2023

Examining Psychosocial Characteristics of Female Serial Murderers

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2019

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Abstract

Previous studies of serial murderers have focused primarily on male serial murderers. The reason for this is unknown, but is primarily reflective of media patterns, gender roles, and social norms that often exclude females from conversations surrounding female serial murder. This study focused on the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. Both solo female serial murderers and serial murderers who worked with one partner were studied. Using a grounded theory approach, based on the review of 11 secondary data case studies, 12 female serial murderers were studied; six who murdered individually and six who murdered within a team. Six main themes emerged: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, presence of sexual deviance, presence of team disintegration, and presence of romantic instability. These findings contribute to the knowledge about female serial murderers. Positive social change may occur through confirmation of previous findings and additional knowledge for law enforcement, behavioral analysts, and forensic professionals, which may assist with the identification and incarceration of female serial offenders.

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Dedication

For my friends and sister, who always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Your support means the world to me, and I am so lucky to have all of you in my life.

For my mother and father, who fostered my love of learning, emphasized the importance of education, and let me read books about serial murderers at way too young of an age.

For JB, who interfered every time I actually tried to get work done.

For the victims of the individuals studied in this dissertation.

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking my committee members, Dr. Eric Hickey and Dr. Wayne Wallace. Dr. Hickey, thank you for enduring endless late-night conversations and countless revisions. Without your constant guidance and reminders of moving onward, I would not be where I am today. Dr. Wallace, thank you for your levity, guidance, and advice. This dissertation would not have been completed without both of your patience, dedication, and hard work. I am very fortunate to have worked with both of you, and I hope that you'll both continue to take my calls and emails in the future.

I would also like to thank Dr. Aamodt and Dr. Leary for allowing me to access the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, which was essential for the completion of this study. Your work on the database has allowed students like me to continue the research in this field, and that is more valuable than I'd ever be able to express.

Though she was mentioned in the dedication, I would like to give additional thanks to my mother. Mom, thank you for putting up with me through this. I know that it wasn't fun, and I know that you didn't want to listen to me ramble about murder for hours on end, but you did it anyway. I appreciate you more than you'll ever know, even though you thought this would only be a fifty page paper. For the record, it's 192 pages.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Serial murder is a rare phenomenon, yet it remains a high topic of interest, both for professionals and in the realm of pop culture. Emphasizing the concept of serial murder as a phenomenon is essential. Serial murder is not common, and serial murderers themselves are incredibly rare (Aamodt et al., 2020). While predictions and statistics differ between sources, data shows that the number of active serial murderers operating in the United States peaked in the 1980s, with victim numbers peaking in 1987 (4787 victims) and gradually declining each year (Aamodt et al., 2020). FBI statistics show similar rates—they hypothesize that serial murder comprises less than 1% of all killings in the United States (Aamodt et al., 2020). From 2016 to 2019, the last year with an available data set at the time this research was conducted, Aamodt et al. (2020) estimated that number of victims of serial murderers was eight. However, the authors noted that, due to the common inability to explicitly tie victims to serial murderers until years after the fact, data from recent years should not be seen as concrete proof. The comparison of serial murder with other rates of violent crime is stark. In 2019, the number of violent crimes totaled 1,203,808 (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2020). In breaking that number down, officials reported the following crime statistics- 16,425 murders; 139,815 rapes; 267,988 robberies; and 821,182 aggravated assaults (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2020). While these numbers are all just estimates that are not inclusive of unreported violent crimes,

basic math shows that the occurrence of serial killings is statistically insignificant in comparison with other violent offenses.

The reasons for the decline in serial murder may vary—since the 1970s and 1980s, where serial killing was at its peak, there have been major cultural shifts in terms of personal safety and stranger awareness, as well as advancements in forensic techniques and law enforcement understanding of homicide and the psychology behind it (Vronsky, 2018)—but the general public's fascination with serial killers has not declined in the same rates actual serial killers have. Movies, novels, and true crime series have propelled serial murderers into the spotlight. Ed Gein, with his skin suit and furniture made from human breasts, was the inspiration for classic movies like *Psycho* (1960), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *The Silence of the Lambs* (first as a novel published in 1988 and later as an Academy Award-winning film released in 1991), while the character Dexter Morgan from the series of novels and the television series inspired several individuals to commit murders. These individuals—whether real or fictional—exist in a small facet of society, though they are often glamorized and blown out of proportion, turning serial murder from a rare phenomenon to an everyday occurrence, something a layperson walking down the street must be careful to avoid, women most especially.

The study of serial murder often takes both a sexual and sexualized approach, meaning that the only serial murderer worth knowing, or understanding is a cis-gendered male offender who kills for some form of sexual release or gratification. While sexual gratification is one of the motivations behind most serial murders (Hickey, 2015), focusing primarily on it neglects other aspects and experiences, namely those of female

murderers who may kill for other purposes (Harrison et al., 2017). The concept of a female serial murderer, who is not incredibly rare within an already small percentage of murderers, is an idea that has only recently begun to gather a similar amount of attention as that of their male counterparts. While female serial murderers have been researched since the mid-1980s (Hickey, 1986), a distinct gap becomes obvious when what is known about female serial murderers is compared to what is known about male serial murderers.

Chapter 1 will provide context for the overall study, including the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the nature of the study, the theoretical framework that will be used to ground the study, the research questions, and any assumptions, delimitations, or definitions that will be used or made throughout.

Background

In relation to serial murder or murder in general, women are often seen as the victims (Mallicoat, 2019). The traditionally female role in murder has always been the object being acted upon, not the object acting. Women have only been recently codified as capable of violence, despite historical information showing that women always could act violently against others, including their relatives and children. The exact reason for this will never be conclusively known but is speculated to be, in part, a result of social norms and dynamics related to gender (Hale & Bolin, 1998; Hickey, 2015; Holmes et al., 1991; Gurian, 2011; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Mallicoat, 2019; Ramsland, 2007; Telfer, 2017; Vronsky, 2018). Regardless of how the problem came to exist, the problem does exist. To not address it is to allow a tradition of not taking female serial murderers seriously.

Eric Hickey completed the first study of female serial murderers in 1986 (Hickey, 1986). Numerous subsequent studies have been conducted to understand female serial murderers, most often by situating them compared to their male counterparts. Holmes et al. (1991) examined case studies of female serial murderers to explain or categorize their behaviors using the Holmes and Holmes typology. The Holmes typology is a classification model that separates serial murderers into five categories based on motivation: the visionary killer, the mission-oriented killer, the hedonistic killer, and power/control killers (Holmes & DeBurger, 1985). Within the context of the study Holmes et al. (1991) completed, there are four different categories into which female serial murderers can be grouped: the comfort killer, the hedonistic killer, the power-seeker, and the disciple killer. In the study, the authors argued that most female serial murderers appear to mostly fit under the umbrella of the comfort serial killer (Holmes et al., 1991).

Hale and Bolin (1998) upheld the notion of female serial murderers using financial gain as a primary motivator, though they also analyzed victimology and the differences between female single murderers and female serial murderers. Regarding victimology, female serial murderers often targeted latent victims with whom they had a close personal relationship (Hale & Bolin, 1998). Aggression often appeared in an inverse relationship with the perceived weakness of the victim. If a victim was weaker, then the female serial murderer often acted more aggressively (Hale & Bolin, 1998). Female serial murderers differed from females who committed a single murder in multiple ways, though victimology was not one of them; like females who committed

multiple murderers, females who committed a single murder often killed someone who had a close personal relationship with them, usually a spouse or romantic partner (Hale & Bolin, 1998). The motivation of the murders often differed; female serial murderers generally killed for profit or other financial gains, though female single murderers killed in response to conflict, showcasing a direct example of the differences between instrumental and expressive violence (Hale & Bolin, 1998).

Kelleher and Kelleher (1998), recognizing the need for a classification system created solely for female serial murderers, created the Kelleher typology, which sorts female serial murderers into eight categories: the black widow, the angel of death, the sexual predator, the revenge killer, the profit or crime killer, the team killer, the question of sanity killer, the unexplained killer, and the unsolved killer. The authors argued that the typologies designed for male serial murderers could not accurately organize female serial murderers and examined close to 100 case studies to develop their typology (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998). Kelleher and Kelleher also noted that female serial murderers killed for more extended periods—eight years on average—than their male counterparts and started killing later in life, often after 25 years of age. Like Holmes et al. (1991) and Hale and Bolin (1998), Kelleher and Kelleher found that female serial murderers are more likely to kill individuals with who they have a close personal relationship, including family members, children, and romantic partners.

Recently, more studies have been completed to explain further the differences between male and female serial murderers and the differences between males and females convicted of single homicide events. Yourstone et al. (2008) completed a study

comparing the psychosocial characteristics of male and female offenders "convicted of homicide in Sweden between 1995-2001" (p. 374), though the study is limited in its relevance to this current study in that it was not solely focused on serial murderers. Their research found several differences in the psychosocial backgrounds of male and female offenders. Notably, female offenders were more likely to experience a range of adverse childhood experiences, including sexual abuse, strained relationships, and parents with mental illness (Yourstone et al., 2008). Yourstone et al. (2008) also found that female offenders had a close relationship with their victim, were less likely to have a criminal record, and had a history of psychiatric issues or mental illness, though there were several similarities between female and male offenders, specifically childhood instability and exposure to trauma.

Hildebrand and Culhane (2015) completed a study that used clinical tools on a sample of four incarcerated females who fit the criteria for serial murder. The clinical tools utilized were the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2), the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III (MCMI-III), the Levenson Psychopathy Scale (LPS), the Psychopathy Personality Inventory-Revised (PPI-R), and the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III (SRPS-III) (Hildebrand & Culhane, 2015). The authors found that female serial murderers may have complex motivations that impact victimology while also noting that "factors such as socialization and personality features interact in complex ways to lead the women to commit murder" (Hildebrand & Culhane, 2015, p. 47). Like Yourstone et al. (2008) and Hildebrand and Culhane, Harrison et al. (2015) completed a study acknowledging the psychosocial characteristics and factors of female serial

murderers. Due to the sole focus on female serial murderers, the sample consisted of women who murdered alone or acted as the dominant member of a partnership. The study confirmed much of what was previously known about female serial murderers, including that the most common means of murder was poison (50%), most offenders knew their victims, and latent victims were the most common type (71.9% of offenders targeted latent victims) (Harrison et al., 2015). Notably, the study results were similar to Hickey's 2010 study despite using a different methodology. Like Yourstone et al. (2008), Harrison et al. (2015) found that female murderers were disproportionately impacted by childhood sexual abuse and physical abuse. In their study, 14.1 percent of offenders experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse, compared to the national average of 9 percent of children experiencing physical abuse and 1 percent of children experiencing sexual abuse (Harrison et al., 2015). There were also apparent patterns of substance abuse, mental illness, and maladaptive personality traits or behaviors (Harrison et al., 2015).

