Murder, unfortunately, is prevalent enough in the United States that media attention generally requires an unusual or shocking component, which serial murder fulfills. At this point, the known murders are described, the public cautioned, and a sense of urgency established. The reports typically portray the killer as an unpredictable maniac or wild animal "on the loose" and urge people to take precautions. These accounts focus on information about the attacks and connections among attacks. For cases in which the killer had not yet been captured, fear is stoked and advice offered about suitable actions to take (e.g., tips to avoid victimization frequently are found).

Nicknames appear in early coverage of the serial murderers, primarily for those who received media attention before their apprehension. The creation and use of nicknames prior to apprehension is a practical means for referring to the ongoing investigation of a series of known murders when the killer's identity is unknown. The nicknames typically are coined by detectives or the media and commonly identify the geographic location in which the killers committed the murders or left victims' bodies – the "Green River Killer" (Ridgway) and the "Molalla Forest Killer" (Rogers) – or a distinctive killing method – the "Night Stalker" (Ramirez) and "The Sunday Morning Slasher" (Watts).[37] Sometimes, the killers created their own nicknames, like "BTK"

[36] Pre-apprehension reports were only found for Jesperson, Rader, and Ridgway.
[37] Ramirez broke into his victims' homes at night; and Watts killed mostly during the early hours on Sundays.

(Rader) and the "Happy Face Killer" (Jesperson),[38] though disseminating their new moniker generally required contact with media or police. Less common is the creation of a nickname *after* the serial murderer's apprehension. This type of nickname appears to be used, not for ease in referring to the case, but for creating meaning about the killer through culturally familiar imagery. Dahmer is the only serial murderer in this study with a post-apprehension nickname – "The Milwaukee Monster."

Media reports frequently continue using the nicknames in articles written after the killers are captured, convicted, and sentenced. After capture, the real name *and* nickname are used in media stories, but the nickname frequently appears in the headline or before the real name in the story. Exceptions in this study are news coverage of Rogers ("typical" group) and Watts ("atypical" group); Rogers' nickname was almost exclusively used *before* his capture, and only two articles of the 65 used in the sample include a reference to Watts' nickname, never in a headline or beginning paragraph.

Notoriety and Record-Setting

Still in the early stages of coverage but after the initial reporting of the murders, articles begin to focus on the growing notoriety of the killers. Stories describe the long lines of cars driving by the killers' homes and neighbors' and family members' complaints of constant phone calls and reporters' questions (e.g., Hughes 1988b; Mount and Koziol 1978c; and Ogintz Axelrod 1979).

At this point, reporters find a way to describe the murders as record-setting and compare the murders and accused killers to past notorious offenders. Dahmer ("typical"

[38] Rader's nickname described his method of killing: bind, torture, and kill. Jesperson drew a happy face in all his correspondence with the media and police.

group) was described as “the man accused of the worst murder spree in the state’s history” (Stingl 1992). Rogers (“typical” group) was described as “Oregon’s worst serial killer” (“Judge Formally Sentences Serial Killer to Death” 2006). Ramirez’s (“atypical” group) case was described as “the biggest murder investigation in Los Angeles since the 1977-78 Hillside Stranglers” (“Briefly; The Nation” 1985). Watts (“atypical” group) was described as “the last major serial killer in Houston” (Makeig 1992) and his murders among “the worst crimes in the past 100 years in Houston” (King 1982b). Wuornos (“atypical” group) was called “one of the most notorious female killers in recent history” (Nesbitt 2005); “one of nation’s only female serial killers” (“Briefs: Moussaoui Wins Trial Delay to Late June” 2002); and “one of nation’s first known female serial killers” (“Photo: Serial Killer Aileen Wuornos” 2001).

Gacy (“typical” group) was frequently compared to Illinois spree killer Richard Speck. After Gacy’s conviction and sentencing, Illinois corrections director said, “He’s the most notorious criminal in Illinois, no doubt about it. I’m sure [Richard] Speck will be happy to see someone more notorious than he” (Rowley 1980a). Around the same timeframe, an article published about Gerald Stano, another multiple murderer, compares the killer to well-known Gacy: “If investigators confirm all his confessions, Stano, 31, may go into the record books as the killer with the greatest number of victims in the nation’s history, a title now held by Chicago’s John Wayne Gacy” (Kemp 1982). Gacy’s name and image eventually became signifiers for multiple murder, as demonstrated by one report that describes another serial murderer as a “Gacy-type killer,” even though they killed in different ways (McNeil 1983).

Before Ridgway's ("typical" group) capture, his murders were described as the "nation's worst unsolved murder case" (Egan 1989a), and after as "one of the nation's deadliest serial murder cases" (Kershaw 2003b) and "perhaps the longest homicide investigation ever undertaken" (Kershaw 2003b). A story compares another alleged serial murderer to Ridgway, treating them as rivals for a record: "If (Robert Charles) Browne's confessions prove true, he will surpass Gary Leon Ridgway, the Green River Killer, as the national's worst serial killer" (Langbein 2006).

Representing the killers as extraordinary evil or the murders as somehow unique likely generates more public interest in the stories, as well as revenue. These representations also encourage the application of the hero type to the killers and contribute to their notoriety.

Need to Know Why

Around the start of legal proceedings, the articles begin to focus on the personal lives of the killer, particularly seeking to determine what made them successful killers and whether there were any missed opportunities to stop them sooner. The reports quote experts and community member speculating about explanations for the murders, the killers' sanity, and who else should share the blame. There also was an element of suspense evident in these stories, with speculation about possible additional victims and frequent revelations of ghoulish details.

The articles include detailed information about the killer's childhood, education, employment history, relationships, and what neighbors and co-workers thought about him or her. Sometimes the killers at this point are cast as victims. Newspapers published many details about Dahmer's ("typical" group) childhood and past problems, almost

portraying Dahmer as a victim through descriptions of his lifelong feelings of loneliness and alienation, sense of abandonment after his parents' divorce, and guilt about being homosexual (Imrie 1991c and Barron and Tabor 1991a). Wuornos' ("atypical" group) rough childhood and prior victimization were frequent foci.