Harrison et al. (2019) continued research and expanded by using an evolutionary framework to compare the differences between male and female serial murderers, testing a "hunter/gatherer" hypothesis. The authors argued that male and female serial murderers fit the historical models of the male "hunter" and the female "gatherer," with the male serial murderers hunting their victims by killing strangers they stalked, while the female serial murderers gathered their victims from those around them, including romantic partners, parents, friends, and children (Harrison et al., 2019).

While some studies address the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers, it is most often done as a part of the study that is not related to its sole

purpose. By solely addressing the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers, there may be an increased understanding of potential risk factors, as well as common characteristics that may help further knowledge in both the forensic professional communities and law enforcement communities. A more thorough analysis of the existing literature will be completed in Chapter 2 of this study.

Problem Statement

Much of the information and discourse regarding serial murder centers on male serial murderers (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Pearson, 2021; Telfer, 2017; Thompson & Richard, 2009; Vronsky, 2007, 2018), and it is not until recently that female serial murderers began receiving similar amounts of attention. Eric Hickey completed the first study of female serial murderers in the mid-1980s (Hickey, 1986), and, while numerous studies (Cameron, 1999; Gurian, 2011; Hale & Bolin, 1998; Harrison et al., 2019; Harrison et al., 2015; Hickey, 2015; Hildebrand & Culhane, 2015; Holmes, Hickey, & Holmes, 1991; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998; Silvio, 2004) have been completed since then, people are still reluctant to believe that female serial killers exist (Hickey, 2015; Holmes, Hickey, & Holmes, 1991; Pearson, 2021; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Vronsky, 2007). Psychosocial characteristics is "a term used to describe the influences of social factors on an individual's mental health and behavior" (Vizzoto et al., 2013, para. 1), and, as psychosocial characteristics tend to differ between men and women (Archer, 2019), it can be surmised that the psychosocial factors between male and female serial murderers also differ.

Because most of the research about serial murder focuses on the male experience, there is little research regarding female serial murderers, specifically regarding their psychosocial characteristics. While the psychosocial characteristics between male serial murderers and female serial murderers may only differ slightly, the differences in factors and characteristics may inform or explain why there is such a stark difference in how they commit their crimes. Information on psychosocial characteristics is generally included as extra information not related to the study's overall purpose, despite the potential benefits of focusing solely on psychosocial characteristics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. Psychosocial characteristics refer to the influences of the psychosocial environment on an individual's thoughts and behaviors (Vizzoto et al., 2013; Walker & Hepp, 2016) and often are related to psychosocial factors (American Psychological Association, 2020). These factors can include childhood experiences, including trauma; mental illness; relationships; adult experiences; and social pressures. One of the key psychosocial factors that differ between men and women is the mode of aggression (Yourstone et al., 2008), which could have a large influence on the differences in how men and women kill their victims (Holmes et al., 1991; Vronsky, 2007). Other psychosocial factors could provide information on why these individuals became serial murderers, possibly providing data on potential risk factors.

Research Questions

The questions for this study are:

RQ1. What are the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers?

Per Lexico (2021), psychosocial is a term "relating to the interrelation of social factors and individual thought and behaviour" (para. 1), and psychosocial characteristics are derived from this relationship (Vizzotto et al., 2013). Psychosocial characteristics may include factors such as the environmental or social culture that an individual grows up in or the innate characteristics of the individual, both of which may inform why the individual decides to kill (Hughbank & Grossman, 2013). Psychosocial characteristics also influence the way a person kills (Hughback & Grossman, 2013), which may explain the differences in methods between male and female serial murderers, as psychosocial characteristics differ between sexes (Archer, 2019). This question seeks to address how psychosocial characteristics or factors may influence the way female serial murderers commit their crimes.

RQ2. How do the psychosocial characteristics of solo female serial murderers differ from offenders who have one or more partners?

Male serial murderers and female serial murderers have different motivations for killing and operate in different ways (Hickey, 2015; Farrell et al., 2011; Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998). Individually, female serial murderers are more likely to kill with money and control acting as the primary motivators, whereas men are more likely to kill for sex and control (Hickey, 2015). Within a team dynamic, the motivations shift to primarily fulfill the motivations of the dominant partner. In team killings with one male partner and one female partner, the male is more likely to take a dominant role within the relationship (Hickey, 2015), and the three most common motivations are sex, money, and control (Hickey, 2015). While control and money are present within each cohort, sex is only seen as one of the top three motivators for male murderers and team murderers. However, there have been cases where females, such as Myra Hindley, Martha Beck, and Karla Homolka, have taken part in sexually motivated crimes with a male partner (Hickey, 2015; Thompson & Richard, 2009). Thompson and Richard (2009) completed three case studies (Myra Hindley, Martha Beck, and Karla Homolka) and found that all three women participated in the murders to please their partners or ensure their partners' continued presence in their lives. Recognizing the extreme differences in the behavior between solo female serial murderers and partnered female serial murderers, this question seeks to address whether the psychosocial characteristics also differ.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded theory. Grounded theory, essentially, is based on the "discovery of theory from data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1) and was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, two sociologists, in the mid-1960s while conducting "research related to the sociology of illness" (Schroth, 2019, para.1). While initially used solely for sociological study, grounded theory has become a prevalent qualitative method of research used across all disciplines, including psychology (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Henwood & Pigeon, 2003). Grounded theory is well-suited for researching and attempting to understand phenomena (Birks et al., 2019; Chun Tie et al., 2019). Several grounded theory techniques can be used to analyze data and attempt to explain what might be happening within a line of research inquiry.

Regarding the current study, grounded theory and its techniques serve as an appropriate qualitative framework, mainly due to the usage of secondary data analysis. As grounded theory is rooted in discovering codes, concepts, categories, and themes (Schroth, 2019), similarities or differences amongst the psychosocial characteristics of the individuals explored in this study will be developed and analyzed through comparison.

A more detailed explanation of grounded theory will be completed in Chapter 2 of this study.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a qualitative study as it is designed to examine females who are serial murderers, who are relatively rare in criminological research. Most of the analysis will be done through secondary data analysis. Due to the improbability of conducting in-person interviews, data was collected from archival interviews done by other professionals. Additional information was gathered from other forms of data available in each case, including public records, videos, peer-reviewed books authored by professionals, and peer-reviewed studies published in journals. The information was then examined to address common characteristics and deviations within the selected case studies. This qualitative analysis allowed themes and patterns between the studied offenders to become apparent through manual coding.

Definitions

The terms used in the study are defined as follows:

Angel of death: A woman who systematically murders individuals who are in her care or who rely on her for some form of medical attention or similar support. The motives for these murders may be diverse (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 15).

Black widow: A woman who systematically murders multiple spouses, partners, or other family members. She may also claim victims outside the family. The motives for

these murders may be diverse and may encompass other classifications, such as profit or crime (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 15).

Expressive violence: Violence that is impulsive and meant to vent bottled-up feelings (Pearson, 2021, p. 36).

High risk victim: A person who generally has a high probability of criminal victimization (FBI, 2017).

Instrumental violence: Violence that is cool and calculating (Pearson, 2021, p. 36).

Latent victim: Victims who are unable or have limited abilities to defend themselves because of their general condition (Hale & Bolin, 1998, p. 42).

Low risk victim: A person who generally has a minimal probability of criminal victimization (FBI, 2017).

Moderate risk victim: A person who generally has a minimal probability of criminal victimization but due to behavior, atypical or otherwise, the risk was situationally elevated at the time of victimization (FBI, 2017).

Profit or crime: A woman who systematically murders individuals during other criminal activities (or for profit) but is not a member of a team of killers and does not meet the criteria for a black widow (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 16).

Question of sanity: A woman who murders in an apparently random manner, usually without a clear and explicable motive, and who is later judged to be legally insane. Alternatively, a woman who murders in a systematic way and is later found to be suffering from a mental disorder that is connected to the crimes. In either event, a

psychological disorder must be present and be of such a magnitude as to bring the issue of culpability into question (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 16).

Revenge: A woman who systematically murders individuals for motives of revenge or jealousy (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 15-6).

Serial murder: The unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offenders in separate events (FBI, 2008; Hickey, 2015, p. 36).

Sexual predator: A woman who systematically murders others in what are known to be clear acts of sexual homicide. The motive for these murders must be sexual in nature (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 15).

Team killer: In conjunction with at least one other person, a woman who systematically murders others or who participates in the systematic murder of others. The motives for these murders may be diverse, and the woman may not have personally murdered others (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 16).

Unexplained: A woman who systematically murders for reasons that are wholly inexplicable or for a motive that has not been made sufficiently clear for organization. The perpetrator must not be judged legally insane (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 16).

Unsolved: A systematic pattern of murders that may be attributed to a woman (or women) with relative confidence, but which have not been solved (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 16).

Victim facilitation: The occurrence when a victim unintentionally makes it easier for an offender to commit a crime (Daigle, 2016, p. 2).

Victim precipitation: The extent to which a victim is responsible for his or her own victimization (Daigle, 2016, p. 2).

Victim risk level: The degree to which an individual's personality, behavior, lifestyle, habits, physical attributes, location, circumstances, judgment, security consciousness, and/or other personal factors affect the probability of criminal victimization (FBI, 2017).

Assumptions

The main assumption of this study is that female serial murderers have psychosocial characteristics that are unique. This assumption is necessary because it provides the foundation of the research study. Another assumption is that the data will be reliable and factual. Because the Radford/FGCU Database undergoes stringent requirements and vetting, the information collected from the database should be both valid and reliable, though it will be checked against other sources.

Scope and Delimitations

This study aimed to examine the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. The study focused primarily on Canadian and American female individuals who fit the FBI's (2008) criteria for establishing serial murder. Participants were selected from the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, and data was collected via a review of the information available in the database, as well as peer-reviewed and scholarly outside information.

One of the major delimitations of the study is the exclusion of male participants. Because extensive research has been conducted on male serial murderers, this study is solely focusing on the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. Additionally, female serial murderers from outside of the United States and Canada will be excluded from this study due to offenders from other countries not being included in the primary data resource, the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database.

Limitations

One of the apparent barriers in this study is the lack of access to live participants. Because female offenders are rare and often are a challenge to access, this study relied on primary and secondary data, though primary data sources may be more challenging to access. The reliance on public records and criminal files is a limitation that may negatively impact the study's overall findings. However, this is noted and will be addressed throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Other barriers to the study include the barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the level of misinformation that can be present when researching this field of study. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, this study is less affected due to a lack of live participants, though access to resources and data may take longer because of ongoing pandemic restrictions. In terms of misinformation and serial murder, because of the high public interest and glamorization of serial murder, misinformation may be printed and taken as fact. Additionally, authors can hold biases about serial murder, whether intentional or not. These limitations were managed by cross-referencing information,

relying heavily on peer-reviewed publications, and obtaining as many reliable scholarly sources as possible.

Significance

The importance of conducting further study into the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers may lie in its benefit to the forensic community and law enforcement. Though serial murder itself is a rare phenomenon, any increased understanding allows the possibility of saving one life or more, which is accurate regarding female serial murderers. Hickey (2015) estimated that "nearly 17 percent [of serial killers] are female" (p. 5) and can often remain "invisible to public view and can kill over many years" (p. 308), partly due to society's reluctance to view women as being capable of violence (Gurian, 2011; Hale & Bolin, 1998; Hickey, 2015; Holmes, Hickey, & Holmes, 1991; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Mallicoat, 2019; Pearson, 2021; Ramsland, 2007; Telfer, 2017; Vronsky, 2007, 2018). Because of the so-called invisibility of female serial murderers, female serial murderers can operate undetected for significant periods. Kelleher and Kelleher (1998), in their seminal study, found that female serial murderers, on average, operate for approximately eight years, though they tend to begin killing at a later age than male serial murderers. Female serial murderers have historically been underestimated and dismissed in a variety of contexts: Aileen Wuornos was described as the first actual female serial murderer despite the dozens of female serial murderers who predated her (Hickey, 2015); the noms de guerre of female serial murderers are often based on their appearance or age, belittling the violence of their crimes and the lives they

impacted (Harrison et al., 2017; Hickey, 2015); and, most significantly, there are still individuals who view the concept of a female serial murderer as a joke rather than an actual threat (Vronsky, 2007, 2018). Because females were unable to be viewed as incapable of anything except nurturing, much about female serial murderers is still very unknown.

An increased understanding of the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers may improve the general awareness of why they kill, how their social and cultural environments impact this, and increase understanding in both prevention and apprehension. While research regarding serial murder is generally more helpful after a murder has already been committed, an increased understanding of female serial murders and how they operate may shorten the time female offenders are active and assist law enforcement with identifying, understanding, and arresting them.

Summary

Though serial murderers are overwhelmingly male, female serial murderers do exist and do pose a threat that should be taken seriously (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2008, 2018). The reluctance to take female serial murderers seriously has led to several problems, both historic and current, including female murderers being acquitted of their crimes (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998), sentencing disparities between male and female serial murderers, and a lessened level of dangerousness attributed to female serial murderers (Hickey, 2015). Researchers postulate that this may stem from gender politics and social dynamics (Gurian, 2011; Hale & Bolin, 1998; Hickey, 2015; Holmes, Hickey,

& Holmes, 1991; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Mallicoat, 2019; Pearson, 2021; Ramsland, 2007; Telfer, 2017; Vronsky, 2007, 2018). Research regarding female serial murderers has advanced in numerous ways, but a study regarding the psychosocial characteristics is needed to further the scope. Because of that, the focus of this study is on the psychosocial characteristics of American and Canadian female serial murderers.

In Chapter 2, a thorough review of seminal and recent research is completed. Topics reviewed include the historical understanding of serial murder, the modern understanding of serial murder, the etiological causes of serial murder, a review of grounded theory and its applicability to the current study, and a summary of common themes found in relating women to serial murder. Also included is a brief history of notable female serial murderers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Much of the information and discourse regarding serial murder centers on male serial murderers (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Pearson, 2021; Telfer, 2017; Thompson & Richard, 2009; Vronsky, 2007, 2018), and it is not until recently that female serial murderers began receiving similar amounts of attention. Eric Hickey completed the first study of female serial murderers in the mid-1980s (Hickey, 1986), and, while numerous studies (Cameron, 1999; Gurian, 2011; Hale & Bolin, 1998; Harrison et al., 2015; Harrison et al., 2019; Hickey, 2015; Hildebrand & Culhane, 2015; Holmes et al., 1991; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998; Silvio, 2004) have been completed since then, people are still reluctant to believe that female serial killers exist (Hickey, 2015; Holmes, Hickey, & Holmes, 1991; Pearson, 2021; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Vronsky, 2007). Psychosocial characteristics is "a term used to describe the influences of social factors on an individual's mental health and behavior" (Vizzoto et al., 2013, para. 1), and as psychosocial characteristics tend to differ between men and women (Archer, 2019), it can be surmised that the psychosocial factors between male and female serial murderers also differ.

Because most of the research about serial murder focuses on the male experience, there is little research regarding female serial murderers, specifically regarding their psychosocial characteristics. While the psychosocial characteristics between male serial murderers and female serial murderers may only differ slightly, the differences in factors

and characteristics may inform or explain why there is such a stark difference in how they commit their crimes. Information on psychosocial characteristics is generally included as extra information not related to the study's overall purpose, despite the potential benefits of focusing solely on psychosocial characteristics.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. Psychosocial characteristics refer to the influences of the psychosocial environment on an individual's thoughts and behaviors (Vizzoto et al., 2013; Walker & Hepp, 2016) and often are related to psychosocial factors (American Psychological Association, 2020). These factors can include childhood experiences, including trauma; mental illness; relationships; adult experiences; and social pressures. One of the key psychosocial factors that differ between men and women is the mode of aggression (Yourstone et al., 2008), which could have a large influence on the differences in how men and women kill their victims (Holmes et al., 1991; Vronsky, 2007). Other psychosocial factors could provide information on why these individuals became serial murderers, possibly providing data on potential risk factors.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy includes gaining access to and exploring various journals, online scholarly databases, websites, online books, and print books. The most frequently used databases were JSTOR, APA PsycINFO, EBSCO, SAGE Journals, and the Criminal Justice Database. The most frequented search engine was the online Walden University Library. Google and Google Scholar were also utilized. Keyword searches

included various forms of the root words of terms including *serial murder, serial killer, female serial murder, female serial killer, female deviance, psychosocial characteristics, psychosocial factors, childhood, trauma, grounded theory, gender, murder, homicide, risk factors, violence, typology, criminal behavior,* and *psychosocial characteristics of serial murderers*. This intensive search consisted primarily of examining data from studies published in or after 2000. Research published prior to 2000 served as foundational or seminal and was used as supplemental when more recent research could not be located.

Theoretical Foundation

The proposed theoretical framework for this study is grounded theory. Grounded theory, essentially, is based on the idea of theories developing from data rather than data being used to adhere to or prove a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and was created by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, two sociologists, in the mid-1960s while conducting research related to terminally ill patients (Schroth, 2019). While initially used solely for sociological study, grounded theory has become a prevalent qualitative method of analysis used across all disciplines, including psychology (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Henwood & Pigeon, 2003). Grounded theory is well-suited for researching and attempting to understand phenomena (Birks et al., 2019; Chun Tie et al., 2019). Several grounded theory techniques can be used to analyze data and attempt to explain what might be happening within a line of research inquiry.

There are four stages of collection and analysis within a grounded theory analysis: codes, concepts, categories, and theories (Schroth, 2019). Each stage of grounded theory analysis builds off the other; codes lead to concepts, concepts lead to categories, and categories may eventually develop into theories (Schroth, 2019). Initially, a grounded theory method study begins with asking questions about how the data may inform rather than how the data may prove or add to a pre-existing theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012). Different forms of sampling can be used within a grounded theory analysis, but purposive, or nonrandom (Lavrakas, 2008), sampling is used most often (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012). Data collection and analysis co-occur as the researcher continuously interacts with the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012), with the overall goal being not to apply preconceived notions or theories during the collection and analysis.

In the coding stage of the process, which is also the lowest stage of analysis, researchers identify critical points of data that begin to point out larger pictures (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Schroth, 2019), eventually leading to the concept process. Each stage of analysis builds upon the previous ones in terms of specificity and increases in abstraction (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012), eventually leading to the development of theories (Schroth, 2019). In developing theories, the researcher will group categories or possible explanations and potentially establish a theoretical framework (Schroth, 2019).

Data analysis methods are often tested by their validity, whereas, with grounded theory, research is tested by four things: fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Schroth, 2019). Schroth (2019) argued that *fit* refers to whether the final research coincides with the data collected from interviews or secondary

sources of information, while *relevance* refers to whether the research is needed and will, in some way, contribute to the discipline. *Workability* refers to whether the theoretical framework can be used in several different areas or situations (Schroth, 2019). *Modifiability* is what allows the theory or theoretical framework to be modified or changed if new information becomes known (Schroth, 2019).

Despite all the benefits that grounded theory offers to the qualitative researcher (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz & Kenwood, 2017; Schroth, 2019), the grounded theory methodology is not without its critiques and criticisms (Charmaz & Kenwood, 2017; Clarke, 2011). One of the main concerns grounded theory faces is its validity in subject truthfulness. Because grounded theory relies extensively on interviews, the researcher must assume that the subjects are telling the truth and not intentionally misleading the researcher (Clarke, 2011), which can later lead to concerns of validity. Additionally, there is the potential for bias amongst researchers. Clarke (2011) noted that, because grounded theory is unequivocally based on the researcher forming theories based on their perceptions of the data, researcher bias is a likely and valid concern for critics. Within the specific field of psychology, Charmaz and Kenwood (2017) noted that critics essentially argued that grounded theory does not accurately portray or analyze the psychological dynamics of participants, while also arguing that the methods of grounded theory analysis are not enough to form a substantive theory or framework. In response, Charmaz and Kenwood argued that these issues might be present within specific studies that claimed to use a grounded theory framework rather than issues inherent in the methodology itself. It should be noted that researcher bias and participant untruthfulness

are generally indicated as possible limitations in most, if not all, grounded theory studies, including this one.

In psychological research, grounded theory has become a framework often used for qualitative studies (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz & Kenwood, 2017; Clarke, 2011; Parveen, 2018; Schroth, 2019). Parveen (2018) completed a literature review of twenty-two studies of psychological research that used a grounded theoretical framework; in the review, she noted that all the studies gathered for the review benefitted from the inclusion of grounded theory. Specifically, she argued that grounded theory allowed these researchers to identify issues within their chosen field and identify possible solutions to the problems identified (Parveen, 2019). Concerning the current study and its research problem, a search of *grounded theory* and *serial murder* in both the Walden University library, EBSCO, APA PsycInfo, and Google Scholar returned very few, if any, results. Two prominent results included two master's theses completed: *The development of serial killers: A grounded theory study* (Sharma, 2018) and *A qualitative exploration into the subjective experiences of healthcare serial killers* (Tang, 2020). While theses are generally not seen as peer-reviewed sources of data, their inclusion is pertinent to the current study as their research problems are closely related to this study's.