The articles also suggest that other people in the killer's life may be partially responsible for the murders because of alleged negligence or indifference. Community members and officials are given space to level blame at family members, neighbors, the community, police officers, and the criminal justice system. In stories about Dahmer ("typical" group), nearly everyone in the killer's life was blamed for not taking action. The criminal justice system was blamed for not providing Dahmer with treatment upon his release for a molestation conviction ("The Father's Letter" 1991). Police officers were blamed for their alleged racism and for unknowingly aiding in the murder of one victim when they returned the escapee to Dahmer's apartment after Dahmer convinced them the boy was his lover. Dahmer's probation officer was assigned blame for not making home visits. Neighbors were blamed for not doing anything when they noticed a putrid smell, loud noises, and screaming coming from Dahmer's apartment. Family members were blamed for not seeing supposed "warning signs" in Dahmer's past. The articles portrayed the murders as an embarrassment for the city of Milwaukee (Dudek 1991), implying partial blame. Dahmer is credited in several articles (e.g., Francis 1991 and "Bones Unearthed at Dahmer Home" 1991) for his truthfulness and for accepting blame for the murders, suggesting that others are not accepting their share of the responsibility. A columnist portrays Dahmer as helpless and others as culpable in the murders:

> So Dahmer actually turns out to be the only character in this whole grisly saga to take responsibility for what he did. It's nice someone does. It's too bad nobody else – parents, stepmother, neighbors, prison officials, judge, parole officer – cared enough to stop this refugee from a 1950s horror film before their stupid indifference let him bring his nightmares to life. (Francis 1991)

Race was a frequent issue in media accounts of Dahmer's murders, with most portraying minorities as victims of police and community racism, not necessarily Dahmer's hatred (his alleged hatred of African-Americans was mentioned in several articles and later discounted). The fact that Dahmer was white and his victims were mostly African-American was acknowledged in many articles (e.g., "Milwaukee man Killed at Least 17, Authorities Believe" 1991 and Sandin 1991). In addition, the murders were seen as an attack on the gay community, which also was portrayed as victimized due to community prejudice and hatred (e.g., Dvorchak 1991).

In articles about Gacy ("typical" group), police blunders were blamed for not apprehending him sooner:

> Chicago police arrested killer John Gacy more than a year ago when a 19-year-old youth told them Gacy had kidnapped him at gunpoint and forced him to engage in sexual acts, but no criminal charges were filed, police records show. "I was shocked," the youth told The Tribune. "They [the police] would only say there was insufficient evidence. Both the cops and an assistant state's attorney said that he [Gacy] was a solid citizen. I was practically pleading with them. I even told them that he bragged to me that he had killed people and said he was going to kill me, but my pleas didn't do any good" (Gorman 1979).

An article published after Ridgway ("typical" group) was apprehended suggests not just that the police made a mistake in the investigation, but also implies a sense of apathy by a detective:

> More than 20 years ago, a despairing father led a police detective to the Green River Killer's house. But the efforts of the father, Jose Malvar, to

> help catch his daughter's killer fell short when Gary Ridgway, who has since confessed to the Green River murders, denied knowing her and the detective walked away. ("Early Tip Fell Short in Green River Killings." 2003)

Articles about Rifkin ("typical" group) seemed to imply that family members should have suspected the murders:

> The sheer array of women's belongings raised questions about how Mr. Rifkin collected such a pile of personal effects – much of it left in plain sight in his cluttered room – without arousing the suspicion of his sister, Jan, 31, or his mother, Jeanne, 71, with whom he lived. (Schemo 1993f)

Blaming the police was a strong theme in articles published in British media about Black, a member of the "atypical" group who killed in Scotland and England. Following are three examples:

> They (the police) promised us they would learn from their mistakes. Yet 20 years after the Yorkshire Ripper claimed his first victim, police are examining the possibility that another serial killer may be trawling the nation's highways in search of vulnerable women. (Burrell 1996)

> One reason that serial killers often evade detection for many, many years is that our police aren't very good at catching them. (Wilson 2007a)

> His arrest had as much to do with luck as anything else. (Wilson 2007a)

In Wallace's ("atypical" group) case, residents lodged accusations of racism against the police, suggesting that, because the victims were all African-American and among the working class, police officer considered them low-priority victims and responded to the case slowly.

Anniversary Stories

Finally, stories appeared years and decades after convictions that marked anniversaries of important dates related to the trial – typically when the killer was convicted or sentenced – and these dates are also included in lists compiled of significant

historical events, either for a particular state or the nation. The killers' notoriety is especially apparent in these stories.

Berdella's ("typical" group) sentencing was among four events listed for the year 1988 on the *Associated Press*' "Century's events timeline" for Missouri. Gacy's ("typical" group) conviction was included on the "This Week in History" feature in *The Commercial Appeal* newspaper in 2006. Rader's ("typical" group) apprehension was included in list of "Across the Nation and Abroad 2005" in the *Wichita Falls Time Record News*. Wuornos' ("atypical" group) conviction was included in a "Today in History" feature in 1997 in *The Stuart News*.

Missing Victims

A theme found throughout the news coverage of the serial murderers, especially after initial reports, was the invisibility of victims. Nearly all stories mentioned the number of victims killed, but inclusion of their names or personal information was rare. In some cases, stories featuring victims or a particular victim's family were found, and these stories most frequently appeared while the trial was ongoing. Victims' names were most commonly found in reports that included the formal charges, courtroom testimony, and information about wrongful death lawsuits.

In articles about Dahmer ("typical" group), victims were most frequently mentioned by number and race but not often by name: "Police have identified all the victims found in Dahmer's apartment. Nine were black, one white, and one the Laotian teenager" ("Dahmer Murdered First Victim While in High School, Police Say" 1991).

The fact that Ridgway's ("typical" group) victims were primarily prostitutes was always included, and usually near the beginning, in each article. Their arrest records and

histories of drug abuse were frequently included, but they were rarely mentioned by name. Following are examples:

> A police task force investigating murders of young women, many of them prostitutes, yesterday… ("Police Probers add to List of 'Green River' Killings" 1984)

> All of the victims were last seen in those areas, and all but one, who was a tavern waitress, were young runaway girls or prostitutes. (Turner 1987)

> The victims, all killed between 1982 and 1984, were among society's most unfortunate. They were all relatively young women – the oldest was 33 – and rootless. They plied the streets as prostitutes, runaways or beggars. When they disappeared they often weren't missed for days. (Gillie 2001)

Wallace's ("atypical" group) victims received considerably more media attention, with several articles listing all victims' names, ages, how they were killed, when they were killed or found, and how they knew Wallace ("Henry Louis Wallace's Victims" 1997), and others offering in-depth information about one victim's family at a time (e.g., Connor 1994d and Eisley 1994b).

No victim was mentioned by name in any court case or legal journal article analyzed, despite most of the names being known and part of the official charges. The exception was when they were named as plaintiffs in the case or in wrongful death lawsuits. Instead of names, a total number of the killer's victims usually was stated. In one case, each of Berdella's ("typical" group) victims was assigned a letter: victims A, B, C, and D (*Economy Fire and Casualty Company v. Betty Ann Haste, et. al.*).[39]

The omission of victims' names and personal information suggests that they are relatively unimportant to the narrative of serial murder. The killers clearly are the stars of

[39] Further analysis of legal documents regarding different types of cases would help determine whether exclusion of victims' names is commonplace or characteristic of serial murder cases.

these stories. As the victims most often are members of vulnerable groups, their exclusion from these stories reinforces the subordination of these groups and seemingly justifies their victimization. In addition, references to deviant behaviors of victims (e.g., prostitutes, drug users, and runaways) and the absence of humanizing information (e.g., information about their families, friends, and goals) weakens the audience's ability or willingness to identify with the victims, diminishing a sense of their own victimization and shifting their fear.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The following sections expand on the study's findings and form connections among relevant findings and the cultural framework developed earlier. The killers in this study received messages about cultural values, though they showed variation in which they choose to tune in. They also were aware of the (culturally defined) legitimate means of employing those values, but their capacities varied. All but Ramirez ("atypical" group) tried to employ legitimate means – through education, employment, athletics, marriage, politics, the military, or community involvement – but most experienced repeated failures in these pursuits. Alternative lines of action were constructed, including serial murder.

American Cultural Values

Desire for Power

The cultural value most clearly sought by serial murderers in both groups was power. Power exists in many forms, and not all of the killers sought power in the same way. Some desired wealth and success. Others sought recognition or fame. Some perceived that they could gain power that had eluded them, as they felt powerless or subordinated for most of their lives. Many conceptualized the murders as demonstrating a special skill, which they honed over time and which required a great deal of focus and control. Some collected "trophies" as signifying their "accomplishments."

Control of others is another form of power for which many expressed a desire. The killers believed they had the ultimate control – over life. Some even referred to their victims as possessions or objects they had control over. Jesperson ("typical" group) went to great lengths to ensure his victims were properly credited to him – by writing letters to the media, trying to exonerate the couple convicted of his first murder, and leaving the bodies in distinctive ways. Rader ("typical" group) desired control over the telling of *his* story, resurfacing decades after he stopped killing when he learned that a book about the murders was planned.

A desire for control also can be seen in the ways in which they killed – four in the "typical" group (Berdella, Gacy, Rader, and Rogers) and two in the "atypical" group (Ramirez and Watts) usually bound their victims before killing them, affording the killers a large amount of control. Berdella and Dahmer ("typical" group) separately intended to control their victims indefinitely as captives. Restraining victims and targeting members of vulnerable groups also may reduce the likelihood of failure and boost their confidence. The killers did not seek an even playing field.

Regard for Violence

Violence (i.e., a regard for, situational tolerance of, or capacity for) is both a component of American culture and of hegemonic masculinity. About half of the killers in both groups showed some violent tendencies before they started killing (e.g., a history of violent criminal convictions, animal abuse, or a violent temper). And others indicated a high regard for violence and the recognition that it can be a means for control, companionship, wealth, and fame. This was evident by their expressed admiration or

enjoyment of cultural models of violence – other serial murderers and violent offenders, violent films and literature, and violent fantasies.

Thrill-Seeking

Several of the killers described the murders as highly enjoyable, providing a thrill or rush. Others appeared to find their "secret life" thrilling. Ridgway ("typical" group) described feeling excited when his wife wore the jewelry he gave her that he took from his victims. Most participants in thrilling ventures express a desire to repeat the activity again and again, with subsequent episodes usually requiring increased risk. Serial murderers commonly take increased risks as they continue killing. For example, Rogers ("typical" group) killed all his victims in secluded wooded areas until the last victim, whom he killed inside his pickup truck parked in an empty parking lot across from an occupied restaurant. And Jesperson ("typical" group) began killing more frequently as time passed. Law enforcement officials frequently discuss an escalation over time in the frequency of killing by serial murderers but perhaps without adequate recognition of the thrill-seeking that may prompt it.

Culturally Familiar Imagery and Social Typing

Culturally familiar imagery appears in the killers' explanations of their murders. The most common explanation – insanity – fits with the predominant image of the serial killing "monster" – the evil, crazed beast that stalks his victims and viciously pounces through the cover of darkness. The image may be appealing to the relatively powerless as it suggests they single-handedly can terrorize. It also is entangled in the process of creating a legal defense.