Sharma (2018) used a grounded theory methodology to study the lived experiences of three male serial murderers—Ted Bundy, Gary Ridgeway, and Richard Ramirez—to develop possible etiological explanations for serial murder. The study found that several factors—notably low-self-esteem, stress/trauma, loneliness, power/control, and a need for belonging—were shared between all three murderers and were often

related to each other (Sharma, 2018). In recognizing the study's limitations, Sharma (2018) noted that his sample was limited by both gender and race and stated the need for a study with a more diverse sample. Tang (2020) used a grounded theory methodology to examine three healthcare serial murderers through the lens of neutralization theory. The study sample included two males and one female (Tang, 2020). Tang (2020) found that the three offenders shared similar experiences and often justified their murders using neutralization techniques, arguing that committing the murders was their duty or their crimes were necessary. Like Sharma (2018), Tang (2020) noted the need for a study with a larger sample size and a more extensive representation of female offenders.

Regarding the current study, grounded theory and its techniques serve as an appropriate qualitative framework, mainly due to secondary data analysis. As grounded theory is rooted in discovering codes, concepts, categories, and themes (Schroth, 2019), similarities or differences amongst the psychosocial characteristics of the individuals explored in this study will be developed and analyzed through comparison. Additionally, grounded theory methodologies have been used in numerous psychological studies (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz & Kenwood, 2017; Clarke, 2011; Parveen, 2018; Schroth, 2019), as well as studies pertaining specifically to serial murderers (Sharma, 2018; Tang, 2020).

Historical Understanding of Serial Murder

Serial killing itself has been chronicled dating back to ancient history (Vrosnky, 2007, 2018) and has been studied as early as medieval Europe, though it was not codified

as serial murder at the time (Hickey, 2015; Vrosnky, 2007, 2018). The first person known to extensively research the topic of sexual deviance—which, for an extended period, was considered necessary for a homicide to be indicative of serial murder—was Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing (Oosterhuis, 2012). Krafft-Ebing conducted some of the first research on sexual deviance, and, while it is limited from a modern standpoint based on it reflecting the beliefs and politics of its time (Oosterhuis, 2012), Krafft-Ebing's work has been credited with shaping the contemporary notion of sexuality, primarily through *Psychopathia Sexualis*, his most known work.

Despite *Psychopathia Sexualis* being predominantly targeted for medical professionals, it served as a basis for understanding sexual deviance and perversion, both of which would be integral to developing early definitions of sexual serial murder. In his text, Krafft-Ebing described several acts of sexual deviance, including lust-murder and sadism in both men and women (Krafft-Ebing & Chaddock, 1892). While Krafft-Ebing is self-described as a medical professional and alienist—a historically dated term for psychiatrist (Merriam-Webster, 2021)—he also included relevant legal aspects for the deviances he considered especially dangerous to society.

One of the critical notes Krafft-Ebing (1892) made in his research is the intersection between lust and cruelty, arguing that lust and anger are similar emotions in several ways and often result in similar expressions of feeling. Krafft-Ebing (1892) further stated that, in certain individuals, the emotions of lust and cruelty are inextricably bound, causing weakened or absent inhibitory feelings; this could often result in the aggressor causing pain, injury, or even death to the involved partner. Krafft-Ebing (1892)

credited the ties between sex and aggression to social dynamics, theorizing that, because men must act as the aggressors when pursuing a sexual relationship with a woman, the aggressive character may be overdeveloped, leading to a potentially dangerous encounter where the man overpowered or harmed the woman to control her. Krafft-Ebing (1892) described this relationship in a chicken-and-egg paradigm: sexual excitement can activate cruelty, but cruelty can also activate a sexual response. This concept of sexual sadism as Krafft-Ebing described it continued directly into his concept of lust-murder.

Citing several examples of lust murder, including the infamous Jack the Ripper case, Krafft-Ebing (1892) provided several definitions for what may constitute a lust-murder, including "acts of bestiality with the body" (p. 62), cannibalism, and arousal from the sadistic acts committed, including strangulation, mutilation, rape, and acts of necrophilia. In terms of the fixation on necrophilia, which would later be seen in killers such as Ted Bundy, Ed Kemper, and Jerry Brudos, Krafft-Ebing (1892) theorized that "the corpse—a human form absolutely without will—satisfies an abnormal desire, in that the object of desire is seen to be capable of absolute subjugation, without possibility of resistance" (p. 68). The relationship described, linking sex, violence, and control, would later prove to be instrumental in understanding the motivations of sexual serial murderers.

Relating to Krafft-Ebing's (1892) views on gender dynamics, he argued that sadism was more frequent in men than women due to sadism being a perverted sense of aggression and masculinity and that sadistic women reflected a reversal of traditionally feminine behavior. While *Psychopathia Sexualis* provided numerous accounts of male

sadism, he only included two accounts of female sadism, both of which were marked by the women involved experiencing odaxelagnia, or sexual arousal from the act of biting (Krafft-Ebing, 1892). Additionally, the section on male sadism is five pages, while the section devoted to sadism in women is only two (Krafft-Ebing, 1892). Again, it is essential to acknowledge that Krafft-Ebing's views were undoubtedly influenced by opinions of gender and women consistent with his time. However, it is important also to note that, in the centuries that followed, law enforcement and psychologists maintained the view that women were too feminine and too weak to partake in the traditionally masculine act of sadism (Hickey, 2015; Holmes, Hickey, & Holmes, 1991; Pearson, 2021; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Vronsky, 2007). The underestimation of the female capacity for violence can be seen as one of the primary reasons female serial murderers have often been able to operate undetected for longer periods.

While Krafft-Ebing's contributions to the study of deviance still ring relevant today, other early studies of serial murder were often conflated with tales of supernatural killers, such as vampires or werewolves (Hickey, 2015; Schlesinger, 2000; Vronsky, 2018), which does limit the amount of historical perspective that has been provided in this field. Because of these unexplained murders, which often included heinous mutilations and cannibalism, several individuals—including Gilles de Rais and Peter Stubbes—claimed not guilty by reason of lycanthropy as a defense for their crimes (Schlesinger, 2000), and, subsequently, lycanthropy was considered a medical issue (Hickey, 2015) known as *lycanthropia* (Vronsky, 2018). Early study of serial murder was often limited by a lack of understanding of the psychology behind these crimes and an

intense fixation on the fear of the supernatural and a reliance on the church for moral and legal direction. Based on information supplied by the church, namely at the hands of demonologists and theologians, people believed that others did not commit crimes because of mental illness or deviant impulses but because they were possessed or consorting with the Devil (Vronsky, 2018). Individuals who committed gory crimes at odds with societal norms at the time were seen as monsters, and offenders were charged with crimes that fit within the schema of the church, notably witchcraft and lycanthropy (Vronsky, 2018). Both Gilles de Rais (1404-1440) and Elizabeth Báthory (1560-1614) were initially charged with "accusations of witchcraft and black magic and only secondarily associated with charges of multiple murder" (Vronsky, 2018, p. 99). While in hindsight it is evident to a modern audience that the murders were committed out of a drive to satisfy a deviant urge, lycanthropy was a valid defense during this time, and, ultimately, there were "at least 300 werewolf trials in Western Europe between 1450 and 1650" (Vronsky, 2018, p. 99). Peter Vronsky (2018) covered this phenomenon extensively, drawing a comparison of the monster theory to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's controversial and now debunked organized-disorganized dichotomy:

> Two of the most enduring monsters in human imagination— the *preservative*, calculating, quasi-necrophiliac vampire and the *destructive*, frenzied, cannibalistic werewolf— roughly correspond to the FBI's serial-killer typology of the calculating, coldy-neat *organized* serial killer (Dracula) and the messy, impulsive, *disorganized* serial killer (the Wolf Man). (p. 32)

Other early modern notions of criminality also tended to follow the idea that criminality reflected morality, often mixing with heredity (Hickey, 2015). While this would later influence the founding of eugenics (and, indirectly, numerous genocides across the globe, including the Holocaust) (Hickey, 2015), the idea of inherited or born criminality provided a foundation for the overall study of criminology, especially within the works of Cesare Lombroso. Considered the founder of modern criminology, Lombroso (1835 - 1909) was well-known for his theory of the "born criminal."

Within his works, Lombroso (2006) favored theories of atavistic biological determinism, arguing that criminality was genetic and often related to traits seen in inferior or savage races. While this viewpoint is rightfully derided in the modern era for being biased by the race politics of its time, Lombroso's influence on criminology is hard to erase, despite his ideas now seeming ludicrous and pseudoscientific. Lombroso (2006) argued that the primary way to determine whether someone was a criminal was based on their appearance and the way their skull was shaped; that criminals were less sensitive to pain than the ordinary citizen, as well as being morally insensitive; and that criminal intelligence is below average. Modern researchers and psychologists now know that most of these theories are inherently false, though that does not discredit the harm that they had on society and individuals who did not fit societal norms:

The notion of born criminals provided the impetus of the eugenics movement of the early 1930s. Based on the belief that many criminal traits and mental illnesses were inherited, 27 states allowed the forced sterilization of the "feeble-minded, chronic offenders, and the insane." (Hickey, 2015, p. 69)

Lombroso also faced scrutiny and criticism during the early to mid-1900s, with Lindesmith et al. (1937) arguing that Lombroso effectively made criminals out to be non-persons, adding that Lombroso's theories went against hundreds of years of criminological research that both pre-dated his and often proved his theories factually incorrect. The rise of Lombroso as the father of criminology could possibly be attributed to American scholars, who did not have access to any prior criminological theories, as they had not been translated into English, making their dissemination difficult for English-speaking audiences (Lindesmith et al., 1937).

However, while it is important to recognize Lombroso's faults as a researcher, it is also important to understand that he may have been correct about some aspects of criminality. Lombroso (2006) touched on how criminals seemed to lack genuine empathy for those impacted by their crimes, were prone to boasting, and often committed crimes to gain recognition, all valid observations of criminal behavior today. He also commented on possible sociological influences of criminality at the time, including facilitators such as alcohol, learned behavior observed from interactions with family members, and the impact of education (Lombroso, 2006). Modern professionals often touch upon all these factors in addressing possible risk factors or causes of modern criminal behavior.