In particular crimes, images of a "deserving victim" are summoned. Female victims, especially those who do not fit traditional feminine ideals (e.g., women who wear skimpy clothing, stay out late at night, use alcohol or drugs, or are promiscuous), frequently are depicted in media as "asking for it." Victims of fraud are commonly portrayed as stupid and gullible, implying that they "should have known better." Although this imagery likely did not influence their choice of victims, it is apparent in their descriptions of victims. Ridgway and Rifkin, both members of the "typical" group who killed prostitutes, relied on perceptions of their victims as worthless, trash, or somehow "deserving" of violence. Rifkin said he did not think of his victims as "real people" with families, and Ridgway explained that he was "cleaning up society" by killing them. (Ridgway's explanation, in which he casts himself as a sort of do-gooder or guardian of morality, also is an apparent attempt to gain a sense of achievement when killing "expendable" people generally would not be perceived as much of an accomplishment.) The failure of the media to make the victims seem real also fits with this typing.

Gender-specific images also are evoked. Female killer Wuornos' explanation of self-defense points to a traditional female defense for offending. Explanations by Cole, Jesperson, and Rifkin (all in the "typical" group) that they killed to take revenge against domineering women in their lives may be understood as a means for restoring elements of their masculinity, as masculinity in American culture includes domination over women.

Model of Media Coverage

The amounts of media coverage each serial murderer received[40] varied dramatically, and this was related to the eventual notoriety of each killer: The more media coverage, the more infamous the killer became. Membership in the "typical" group or "atypical" group made no apparent difference; four members of the "typical" group and three members of "atypical" group received large amounts of coverage, while five members of the "typical" group and three members of the "atypical" group received smaller amounts of coverage. The most news articles were found for Dahmer (12,896 articles), followed by Bundy (10,339), Ramirez (6,598), Gacy (4,905), Ridgway (4,816), Wuornos (4,172), and Rader (2,745). Smaller numbers of articles were found for Rifkin (974 articles), Black (806), Jesperson (529), Watts (459), Wallace (453), Rogers (433), Berdella (86), and Cole (41). For all the killers in this study, regardless of notoriety, themes emerged in the presentation of information in news stories.

Killers who were active for longer period of time received more coverage than those who were active for shorter periods, but this did not appear to be because the total number of articles covered a longer period of time.[41] Instead, the killers who were active the longest periods of time received more coverage at every comparable timeframe after their apprehension than those who were captured more quickly. Long time spans were related to larger numbers of victims, which adds an element of shock and may explain some of the increased coverage.

[40] See Table 3 in Appendix A.
[41] All of the articles found about Rader were published after he resurfaced, and the majority found for Ridgway were published after his apprehension

As a key transmitter of cultural values, mass media messages create meaning about serial murder. Vastly differing amounts of media coverage related to the killers' eventual notoriety, and I identified three components that appear to make a serial murder case more or less newsworthy: the social status of the killer, the social status of the victims, and the murders' shock factor.[42] For high amounts of media coverage, generally at least two of these three components also were high. The cases in which this does not hold true are for Dahmer and Ridgway (both in the "typical" group); in those cases, the shock factor was so extreme that it appeared to be the main factor in the enormous amounts of coverage they received. This relates to valuations of members of high-status and low-status populations. Except for Dahmer's and Ridgway's cases, high amounts of media coverage were generated when the victims' social status was high, but the killers' social status was of limited consequence. A high-status killer apparently warrants more coverage than others, but it is unclear whether this relates to the killer's status, or the apparent tendency of a high-status killer to target higher-status victims, or the shock factor of a high-status person committing such offenses.

Cultural Competencies and Building Lines of Action

Although an awareness of and adherence to cultural values were apparent for each killer, his or her capacities to utilize them through culturally approved means varied. They constructed lines of action in relation to these capacities and their access to power and resources. The serial murderers in this study may not have been any less competent

[42] See Table 7 in Appendix A.

than many others in culturally legitimate pursuits, but they experienced a sense of incompetence that led to other paths.

The killers' choices of victims appear to be related to their position in the social structure and access to power. Most of the killers could be classified as of a somewhat low social status,[43] and, in most cases, they targeted victims they knew they could control relatively easily. Typically, victims were of a lower social status than the killer, including prostitutes and drug addicts, or were members of vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and ethnic minorities. Killers of a relatively higher social status (i.e., Gacy, Rader, and Bundy) targeted victims of a higher status than the other killers' victims but of a lower status than their own. Gacy, a white, male businessman well-known for his involvement in community groups, targeted young, transient white men. Rader, a white, male college graduate with a respectable job and role as a church leader, targeted white, middle-class women. And Bundy, a white, male law student known for community service and political involvement, targeted white, middle- to upper-class women.

Ramirez and Wuornos (both in the "atypical" group) were the only killers to target members of higher-status groups than their own, but they employed killing methods that afforded larger amounts of control (e.g., they relied on surprising their victims and were the only two killers in this study to use guns in the commission of the murders). As members of subordinated groups, targeting members of high-status groups was a way for them to gain power.

[43] See Table 6 in Appendix A for the measured social status of each serial murderer, determined with the scale developed by Hollingshead (1975) and updated by Barratt (2006).

Variations of the White, Male Model

Most serial murderers in the "atypical" group except for Black (a white, male Scot) differed from the white, male model of serial murder as portrayed by those in the "typical" group. Although not as much information was available for Black, he appeared to fit the model. This is unsurprising, as British and American cultures have many similar values. The variations represented by other members of the "atypical" group likely were a result of the killers' positions in the social structure and access to power. Four of the six members of the "atypical" group (Ramirez, Wallace, Watts, and Wuornos) were members of subordinated populations (minorities by race, ethnicity, or gender) and therefore have fewer means for gaining and using power than many of the white men.

Bundy's elevated social status seemed to alter media portrayals of him. In contrast to the "monster," "outcast," and "loser" portrayals of the killers in the "typical" group, the coverage of Bundy seemed to include an overall theme of "what a waste," as his alleged potential for legitimate success was repeatedly mentioned.

Ramirez did not fit the profile of the white, male serial murderer, as he generally withdrew from society: He never held a steady job, never showed an interest in dating, had a long history of minor offending and drug use, and did not show any interest in other serial murderers. He also appeared less organized in his killing, did not have one type of targeted victim, and left several victims alive.

Ramirez, Wallace, and Watts, all considered "atypical" serial murderers because of ethnic or racial difference, were the only killers in this study to vary their killing methods. All of the killers in the "typical" group used one method of killing – typically strangulation – for every murder. In addition, Wallace exclusively killed people he knew,

which under most definitions would exclude him from the serial murderer category. Wallace maintained the general intraracial pattern of violence by killing only African-American women, but Watts differed by killing only white women.

Wuornos, the only woman included in this study, also did not fit the white, male model of serial murder. Not only did her explanation for the murders (self-defense) fit with a traditional female defense, but she relied on traditionally feminine imagery to carry out the murders. As a prostitute, she recognized the exploitation of women's bodies as an available means of income. She also recognized the cultural imagery of feminine vulnerability and used it to create the element of surprise – she relied on the men who picked her up to trust her because of her gender, and she caught them off guard when she turned violent. In addition, shooting is one of the most common methods used by women in cases of single murder.

Representations of Serial Murder

Conceptions of serial murderers as highly intelligent, shrewd, super-killers who taunt police and control the media are exaggerated representations largely created by media coverage. Those who contact the police or media usually receive large amounts of coverage, but some of the most notorious (e.g., Bundy, Dahmer, Gacy, and Ramirez) do not. In addition, there is little evidence that many of those portrayed as taunting police are actively doing so. Bundy and Ridgway were portrayed as engaged in a cat-and-mouse game with police – Bundy because of his multiple escapes from jail, frequent changes in appearance, and high mobility; and Ridgway because he rotated among several locations

to dispose of bodies. These behaviors do not necessarily indicate enjoyment of the chase; they can be explained by efforts to avoid (or end) capture. But the representation is more dramatic, interesting, and entertaining.

The findings in this study differed in several ways from purported characteristics of "typical" serial murderers reported by serial murder researchers and often included in criminal profiles.[44] Other studies have reported that many serial murderers serve in the military and that, of those who serve, most are dishonorably discharged. About half of the "typical" serial murders (four out of nine) included in this study served in the military, but only one received a dishonorable discharge. Also divergent from findings of other studies, abuse was not a characteristic shared by many of the "typical" serial murderers in this study – more than two-thirds (seven out of nine) had no history of abuse in their childhood. There also was little interest in law enforcement found.

The differences indicate that there may be fewer commonalities among serial murderers, even among those considered "typical." Using a comparison group, composed of killers who differed from the prototypical model in various ways, also helped deconstruct the "typical" serial murderer profile. Characteristics of the members in the two groups were much more similar than different, which raises questions about the "typical" model. Profiles require identifiable similarities, but in cases of serial murder, selecting particular characteristics of a diverse group to force into neat categories is self-

[44] Although the sample in this study was not randomly selected, the selection process was similar to the approach of previous studies. No study was found that claimed to employ a random selection process. Divergent definitions of serial murder and the unknown reliability of records would limit any sampling frame. Hickey's (2006) study, employing one of the most inclusive definitions of serial murder, is the only one found that purports to offer a comprehensive study of serial murder in the United States, but employment of a different definition would exclude a number of killers from his study.

serving for those who create the profiles and possibly counterproductive in solving serial murder cases.

Considering the Definitions

Two of my goals in this study were to understand how American culture contributes to the over-representation of whites and the over-representation of men in serial murder, but findings suggest that the over-representations could be explained by the restrictive definitions of serial murder. The definitions appear to describe characteristics most associated with white, male serial murderers in the United States and exclude characteristics that may be associated with other groups and people acting with different motivations. Slight reformulations of these narrow definitions would fundamentally change the characterization of the "typical" serial murderer. For example, if these definitions were expanded to allow for victims who are known to the killers, a number of African-Americans and women would be included. The elimination of some types of multiple murderers – such as those who repeatedly kill spouses or children, or hospital or nursing home employees who repeatedly kill patients – from the definition of serial murder may mean that some offenses are not being recognized, potentially putting people at risk. In addition, most definitions of serial murder would exclude more commonly occurring cases of multiple killings in other countries (e.g., the legally sanctioned killing of homosexuals in Iran), which raises the question of whether there are more serial murderers in other countries than have been identified.

The popular representation of serial murders as highly intelligent,[45] elusive, white men is consistent with the power structure in American society and notions of whiteness and masculinity. Additionally, this representation of serial murder may serve the interests of the elite. Instances of multiple murder – spree and mass murder; mafia murders; murder-for-hire; and political mass murder – are framed according to the perpetrators' access to power (often political mass murder is not considered murder at all). These representations of serial murder reinforce and perpetuate the power structure in American society and related values, which sustains an environment for extreme violence and creates a cultural blindness to some perpetrators. A reconceptualization of serial murder in American culture is urged.

[45] The only serial murderers to be described as highly intelligent in this study were white males. All of the nonwhite serial murderers and the female serial murderer were described as either average or below-average in intelligence.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

This study aids in an understanding of how American culture provides a milieu conducive to the generation of serial murderers. Serial murder is a deviant means to gain culturally valued feelings of power, control, dominance, success, satisfaction, and pleasure through individualism, competition, and risk-taking, especially for those with limited resources and legitimate power. It also offers a means to attain other cultural values – success and fame – that most forms of offending do not. Because masculine ideals mesh neatly with the American cultural values described in this study, adherence to those values also is a means for proving masculinity.

American culture is full of inconsistent messages and values that may be utilized in a number of legitimate and illegitimate ways. This creates a cultural environment of adjustable boundaries and contradictions in which violence is acceptable at times; white, male privilege is pervasive; extreme types of offending may be rewarded with fame or wealth; violating the law may be seen as honorable; the notion of equality of opportunity places the onus of success and failure solely on the individual; winning at any cost is worthwhile; and being known for anything is better than living in anonymity. This is an environment in which serial murder and its coverage flourish.