Modern Understanding of Serial Murder

Serial murder is often believed to be a uniquely American phenomenon, something that only Americans have experienced or researched. While serial murder was popularized in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly because of the

infamous killers who operated in that era, it is a global experience that has been researched by American scholars and scholars from other countries. Most well-known serial murderers often hail from developed Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, something that Peter Vronsky (2018) argued may be attributed to a lack of widespread reporting from other countries throughout the globe.

The term *serial killer* was first coined by FBI agent Robert Ressler while investigating the Son of Sam murders that plagued New York in the 1970s (Hickey, 2015). Initially, serial murder was said to be "three or more separate events in three or more separate locations with an emotional cooling-off period in between homicides" (Douglas et al., 1992, p. 21), though the same authors later changed this definition to redefine serial murder as "the unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s) in separate events," with the cooling-off period having come to be regarded as "historical" in nature (Douglas et al., 2013, p. 16). One of the most significant differences regarding the two definitions is that the former definition required that some form of sexual motivation be present at the scene or found within the offender's actions, while the latter does not.

Moving beyond the scope of Douglas et al. (1992, 2013), serial murder has, at different times and by different people, been described as an act committed by "any offenders, male or female, who kill over time" with a "minimum of three or four victims" and a "pattern in their killing that can be associated with the types of victims selected or the method or motives for killing" (Hickey, 2006, p. 23); the separate killings of at least

three people by an individual over a certain length of time (Bartol & Bartol, 2004); or "the killing of three or more people over a period of more than 30 days, with a significant cooling-off period between the killings" (Holmes & Holmes, 2006, p. 5-6). While the fine details of each definition showcase their overall differences, the bones are the same—serial murder is the act of killing a specific number of people over a period, not out of necessity, but because the offender enjoys the act of killing. However, the fine details of the definition are what often cause controversy and tension between scholars, law enforcement, and profilers. Because of this, the FBI gathered for the 2006 San Antonio Symposium and created a uniform definition that both professionals and law enforcement could use: "the unlawful killing of two or more victims by the same offenders in separate events" (FBI, 2008; Hickey, 2015, p. 36).

In comparing this definition to the original posed by Douglas et al. (1992; 2013), several distinct differences—namely regarding the number of qualifying victims and the less specific motivation—showcase the ever-evolving nature of studying serial murder. While no definition of serial murder will ever come close to being labeled perfect, as there will always be some level of disagreement between scholars and researchers, recent evolutions on the definition have improved the ability to study the phenomenon.

Organized/Disorganized Dichotomy

Numerous typologies have been created to categorize these offenders, starting with the FBI's Organized/Disorganized Dichotomy (Douglas et al., 2013). The Organized/Disorganized Dichotomy maintained that offenders could generally be

classified into three different groups—Organized, Disorganized, Mixed—based on information found at the crime scene (Douglas et al., 2013). One of the first methods of crime scene profiling, Douglas et al. (2013) theorized that the analysis of a criminal act also spoke to the way a criminal's mind worked. An organized offender is an offender who generally shows more finesse at the crime scene; this offender often chose his victim and exhibited a sense of control throughout the commission of the crime (Douglas et al., 2013), whereas a disorganized offender often commits crimes that are unplanned and could be a consequence of several factors, including age, intelligence, experience, and substance misuse (Douglas et al., 2013). A mixed offender may display aspects of both organized and disorganized offenders for several reasons, including more than one offender, a deteriorating attack, unplanned escalation (e.g., rape to murder), or external stressors (Douglas et al., 2013). Victimology, methodology, and crime scene indicators will differ between all the offenders, and offender typology is not necessarily static (Douglas et al., 2013). As an example, Ted Bundy, who was regarded as a highly organized offender, later devolved and deteriorated into a disorganized offender when he attacked the Chi Omega sorority house at FSU. Notable for being one of the first serial murderer typologies, the Organized/Disorganized Dichotomy has mainly been debunked and is no longer used by the National Center for Analysis of Violence Crime (NCAVC) when conducting day-to-day case analysis (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2017). While the study was foundational for showing that there are commonalities between serial murderers, the study also suffered from a poor research design, notably a small

sample size, a sampling bias, and self-reported counts from the interviewed offenders (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2017).

Holmes Typology

Another notable typology of serial murder is the Holmes typology, which divides serial murderers into four different types of offenders—the visionary killer, the mission-oriented killer, the hedonistic killer, and power/control killers (Holmes & Deburger, 1985). Visionary killers are one of the few serial murderers who may be classified as psychotic, as they often hear outside voices or visions that compel them to murder. Within their foundational paper, Holmes and Deburger argued that this type of killer is often out of touch with reality and may classify for an insanity plea after apprehension. The mission-oriented killer has identified a group or subset of people that he or she feels needs to be destroyed (Holmes & Deburger, 1985). These people may be individuals he or she feels morally offended by, such as sex workers, transient populations, or other high-risk individuals, though it may also just be groups or people he or she deems unworthy of life. While not psychotic, the mission-oriented serial killer believes it is his or her duty to rid the world of an undesirable group. The hedonistic serial killer is what the average layperson often thinks of when they imagine what a serial killer should be. Hedonistic killers are killers who kill for enjoyment, or, as Holmes and Deburger (1985) put it, the "thrill of it" (p. 32). Sexually motivated killers can often be classified as a subtype of hedonistic killers. The power/control serial killer is one who "receives gratification from the complete control of the victims" (Holmes & Deburger, p. 32,

1985). For the power/control type of serial murderer, the allure of murder comes from having complete control over the victim, and, most importantly, whether the victim dies. While there may be some initial similarities between the hedonistic serial killer and the power/control serial killer, the primary (and most significant) difference lies in what the killer derives their pleasure from: for the hedonistic killer, the pleasure comes from the act of killing itself, while the power/control killer derives pleasure from their control over the victim and whether they live or die (Holmes & Deburger, 1985).

The Holmes typology also delineated the differences between geographically stable and geographically transient serial murderers. A geographically stable serial murderer is generally stable within a certain area, choosing and killing his victims from spaces near place of residence (Holmes & Deburger, 1985), while a geographically transient serial murderer is not tied to any specific location and travels while committing their crimes (Holmes & Deburger, 1985). Outside of their geographical locations, stable and transient murderers also differed in other ways. Geographically stable murderers are more likely to have ties to the community, are well-liked, and have motivations that are often sexual in nature, while a geographically transient murderer moves between police jurisdictions for each murder and rarely has long-term ties (Holmes & Deburger, 1985).

Kelleher Typology

Most typologies surrounding serial murder are created for male serial murderers without any regard for their female counterparts and only applied to female serial offenders after the fact. One of the exceptions to this is the typology proposed by

Kelleher and Kelleher (1998), which examined close to one hundred cases of female serial murderers and categorized them based on each murderer's perceived motivations. They designed nine categories of female serial murderers—the black widow, the angel of death, the sexual predator, the revenge killer, the profit or crime killer, the team killer, the question of sanity killer, the unexplained killer, and the unsolved killer (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998). All definitions for each category are provided in Chapter 1. The Kelleher and Kelleher typology separated female serial murderers who work alone from female serial murderers who work with others. As reported within their study, it is more common for females to murder when working with others than it is for them to do so alone, though women who do murder alone are more likely to be categorized as Black Widows or Angels of Death (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998). It is also highly rare for a woman to be labeled as a Sexual Predator, and the only one mentioned in their study is Aileen Wuornos (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998). While also susceptible to the criticism that comes with providing a typology within this realm of the study, the Kelleher and Kelleher Typology has consistently been rated one of the best typologies when attempting to understand female serial murderers.

There are many models, typologies, dichotomies, or methodologies outside of the ones listed here that have been used to try and explain why men and women feel the need to kill others. Of course, no typology can ever concretely explain why these people exist and do what they do, but most methodologies do have their merits, despite the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2017) arguing otherwise by stating that most methodologies have a minimal positive impact on law enforcement personnel trying to apprehend these

offenders. Thus, begging the question—is the study of serial murder designed to only support law enforcement? The answer, of course, is no.

Etiological Theories of Serial Murder

The question of nature versus nurture is one that features prominently in both the professional's and layperson's understanding of why a person may grow up and kill others. Forensically speaking, there are several theories or approaches that attempt to explain the reasons why someone may become a serial murderer, generally through the mode of explaining why people become violent or aggressive. These approaches often fall under three categories: biological theories, psychological theories, and sociological theories (Lee & Choi, 2014).

Biological Theories of Serial Murder

There is little to no empirical evidence showing that biological factors have a hand in influencing aggressive or violent behaviors (Coleman, 1974; Hickey, 2015). Despite this, numerous attempts have been made to show that genetics or biological factors have some hand in determining aggression (Hickey, 2015), including theories of biological atavistic determination (Hickey, 2015; Lombroso, 2006), the now-debunked XYY Syndrome (Coleman, 1974; Fox, 1971; Hickey, 2015; Jarvik et al., 1973; Re & Birkhoff, 2015; Rizzo, 2019), and theories surrounding the impacts of traumatic brain injury or head trauma (Aaronson et al., 2021; Bannon et al., 2015; Bernard et al., 2017;

Brewer-Smyth & Burgess, 2021; Byrne & Coetzer, 2016; Fullerton et al., 2019; Katzin et al., 2020).

Early biological theories of murder and violence often followed in line with Lombroso's criminological theories of biological atavism, where criminality was an inherited trait and violence a symptom of that (Lombroso, 2006). These theories have been attributed, in part, to the spread of Darwin's Theory of Evolution (Lindesmith et al., 1937), which argued that species evolved based on natural selection (Britannica, 2019). Lindesmith et al. (1937) argued that "Darwinian concepts not only swept through the biological sciences but were also applied in a wholesale manner in the social sciences—in anthropology, political science, and sociology" (p. 667). Lombroso's theory of the born criminal and hereditary criminality was an example of this (Lindesmith et al., 1937).

XYY Syndrome

First developed in the mid-1900s, one of the early leading biological theories of serial murder or aggression was the 47 XYY syndrome, where a male individual had one more Y-chromosome than typical (Coleman, 1974; Fox, 1971; Hickey, 2015; Jarvik et al., 1973; Re & Birkhoff, 2015; Rizzo, 2019). XYY males were generally thought to have specific characteristics that were manifestations of the chromosomal defect, including a low intelligence, acneic skin, an above-average height, and a short temper (Jarvik et al., 1973). Individuals with XYY Syndrome were, for a time, believed to be at a higher risk of committing violent or aggressive acts against others, and XYY Syndrome was used as an unsuccessful criminal defense in multiple jurisdictions, including the United States

and Australia (Coleman, 1974; Fox, 1971). While XYY Syndrome was considered a predictor of violence or aggressive behavior for a short period of time, the theory was eventually debunked by other scholars, who argued that the experiments suffered from a poor sample size and that the presence of an extra Y chromosome did not necessarily prove causation of crime (Coleman, 1974; Fox, 1971; Re & Birkhoff, 2015; Rizzo, 2019). Scholars also argued that the theory of XYY Syndrome was essentially a continuation of Lombroso's theories of atavism (Coleman, 1974). XYY Syndrome is believed to be a risk factor for later offending due to the physical manifestations of the syndrome; essentially, because the individuals who have it are often larger with bad acne and low intelligence, they may be treated differently than others (Re & Birkhoff, 2015). Re and Birkhoff (2015) argued that, because of this, individuals with XYY Syndrome may be more likely to show deviance and violent or antisocial behaviors. Likewise, Rizzo (2019) argued that individuals with XYY Syndrome may seem more likely to display violent behavior because of environmental factors rather than genetic ones. The public appeal of the XYY chromosomal explanation may be a result of people wanting to be able to distance themselves from offenders who committed brutal crimes (Fox, 1971). To put it simply, people are more attracted to theories such as XYY Syndrome so they can assuage themselves by arguing that they cannot be predisposed to violent behavior because they do not have the chromosomal abnormality that predisposes individuals to violent behavior.

Head Trauma

One of the more recent developments in biological theories of violence is centered on the role of head trauma and violence (Allely, 2018). Traumatic brain injury (TBI) and acquired brain injury (ABI) have been studied in their relation to violence in increasing frequency (Allely, 2018). Head injury was first linked to violence in a study linking head injury and intimate partner violence (IPV) in the late 1980s (Rosenbaum & Hoge, 1986), and subsequent studies have branched out from IPV to explore other realms of violent behavior, including serial murder (Allely et al., 2014). Head trauma, especially during childhood or developmental years, have been linked to declines in impulsivity and self-control, along with cognitive impairments and decision-making abilities (Bannon et al., 2015; Byrne & Coetzer, 2016; Fullerton et al., 2019). Fullerton et al. (2019) conducted a study on twins, one of whom had experienced an early childhood head injury. They found "moderate support for the idea that early childhood head injury impacts the trajectory of impulse control in adolescents" (Fullerton et al., 2019, p. 1040), specifically noting that adolescents with a childhood head injury retain higher levels of impulsivity than the noninjured (Fullerton et al., 2019). They also noted that, the earlier the age of injury, the smaller the difference in decline in impulsivity (Fullerton et al., 2019). Katzin et al. (2020) completed a study exploring TBI and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) in young male offenders who were incarcerated at the time of data collection. They found a positive relationship between TBI and young male offenders, as well as information speaking to a relationship between TBI and other deviant or antisocial behaviors,

including substance misuse (Katzin et al., 2020). Ultimately, the study provided no information on the severity of TBI or the causation of the demonstrated associations (Katzin et al., 2020).

Also related to the concept of TBI is chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), which occurs after numerous and repeated head injuries, including concussions (Aaronson et al., 2021). Despite existing as a concept for almost a century, CTE as a medical diagnosis is a relatively new prognosis whose "biological validity and reliability" (Aaronson et al., 2021, p. 64) is generally unknown. Knowledge about CTE is limited for a number of reasons—specifically poor samples in previous research and most research and diagnosis being done on deceased participants (Aaronson et al., 2021).While the effects of CTE are considered wide and ranging, with different opinions on CTE's diagnosis, prognosis, and severity, CTE has often been linked to boxers and professional football players (Aaronson et al., 2021), two careers in which repeated head trauma is a likely event. Aaron Hernandez, a former player for the New England Patriots, committed suicide by hanging two years after being found guilty of a single homicide event, though he was later charged with the homicides of two other individuals (Gregory, 2020). Hernandez was posthumously diagnosed with CTE (Gregory, 2020). The link between CTE and aggression is often related to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC); VMPFC atrophy or damage is thought to lead to an increase in antisocial behavior (Aaronson et al., 2021; Allely, 2018). Individuals with damage to the prefrontal cortex may understand that what they are doing is wrong, but they may not be able to control their actions or behaviors (Allely, 2018). Allely (2018) noted that, because of this, frontal

lobe damage-based insanity defenses are rare and usually unsuccessful. Similarly, CTE is not currently a valid insanity defense (Aaronson et al., 2021). Due to the inability to diagnose CTE in a living brain, CTE cannot be used as an insanity defense.

In respect to serial murder, several male offenders have a history of TBI that occurred prior to when the first murder took place, including Richard Ramirez (Allely et al., 2014) and Frederick 'Fred' West (Stone, 2001). In a case study, Allely et al. (2014) noted that Ramirez sustained multiple head injuries causing trauma throughout this life. These included a dresser falling on top of him when he was two and being hit by a park swing at age five (Allely et al., 2014). Later in life, Ramirez was diagnosed with frontal lobe epilepsy (Allely et al., 2014). Fred West, who later sexually assaulted, tortured, and murdered multiple women with his wife, sustained a head injury that left him unconscious for several days following a motorcycle accident; two years later, West sustained another head injury after being pushed down a fire escape by a woman he was sexually assaulting (Stone, 2001). Per Stone (2001), friends and family noticed personality and mood changes in West following the first head injury.

Menstruation

Biological theories of female criminality have often been related to the menstrual cycle or menstruation. Beginning with Cesare Lombroso, crime and menstruation have been connected since the end of the nineteenth century continuing into the mid-twentieth century and beyond (Horney, 1978). Hall (1904) connected menopause to suicidal and homicidal impulses, as well as "loss of reason, morality, and responsibility" (p. 318). Hall

(1904) also argued that women who commit crimes during their menstrual cycle and during menopause cannot be held responsible for their actions, as they are experiencing a form of diminished capacity related to the bodily functions of menstruation. Dalton (1961) conducted a study on incarcerated females who fit certain criteria related to their menstrual cycle and found that nearly one-half of the study participants "committed their crime during menstruation or the pre-menstruum" (p. 1753), sparking a wave of similar subsequent studies, though her study was later criticized for a lack of empirical validity and poor data analysis (Harry & Baker, 1987; Horney, 1978). Early studies of crime and menstruation often excluded other important variables that often correlate with criminality, including socioeconomic and psychological demographics (Horney, 1978). Even though there is no scientific evidence or empirical data showcasing a causal relationship between menstruation and criminality (Harry & Baker, 1987; Horney, 1978), studies on the relationship between menstruation and crime have continued to occur. Studies on the effects of the menstrual cycle on aggression have often relied on self-reporting measures, which affects the empirical validity of the study's results (Ritter, 2003). Dougherty et al. (1998) found that, when women reported their own menstrual symptoms, there was evidence that showed higher levels of aggression although data reporting the rates of aggression remained consistent during pre-menstruation, menstruation, and post-menstruation periods. The interest in the relationship between menstruation and aggressive behaviors, such as criminality, may be rooted in hormones: aggression can be tied to varying levels of progesterone and estrogen, which are both believed to lower aggression levels (Ritter, 2003). Because levels of progesterone and

estrogen are lower during menses, women are often thought to act ‘more like men’ in their behavior and thought patterns (Ritter, 2003). This is tied to the thought of testosterone increasing aggression levels, though this has been primarily debunked (Demause, 2007).

Despite the numerous attempts to connect biological theories to aggression, and subsequently serial murder, there is little to no empirical evidence showing that the two can be connected to a level of statistical significance (Hickey, 2015). Biological theories have been derived from racist or sexist ideologies that seemed to both ostracize and condescend to the participants being studied, and society latches onto these theories to further distance itself and its “normal” citizens from criminal behavior. It is unlikely that an empirically sound biological theory will ever successfully prove a solid causal relationship to violence or aggression, as crime is often a mix of multiple influences rather than just a singular one (Hickey, 2015).

Psychological Theories of Serial Murder

Psychological theories of serial murder often attempt to explain whether personality characteristics or psychological factors have a role in the development of a serial murder, and, if they do, how much of a role they play (Hickey, 2015). Psychological theories of murder often revolve around two categories: the role of mental illness in determining behavior and psychoanalytic theoretical approaches developed, in part, from the works of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In terms of the role of mental illness

or defect, much of the conversation is centered on the idea of psychopathy or the psychopath despite it not being a current diagnosis.

Psychopathy

Psychopathy is either a neuropsychiatric or personality disorder, though it has not been included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as of its fifth and most recent edition (Peterson & Brown, n.d.). Psychopathy is characterized by several aberrant behavioral traits, notably:

> impulsivity; a lack of guilt, loyalty, or empathy; an incapacity to form deep or meaningful interpersonal relationships; a failure to learn from experience or punishment; profound egocentricity and superficial charm; persistent antisocial and criminal behavior without any evidence of remorse for the harm done to others; and a predisposition to aggression, particularly under the influence of alcohol. (Harpur et al., 1994, p. 150)

Not every single psychopath, regardless of gender, will present with every symptom commonly associated with psychopathy (Hickey, 2015). Hickey (2015) argued that psychopathic behavior may be "cyclical" (p. 99) in nature. Additionally, the presentation of psychopathy can and often does differ between men and women who exhibit psychopathic personality traits (Hickey, 2015; Smith et al., 2018, 2021). Male psychopaths tend to display more apparent signs of malignant narcissism then their female counterparts, who are often characterized as histrionic and dependent on others for approval (Hickey, 2015; Smith et al., 2018, 2021). Female psychopaths appear to be

primarily defined by a chronically low sense of self-image or self-esteem (Smith et al., 2021). Because of her chronic need for attention, the female psychopath may be more likely to present a facade of caring or of wanting to improve; Smith et al. (2018) noted that female psychopaths are more likely to engage in therapeutic services of their own accord and may falsely present that they are improving due to therapeutic intervention.

Though psychopathy is not a diagnosis and should not be considered as such, the Psychopathy Checklist—revised (PCL-R) can be used to assess the presence of psychopathic traits (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004; Hare, 2016; Hickey, 2015; LaBrode, 2007; Smith et al., 2018, 2021). Originally developed in the 1970s by Robert Hare, the PCL-R assesses individuals based on 20 variables, including superficial charm, manipulativeness, impulsiveness, and irresponsibility, on a 40-point scale (Hare, 2016). Per Hare (2016), the creation of the PCL-R drew from clinician experiences and Hare's personal experiences, as well as observations from institutions and prisons. To score the individual, the PCL-R draws on observable behaviors instead of inferences (Hare, 2016). Since its introduction, the PCL-R has been used widely in both clinical and forensic settings (Hare, 2016; Hickey, 2015). In forensic settings, the PCL-R is often used to establish male offender risk (Hare, 2016). Hickey (2015) noted that psychopaths tend to score at 30 points or higher, while "the typical male incarcerated offender in North America rates about a 23" (p. 100). While the PCL-R is currently considered the soundest methodology to assess psychopathy, there are some concerns about its validity and applicability to females (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004). The PCL-R was developed for a male population and its intended use is on male populations; because of this, it may not be as

reliable (Hickey, 2015). Arrigo and Griffin (2004) noted that there is a need for the development of a tool that is catered to female offenders, as did Hickey (2015).