Representations of serial murderers in mass media, as well as popular profiles and exclusive definitions, construct a distinct, elite status for serial murderers, to which other repeat offenders are not compared. Other multiple murderers, serial stalkers, serial

arsonists, serial rapists, school shooters, and white supremacists are not afforded the high status of serial murderers, and their offending may be overlooked. The ubiquity of serial murderer images in mass media places serial murder in the cultural milieu, but exaggerated representations lead to apparently inaccurate perceptions of serial murder and serial murderers. Harboring misconceptions about characteristics of serial murderers and attempting to force them into established profiles prevent a more realistic picture from emerging and may inhibit investigations.

Implications

Widespread media coverage does not create serial murder, but it does keep serial murder on the cultural surface. Through portrayals as both savage, elusive beasts to fear and corrupt American heroes, serial murderers become cultural monsters as mythic as Frankenstein, the Bogeyman, and Freddy Krueger. Stories of serial murder are ubiquitous, and sensational, often exaggerated representations of serial murderers help maintain public interest. Media representations that create nameless, faceless victims and afford the killers celebrity status may lessen our fear of victimization. Media also benefit from the representations: In-depth, prominent coverage of serial murder and the perpetuation of its sensational image draw consumers (and their money).

Law enforcement agencies, particularly the FBI, have much to gain from the incidence of serial murder. Since the term "serial killer" was coined by one of its agents, the FBI has claimed to be the authority on serial murder. The Behavioral Analysis Units make up the current profiling arm of the FBI, aiding in serial murder investigations in the

United States and sometimes abroad. Criminal profilers generally receive a large amount of public support for the presentation of themselves as, not just experts on serial murder investigation, but *the sole authority*, thus establishing a need for their services. They also benefit from popular profiles of serial murderers, for if serial murderers are portrayed as highly intelligent, cunning, and elusive, then those who purport to understand them or are able to capture them are depicted as even more clever. And the killers' supposed brilliance makes it understandable (and not attributable to law enforcement failure) when FBI agents or profilers experience difficulties in serial murder investigations. Finally, for an egocentric country preoccupied with exceptionalism, claiming the highest number of the worst type of violent offender may be a perverse source of cultural pride in America.

As long as serial murderers are glorified in omnipresent media representations, and groups such as media and the FBI stand to benefit, the incidence is unlikely to decrease.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study has identified components of American culture and the nature of social life in American society that may increase the probability of serial murder, contributing to an understanding of American culture and how people construct lines of action according to their cultural competencies, but more research is needed before any substantial conclusions can be drawn. Future research should use the theoretical framework and findings as a basis for developing tests of the arguments. Further critical

examination of Americans' interest in serial murder could reveal much about American cultural values and the process of meaning-making.

In addition, the ways in which newspapers can emphasize or minimize particular stories or elements in stories should be considered in an analysis of media meaning-making. Although it was not possible in this study because of the way in which data were collected,[46] future analyses of media representations of serial murderers should consider typographic and other visual elements including an article's placement on a page, headline size and font, and use of non-narrative elements such as information boxes, pulled quotes, and photographs. Representations of serial murderers in other forms of mass media, including television and radio, also should be examined and compared to the print media representations examined in this study.

Finally, more research should be conducted to examine potential alternative models of serial murder. There may be fundamental differences among various types of serial murderers (especially by race, ethnic origin, and gender) depending on their access to power and other resources.

[46] The layout and design of articles archived in Dow Jones Factiva and Newsbank Inc. databases are not retained; only the text is available. The ProQuest Historical Newspapers database does retain original layout and design of articles, but the number of available newspapers is limited. Newspapers included in the University of Tennessee's access to Proquest include the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, and only articles within finite timeframes are accessible.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TABLES

Table 1: General Information About Serial Murderers in the Sample

	Birth	Death	Sex	Race/ Ethnicity	Nationality	Nickname	Timeframe	Location	Victim type	No. of victims	Killing method	Sentence
Bob Berdella	1/31/39	10/8/92	Male	White	American	N/A	1980-1984	Kansas City, Mo.	Gay men	6	Torture, suffocation, drugs	Life in prison
Eddie Cole	5/9/38	12/6/85	Male	White	American	N/A	1971-1980	Dallas; San Diego; Las Vegas	Women	16	Strangulation	Death, two life terms
Jeffrey Dahmer	5/21/60	11/28/94	Male	White	American	"Milwaukee Monster"	1978-1991	Milwaukee	Boys, young men	17	Strangulation	15 life terms
John Gacy	3/17/42	5/10/94	Male	White	American	"Killer Clown"	1972-1978	Chicago	Boys, young men	33	Strangulation	Death
Keith Jesperson	4/6/55	N/A	Male	White	American	"Happy Face Killer"	1990-1995	Oregon, Wyoming, Wash.	Prostitutes	At least 4	Strangulation	2 life terms
Dennis Rader	3/9/45	N/A	Male	White	American	"BTK"	1974-1986	Wichita, KS	Women, men, kids	10	Strangulation	10 life terms
Gary Ridgway	2/18/49	N/A	Male	White	American	"Green River Killer"	1982-1998	Wash.	Prostitutes, runaways	48	Strangulation	48 life terms
Joel Rifkin	1/20/59	N/A	Male	White	American	N/A	1989-1993	New York City	Prostitutes, drug addicts	9	Strangulation	Life term
Dayton Rogers	9/30/53	N/A	Male	White	American	"Molalla Forest Killer"	1980s	Oregon	Prostitutes	At least 7	Stabbing	Death
Robert Black	4/21/47	N/A	Male	White	Scottish	N/A	1982-1990	Scotland, England	Female children	At least 3	Strangulation	Life, parole possible
Ted Bundy	11/24/46	1/24/89	Male	White	American	N/A	1974-1978	Wash., Utah, Colo., Fla.	Young women	At least 3	Strangulation, bludgeoning	Death
Richard Ramirez	2/29/60	N/A	Male	Mexican	American	"Night Stalker"	1984-1985	Southern California	Women and men*	At least 13	Shooting, stabbing	Death
Henry Wallace	11/4/65	N/A	Male	African-American	American	N/A	1992-1994	Charlotte, NC	Young women	At least 9	Strangulation, stabbing	Death
Coral Watts	11/7/53	9/21/07	Male	African-American	American	"Sunday Morning Slasher"	1974-1982	Texas, Michigan	Young women	At least 14	Drowning, stabbing, hanging, strangulation	60 years, 2 life terms
Aileen Wuornos	2/29/56	10/9/02	Female	White	American	N/A	1989-1990	Florida	Men	At least 6	Shooting	Death

*Men were attacked if they were with female targets; in such cases, the men usually were attacked first.