It should be noted that being a psychopath does not automatically make an individual a criminal (Hickey, 2015; Itzkowtiz, 2008; LaBrode, 2007). Psychopaths are often attracted to positions of power that feed their sense of self-importance and speak to their narcissistic personality. Jobs that attract psychopaths meet these criteria, and it has been theorized that a person is more likely to meet a psychopath in a white-collar boardroom than in a prison (Hickey, 2015). There are some serial murderers who can be assessed as psychopaths using the PCL-R. Norris (2011) studied six offenders—three males and three females—and assessed them using the PCL-R. Though it should be noted that the PCL-R is only designed for use by individuals with a clinical license (Hickey, 2015) and that is recognized when reviewing the results of this thesis, Norris's use of the PCL-R on convicted serial murderers speaks to the potential variance of psychopathy amongst offenders. Norris (2011) found that Ted Bundy had a potential score of 33/40, Richard Ramirez had a potential score of 18/40; Dennis Rader had a potential score of 22/40; Elizabeth Bathory had a potential score of 17/40; Jane Toppan had a potential score of 17/30; and Aileen Wuornos had a potential score of 23/30. Within the confines of this study, it is interesting to note that only one of the offenders, Ted Bundy, meets the traditional minimum score (30) defined by the PCL-R and that, given the concerns regarding the PCL-R's use on female offenders, Aileen Wuornos had a higher potential PCL-R score than both Richard Ramirez and Dennis Rader.

Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Theories

Psychoanalytic theory, which attempts to explain behavior because of personality traits, is drawn from the works and writings of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) (Konvalina-Simas, 2016). Freud is considered a controversial figure in the field of psychology, with some arguing that his influence is often inescapable while others have argued that Freud's theories lack perspective and often present single-sided arguments (Woodward, 1917). Along with the theories of transference and the Oedipal complex, Freud is well known for his theory of the id, ego, and superego, which attempts to explain the inner workings of the human personality and mind (Freud, 1923, 2019; Hickey, 2015). The id, ego, and superego represent the three levels of the human consciousness (Freud, 1923, 2019). The id and superego are diametrically opposed, with the id representing the most primitive impulses and the superego representing the moral conscience (Freud, 1923, 2019). The ego, or median part, often acts as the mediator between the two, representing "reason and prudence" (Freud, 1923, 2019, p. 16). Psychoanalytic theory has been related to serial murder in several ways, including via the Oedipus complex.

Named after a tragedy written by the Greek playwright Sophocles (Blackmon, 2021), the Oedipus complex refers to the Freudian belief that all men children act aggressively towards their fathers because they harbor sexual feelings for their mothers (Blackmon, 2021). While the Oedipus complex has been primarily discredited and is now generally only used within literature studies, childhood sexual trauma or abnormal sexual feelings that are not properly dealt with may impact later adult behaviors (Blackmon,

2021). Within the field of studying serial murderers, the Oedipus complex has been used to study behavior and potential root causes. Knight (2006) argued that traumas in the pre-Oedipal or Oedipal stages of development may lead to psychological issues in sexually motivated serial murderers, and that strong feelings toward the mother, whether incestual or angry, may later influence their killings. The murder of women may be seen as "displaced matricide" (Knight, 2007, p. 1200). Interestingly, Ed Kemper displayed signs of displaced matricide throughout his murders and eventually culminated by killing his mother and sexually assaulting her corpse; Kemper was also known to have blamed his mother for his murders (Hickey, 2015). Knight (2007) reasserted their argument of pre-Oedipal and Oedipal development influencing murderous tendencies, while also arguing that psychoanalytic theory suggests that "evil as aggression" (p. 27) is innate and fuels motivation.

Mental Illness

Mental illness is defined as a health condition involving "changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior (or a combination of these)" (American Psychiatric Association, 2018, para. 1) and are often "associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities" (American Psychiatric Association, 2018, para. 1). Clinically, mental illnesses are diagnosed using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which is currently in its fifth edition. Mental illnesses often range in severity and type, though there is evidence to suggest that most serial murderers do have a history of at least some mental illness or disorder (Harrison et al., 2015; Hickey, 2015),

and an emphasis is often placed on personality disorders, which are characterized by personality defects that severely impact functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD)

Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) is a cluster-B personality disorder commonly characterized by a disregard for others, laws, and social norms; impulsivity; and a lack of remorse, among other behaviors (Fisher & Hany, 2021). Per the DSM-V, antisocial personality disorder can only be diagnosed in an individual 18 years of age or older who, in addition to at least three antisocial behaviors, was diagnosed with conduct disorder prior to age 15 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The exact cause of ASPD is unknown, but researchers postulate it may be a combination of genetic and environmental factors (Fisher & Hany, 2021). While ASPD and psychopathy are commonly seen as the same thing, almost all psychopaths fit the criteria for ASPD, but most people with ASPD do not meet the criteria for psychopathy (LaBrode, 2007). In terms of ASPD prevalence in serial murderers, Hickey (2015) argued that “all serial killers exhibit antisocial qualities, but not all in the same manner” (p. 92). Additionally, a diagnosis of ASPD does not mean that a person will become a serial murderer (Simons, 2001); there may be correlation, but there is nothing to suggest causality.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)

Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a cluster-B personality disorder characterized by an inflated sense of self and lack of empathy for others (Mitra & Fluyau, 2021). Like ASPD, NPD is believed to have genetic foundations, though there is also research that suggests early childhood experiences, including excessive praise, may lead to the development of NPD as an adult (Mitra & Fluyau, 2021). NPD may also be diagnosed in conjunction with other personality disorders. The connection between NPD and serial murderers may be related to the narcissistic individual's complete lack of empathy for other individuals; to the narcissist, other people exist solely to feed their ego and sense of self. Schlesinger (1998) completed a case study of a suspected serial murderer and found that the individual displayed signs of pathological narcissism, which likely contributed to the offender's crimes.

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a cluster-B personality disorder characterized by impairments in self-functioning and in relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals with borderline personality disorder often struggle with maintaining healthy relationships and see things as either wholly good or wholly bad. BPD is believed to derive from a mix of factors, including genetic and socioenvironmental, with extensive childhood trauma being a main risk factor for the development of BPD (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). Regarding BPD and

criminality, BPD is often overrepresented in prisons, particularly in female populations (Sansone & Sansone, 2009). Liebert (1985) noted that there are similarities between personality traits of list serial murderers and personality traits common in those diagnosed with BPD. Liebert also theorized that, for people diagnosed with BPD, murder can act as a means of protecting one's mental health from "disintegration" (p. 196).

Sociological Theories of Serial Murder

Sociological theories have often been used to explain criminal behaviors, including serial murder (Hickey, 2015). Sociological theories attempt to provide explanations for both "human society" (Trueman, 2015, para. 1) and how individuals interact with both the parameters of society and the others living in it. Sociological theories of criminality often encompass broad topics including class, gender, and even political identity (Rock, 2002), though some scholars argue that the sociological study of crime traces its roots to Durkheim's theory of *anomie* (Zembroski, 2011).

Emile Durkheim

Émile Durkheim (1858 - 1917) is often considered to be the father of sociology (Zembroski, 2011). While Durkheim was primarily concerned with the impact of modernity on society, his theories have influenced several modern sociological theories, including strain theory and control theory (Zembroski, 2011). Durkheim's most relevant book is arguably *Suicide* (1897). In *Suicide*, Durkheim (1897, 2002) argued that suicide, and by extension criminal or abnormal behavior, often occurred because of a breakdown

of moral or collectivist values within a society. Durkheim's (1897, 2002) theories often took on a classicist approach like that of Marx or Engels, focusing on the influence of class and labor divisions and their impact (Zembroski, 2011). Derived from these works, the concept of *anomie*, or a lack of norms, later informed Merton's sociological theories, which include strain theory and Merton's theory of deviance (Zembroski, 2011).

Strain Theory

Strain theory holds that individuals commit crimes or criminal activity due to stress, or strain, that they are unable to properly cope with (Agnew, 1985, 2013; Campbell, 2020; Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Originally proposed by Merton, the original strain theory was criticized in the 1970s due to a perceived lack of empirical validity (Campbell, 2020; Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Strain theory was later revised by Agnew (Agnew, 1985, 2013; Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). General strain theory (GST) holds the same tenements of original strain theory, namely that people unable to cope with stress may commit crimes because of that strain (Agnew, 1985, 2013). One key difference between the original theory and Agnew's revised version is that, while strain theory originally solely focused on strain because of goal-seeking, Agnew (1985) noted that strain can also be caused by pain-blocking behavior (Cullen & Wilcox, 2013). Agnew (1985) held that strain because of pain-blocking behavior occurs when an "individual is walking away from an aversive situation and his or her path is blocked (p. 154); because of this stress, an individual may react violently or criminally.

A common critique of GST is based on the question of why some people who encounter strain engage in criminal activity while others who encounter the same type of strain do not (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Agnew (2013) argued that different factors influence the impact strain may have on a person, including social support, the presence of positive or negative coping skills, and the presence of negative influences, among others. Additionally, the type of strain experienced may have an impact on a criminal reaction (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010); these could include adverse childhood experiences, victimization, and other stressors (Agnew, 2013). GST also considers potential predispositions to crime or criminal behavior, such as negative peer associations (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). GST has been found to be empirically sound in several different studies (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). In relation to serial murder, many serial murderers experience strains, or stressors, early in life, including parental abandonment, little to no social bonds, extensive abuse, and early antisocial and criminal behavior (Hickey, 2015).

Neutralization Theory

Neutralization theory argues that offenders often attempt to make their behaviors appear less deviant using different techniques (Dziak, 2021; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Offenders may utilize techniques of neutralization to justify their crimes, including denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Most techniques of neutralization involve denying some aspect of the crime, whether that may be the role they played in it, the severity of the injury, or the amount of harm done to the victim(s) (Sykes & Matza,

1957). It should be noted that denial of responsibility does not only refer to the literal sense of an offender denying that they committed the crime, but also to the offender placing the cause of their behavior on someone else (Dziak, 2021; Sykes & Matza, 1957). This has been seen with serial murderers, who often blame internal forces that they could not resist as the cause of their murder(s).