Table 2: Breakdown of Data-Collection Sources*

	Books	Crime Library by truTV	Newspaper articles	Court cases	Legal journal articles	Official confessions
Bob Berdella	1	1	22	8	4	---
Eddie Cole	1	1	17	2	---	---
Jeffrey Dahmer	2	1	149	10	---	---
John Gacy	1	1	187	10	---	---
Keith Jesperson	1	1	71	---	3	---
Dennis Rader	2	1	67	---	3	1
Gary Ridgway	2	1	64	---	5	1
Joel Rifkin	1	1	103	7	---	---
Dayton Rogers	1	1	66	4	3	---
Robert Black	1	1	35	---	---	---
Ted Bundy	3	1	117	22	---	---
Richard Ramirez	1	1	60	18	---	---
Henry Wallace	1	1	111	14	---	---
Coral Watts	1	1	65	6	---	---
Aileen Wuornos	2	1	58	6	---	---
Totals	21	15	1,192	107	18	2

* For full citations of all sources used in data collection, see Appendix B.

Table 3: Number of Articles Found by Database and Search Term, and Number and Percentage Used in Analysis**

	Newsbank name	Newsbank nickname	Factiva name	Factiva nickname	Proquest name	Proquest nickname	Total found	Total analyzed	Percentage analyzed
Bob Berdella	5	N/A	80	N/A	1	N/A	86	22	25.58
Eddie Cole	0	N/A	41	N/A	0	N/A	41	17	41.46
Jeffrey Dahmer	865	0 (1*)	11,814	9 (21/12*)	208	0	12,896	149	1.16
John Gacy	219	N/A	4,505	N/A	181	N/A	4,905	187	3.81
Keith Jesperson	15	0 (9*)	166 (477/ 311*)	343	3 (4/1*)	2	529	71	13.42
Dennis Rader	0 (54*)	85	164 (1,776/1,612*)	2,413	0	83	2,745	67	2.44
Gary Ridgway	6 (63/ 57*)	71	1,574 (2,337/763*)	3,117	8 (14/6*)	40	4,816	64	1.33
Joel Rifkin	37	N/A	797	N/A	140	N/A	974	103	10.57
Dayton Rogers	0	0	405	0	28	0	433	66	15.24
Robert Black	0	N/A	806	N/A	0	N/A	806	35	4.34
Ted Bundy	527	N/A	9,464	N/A	348	N/A	10,339	117	1.13
Richard Ramirez	111 (161/ 50*)	208	1,185 (2,522/1337*)	4,502	18 (45/27*)	574	6,598	60	0.91
Henry Wallace	16	N/A	430	N/A	7	N/A	453	111	24.50
Coral Watts	20	0	433	0 (2*)	6	0	459	65	14.16
Aileen Wuornos	158	N/A	3,931	N/A	83	N/A	4,172	58	1.39

* For cases in which the serial murderer had a widely used nickname, separate searches using the nickname and the real name frequently produced duplicate articles. In such cases, two numbers are listed in parentheses to indicate the total number of articles produced by the search (to the left of the slash) and the number of duplicate articles (to the right). The number outside of parentheses indicates the number of distinct articles produced by the search.

** For full citations of all sources used in data collection, see Appendix B.

Table 4: Findings – Characteristics of Serial Murderers in the Sample

	IQ	Childhood School performance	Employment	Sexual orientation	Age at first murder	Previous abuse	Criminal history	Military service	Interest in law enforcement
Bob Berdella	High	Good	Curio shop owner	Homosexual	41	No	Drug arrests	None	None
Eddie Cole	High	Poor	Warehouse worker	Heterosexual	33	Yes	Various – property and conduct	Navy	None
Jeffrey Dahmer	Average	Poor	Factory worker	Homosexual	18	No	Indecent exposure, sexual assault	Army	None
John Gacy	Average	Poor	Construction business owner	Bisexual	30	No	Various – sexual, violent, property	None	Posed as officer
Keith Jesperson	Average	Poor	Long-haul truck driver	Heterosexual	35	No	None	None	Interest in RCMP or being game warden
Dennis Rader	Average	Average	Compliance officer	Heterosexual	29	No	None	Air Force	Compliance officer; degree in criminal justice
Gary Ridgway	Low	Poor	Truck painter	Heterosexual	33	No	Patronizing prostitutes	Navy	None
Joel Rifkin	High	Poor	Frequently unemployed landscaper	Heterosexual	40	No	Patronizing a prostitute	None	None
Dayton Rogers	High	Poor	Engine-repair business owner	Heterosexual	≈ 27	Yes	Accused of violent assaults	None	None
Robert Black	Average	Average	Delivery truck driver	Heterosexual	35	Yes	Pedophilia, theft, auto theft, assault	None	None
Ted Bundy	High	Good	Sometime student	Heterosexual	28	No	None	None	Posed as officer; worked in security
Richard Ramirez	Average	Poor	No history of employment	Heterosexual	24	No	Petty theft, auto theft	None	None
Henry Wallace	Average	Poor	Fast-food worker	Heterosexual	27	No	Arrested for rape	Navy	None
Coral Watts	Average	Poor	Auto mechanic	Heterosexual	21	Yes	Harassment, theft, assaults	None	None
Aileen Wuornos	Low	Poor	Prostitute	Homosexual	33	Yes	Disorderly conduct, DUIs, weapons	Tried to join	Tried to work in corrections

Table 5: Findings – Characteristics of Serial Murderers in the Sample (Continued)

	Peer and Romantic Relationships				
	Childhood	**Adulthood**	**Type of failures***	**Trophies**	**Explanations offered****
Bob Berdella	Loner/outcast	Seen as community leader; few dates; never married	Scholastic	Photographs, body parts	Movie "The Collector"
Eddie Cole	Loner/outcast	Loner; divorced	Scholastic, relationships	None known	Revenge for domineering mother, prior victimization
Jeffrey Dahmer	Loner/outcast	Loner; poor relationships; never married	Scholastic, relationships	Photographs, body parts	Fear of abandonment, insanity
John Gacy	Seen as well-adjusted	Active in community; divorced	Arrest	Small personal items (e.g., wallets and clothing)	Ridding society of its "bad element," mental illness
Keith Jesperson	Loner/outcast	Loner; divorced	Relationships	None known	Revenge for domineering ex-wife
Dennis Rader	Loner/outcast	Active in community; married at time of arrest	None identified	Photographs and small personal items (e.g., driver's licenses)	"Demon" inside him
Gary Ridgway	Loner/outcast	Loner; married at time of arrest	Scholastic	Photographs	Cleaning up society
Joel Rifkin	Loner/outcast	Loner; never married	Scholastic	Lingerie and small personal items (e.g., driver's licenses, library cards, credit cards)	Revenge against biological mother (whom he never met), movie "Frenzy," insanity
Dayton Rogers	Loner/outcast	Loner; married at time of arrest	None identified	Clothing, jewelry	Self-defense for one murder, strict religious upbringing
Robert Black	Loner/outcast	Loner; never married	Occupational	None known	Uncontrollable sexual desire
Ted Bundy	Seen as well-adjusted, though described feeling like an outcast	Active in community; few friends; never married	Scholastic, relationships	None known	None offered; pornography alleged as influence
Richard Ramirez	Loner/outcast	Loner; never married	None identified	Stole items of value	None offered
Henry Wallace	Loner/outcast	Few close friends; never married	None identified	None known	Insanity
Coral Watts	Loner/outcast	Divorced	Scholastic	Small personal items, which he disposed of within days	Said victims had "evil eyes"
Aileen Wuornos	Loner/outcast	Divorced	Occupational, relationships	Stole items of value	Self-defense, prior victimization

* Types classified by specific failures described by the killers as being most significant to them.
** Including explanations offered by the killers or through their legal defense.

Table 6: Determining Social Status of Serial Murderers in the Study*

	Education		Employment		Total	
	Level	Score	Type	Score	Status score	Status level
Bob Berdella	Some vocational	15	Curio shop owner	30	**45**	**Middle-High**
Eddie Cole	High school dropout	9	Warehouse worker	10	**19**	**Low**
Jeffrey Dahmer	Some college	15	Factory worker	10	**25**	**Middle-Low**
John Gacy	Some college	15	Construction business owner	20	**35**	**Middle**
Keith Jesperson	High school	12	Long-haul truck driver	15	**27**	**Middle-Low**
Dennis Rader	College degree	18	Compliance officer	30	**48**	**Middle-High**
Gary Ridgway	High school	12	Truck painter	15	**27**	**Middle-Low**
Joel Rifkin	Some college	15	Frequently unemployed landscaper	10	**25**	**Middle-Low**
Dayton Rogers	High school dropout	9	Engine-repair business owner	20	**29**	**Middle-Low**
Robert Black	Dropout	6	Delivery truck driver	15	**21**	**Middle-Low**
Ted Bundy	College degree	18	Sometime law student	35	**53**	**Middle-High**
Richard Ramirez	High school dropout	9	No history of employment	0	**9**	**Low**
Henry Wallace	Some college	15	Fast-food worker	5	**20**	**Middle-Low**
Coral Watts	Some college	15	Auto mechanic	20	**35**	**Middle**
Aileen Wuornos	High school dropout	9	Prostitute	0	**9**	**Low**

* Scores determined with scale developed by Hollingshead (1975) and updated by Barratt (2006).

Table 7: Predictors of Media Coverage

	Social status of killer*	Social status of victim**	Shock value***	Amount of coverage****
Bob Berdella	High	Low	High	Low
Eddie Cole	Low	Low	Low	Low
Jeffrey Dahmer	Low	Low	High	High
John Gacy	Middle	High	High	High
Keith Jesperson	Low	Low	Low	Middle
Dennis Rader	High	High	High	High
Gary Ridgway	Low	Low	High	High
Joel Rifkin	Low	Low	High	Middle
Dayton Rogers	Low	Low	Low	Low
Robert Black	Low	High	Low	Middle
Ted Bundy	High	High	High	High
Richard Ramirez	Low	High	High	High
Henry Wallace	Low	Low	Low	Low
Coral Watts	Middle	High	Low	Low
Aileen Wuornos	Low	High	High	High

* For consistency and ease of comparison, only three categories, low, middle, and high, are used here for the social status of the killers. "Middle-Low" was changed to "Low"; "Middle-High" was changed to "High"; and "Middle" was left unchanged. See Table 6.

** Determined based on limited demographic, educational, and occupational information about the victims.

*** The following elements were considered when determining shock value of the murders: torture, high numbers of victims, degree of overkill, cannibalism, necrophilia, and bizarre explanations for murders. Community involvement and marital status also were considered, as "family man" and "community leader" types of serial murderer appear to be more shocking to most people.

**** High coverage was considered more than 1,000 articles produced through database searches; middle coverage was considered between 500 and 999 articles produced; and low coverage was considered fewer than 500 articles produced.

APPENDIX B

DATA-COLLECTION SOURCES

Biographical Narratives

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