While initially used to explain delinquent behavior, neutralization theory has been applied to understanding the behavior of serial murderers (James & Gossett, 2018; Pettigrew, 2020). In separate studies, both James and Gossett (2018) and Pettigrew (2018) found that all serial murderers use at least some forms of neutralization, either to successfully exist in society as a serial murderer or to deal with negative emotions they may suffer from after committing their crimes. Pettigrew (2020) also found that serial murderers may use techniques of neutralization outside of the killing process, revealing "some personal sense of mitigation, excuse, or justification for the murder(s) they have committed" (p. 70).

While neutralization theory has been used in studies extensively and holds some merit, it is not without its criticisms (Hickey, 2015). Hickey (2015) argued that, to successfully validate neutralization theory, one would have to prove that "an offender first neutralized his moral beliefs before drifting into violent behavior" (p. 125), which may not be possible due to the inability to gain undoubtedly true information or data from an offender about his or her thoughts prior to the crime occurring.

Trauma-Control Model

With his trauma-control Model, Hickey (2015) argued that there are a multitude of factors that eventually culminate in someone being a serial killer, including predispositional factors and traumatizations, or "the destabilizing event(s) that occur in the lives of serial offenders" (p. 148). Traumatizations can include several factors, such as abuse, parental conflict, and other events. The traumatizations may serve as a triggering event for later adult offending, but it is important to note that not everyone who experiences an adverse childhood becomes a serial murderer. Hickey (2015) also noted this, arguing that trauma may be exacerbated by other issues mentioned in the trauma-control model, like facilitators and trauma reinforcements. For serial murderers, "the most common effect of childhood traumatization manifested is rejection, including rejection by relatives and parent(s)" (Hickey, 2015, p. 149). When faced with situations that remind the individual of times during these childhood traumatizations where he or she felt like they lacked control, the individual may overcompensate for that feeling by overcompensating in other areas to gain control. Coupled with low self-esteem, violent tendencies, and facilitators such as drugs or alcohol, an individual may be driven to exercise control in the extreme by controlling whether someone else lives or dies. The primary goal for the serial offender is to maintain "control of oneself, of others, and of one's surroundings" (Hickey, 2015, p. 150).

The trauma-control model is praised due to its broadness and lack of focusing solely on sexual serial murderers; because of its focus on psychosocial aspects, it does

not limit or specify based on the types of predispositions, traumatizations, or facilitators an offender may have experienced or used (Petherick & Petherick, 2009). Additionally, the trauma-control model has been used previously in empirical studies (Arrigo & Purcell, 2001; Arndt et al., 2004) with success.

Fractured Identity Syndrome

Initially proposed by Holmes et al. (1999), fractured identity syndrome essentially argues that a traumatic experience or event causes a fracture in an offender's personality, which eventually causes a fractured identity. The individual may experience other traumas or events later in life that compound the issue, but the original traumatization often occurs in early childhood (Holmes et al., 1999). The damage that occurs because of the fracture may change or 'darken' the offender's personality, though this shift may not be noticed by anyone except for the offender despite the hidden personality often being destructive or harmful (Holmes et al., 1999). The strain of hiding the true personality may be taxing on the offender, which eventually culminates in the release of energy through murder. Holmes et al. (1999) argued that only the offender's victims see the serial murderer's true identity, which is why, ultimately, the offender must eliminate them.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) ."are stressful, traumatic events such as physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and physical and emotional neglect" (Kennedy, 2021, para. 1). ACEs transgress race and gender, though children in impoverished or

lower-class households are more likely to experience them. Most forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, and sexual, are considered ACEs, though ACEs also include witnessing domestic violence, a parent having a mental illness, parental absence (whether through incarceration, death, or abandonment), and substance misuse in the household (Center for Disease Control, 2021; Kennedy, 2021). While certain types of stress are necessary and beneficial to a child's ongoing brain and socioemotional development, extreme stress may impact a child's cognitive, behavioral, and socioemotional abilities, eventually causing long-term problems (Kennedy, 2021). The more ACEs a child experiences, the higher their chance of encountering chronic issues, whether health-related or behavioral, later in life.

Multiple researchers have found that serial murderers, regardless of gender, often experience higher rates of childhood traumatizations, including ACEs (Harrison et al., 2015; Hickey, 2015; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Harrison et al. (2015), in a review of 64 female serial murderers, found that "one in ten FSKs [female serial killers] experienced severe childhood illness or trauma" (p. 398) while also noting that physical and sexual abuse were overrepresented in the population (14.1 percent of offenders experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse, compared to the national average of 9 percent of children experiencing physical abuse and 1 percent of children experiencing sexual abuse). Schurman-Kauflin (2000) theorized that extensive abuse and abandonment as a child may have influenced the mentality of offenders as an adult, creating a 'hurt before you get hurt' mindset.

Animal Cruelty

The role of animal cruelty in the background of a serial murderer or offender is something that has been researched and established (Hickey, 2015; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Wright & Hensley, 2003). Considered to be part of the Macdonald triad, three behaviors that can serve as a predictor for adult antisocial behavior (Hickey, 2015), animal cruelty "encompasses a range of behaviors harmful to animals, from neglect to malicious killing" (The Humane Society of the United States, n.d., para. 1). Hickey (2015) argued that most serial killers tend to partake and enjoy in "the vivisection and exploration of dead animals" (p. 141), though some also torture live ones for pleasure.

Researchers have argued that animal cruelty may occur due to emotional transference. Essentially, animals are used as scapegoats for the offender's feelings as the source of the negative emotions was often out of reach (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000; Wright & Hensley, 2003). In a study on the graduation of animal cruelty to serial murder, Wright and Hensley (2003) detailed the patterns of five male serial murderers. In almost every case profiled, the techniques used to torture and kill the animals were the same techniques the offenders used on their human victims. Animal cruelty is also not exclusive to gender. Both male and female serial murderers reported a history of childhood animal cruelty. Schurman-Kauflin (2000) noted that almost every female serial murderer profiled in the study engaged in some form of animal cruelty, with cats being the most frequent victims. Per the female offenders, cats were chosen because they were less likely to be able to injure the offender, which mirrors females being more likely to

choose latent victims than male offenders (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Animal cruelty often graduates to violence against others, with murder being the most extreme example of that.

Fantasies

Sexual fantasies are a common experience for most adults, and most sexual fantasies are not deviant or abnormal (Joyal et al., 2015). Sexual fantasies exist on a spectrum, with sexually deviant fantasies existing on the extreme part of that spectrum. The role of deviant or paraphilic sexual fantasies and their role in offending has been an interest in researchers since the late 1980s (Baughman et al., 2014; Brineman & McAnulty, 2020; Gilbert & Daffern, 2017; Mangiilo, 2010; Murray, 2017; Prentky et al., 1989; Stein, 2004). Prentky et al. (1989) found that there is a positive relationship "between fantasy and repetitive assaultive behavior" (p. 890), noting that offenders often escalate because acting out the actual fantasy never lives up to the feeling of the actual fantasy itself. In like with Prentky et al. (1989), Brineman and McAnulty (2020) stated that the "severity of their [offenders] deviant fantasies may escalate as these perpetrators require increasing degrees of control or victim suffering to achieve sexual gratification" (para. 3). Fantasies also serve as a model for how offenders perpetuate their crimes, acting as both a motivation and a roadmap (Gilbert & Daffern, 2017; Murray, 2017; Stein, 2004).

Fantasies play a large role in the development of a serial murderer (Hickey, 2015; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Hickey (2015) includes fantasies in his trauma-control model

of serial murder, arguing that fantasies derived from the offender's low self-esteem eventually develop into increasingly deviant and violent fantasies, which eventually lead to the offender committing homicide. Similarly, Schurman-Kauflin (2000) argued that there is something like a tornado effect with female offenders. Powerlessness leads to rage, which leads to fantasies, which lead to violence, which leads to increasingly deviant or aggressive fantasies, which culminate in murder (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). The act of committing the crime may remove the pressure of the fantasy, but the actual act will never live up to the fantasy, and so the cycle continues.

Gender and Violence

When the phenomenon of serial murder first began to be studied by professionals and law enforcement in the modern age, the concept of gender was not a variable that needed to be included unless considering offender victimology. Serial murderers were perceived to be only male until the mid-1980s, when the first study on female serial murderers was completed (Hickey, 1986). The disregard of females operating as serial murderers can have its roots in many places, but most believe that it stems from a social reluctance to see females as beings capable of violence (Hale & Bolin, 1998; Hickey, 2015; Holmes, Hickey, & Holmes, 1991; Gurian, 2011; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Mallicoat, 2019; Pearson, 2021; Ramsland, 2007; Telfer, 2017; Vronsky, 2007, 2018;). Most of this is due to the way that different genders express different kinds of violence and because numerous social psychologists have viewed violence through a masculine lens, defining aggression in masculine ways that tend to exclude feminine experiences (Pearson, 2021).

Socially, aggression is usually synonymous with violence, though there are generally two types of aggression as seen by researchers: expressive aggression and instrumental aggression (Sechrist & White, 2011; Gavin & Porter, 2015; Pearson, 2021). Expressive aggression is often "impulsive" and meant to vent "bottled-up feelings" (Pearson, 2021, p. 36) that the aggressor may be experiencing at the time, while instrumental aggression is aggression that is "cool and calculating" (Pearson, 2021, p. 36). Women are generally seen as only being capable of expressive aggression, generally provoked by an abusive situation (Holmes, Hickey, and Holmes, 1991; Vronsky, 2007). It is reactionary violence, caused by someone else, whereas instrumental aggression is solely caused by the aggressor in a manner that leaves little thought to his or her intentions. The instrumental aggressor plans his or her actions—there is minimal, if any, emotion involved. Women who display acts of expressive aggression are still playing into society's expectations of what female violence should look like.

Social norms and customs do have roles in the ways that people learn to display their anger, as aggression is undoubtedly a human trait rather than a gendered one. Aggression generally follows the course of the effect/danger ratio, which essentially states that "the benefits of the aggression will be weighed against the social, physical, and psychological consequences of the aggression" (Sechrist & White, 2011, p. 90). For women, the negative consequences of displaying instrumental aggression are much higher than those of men who display instrumental aggression: "Displays of overt direct aggression are not acceptable feminine behaviors and can be met with social consequences. Indirect aggression often goes unnoticed and unsanctioned, in part due to

the aggressor's anonymity" (Sechrist & White, 2011, p. 90). These social consequences often alter how aggression is displayed from direct to indirect, and this is frequently seen in the behavioral patterns of adolescent boys and girls. Boys are more likely to engage in direct aggression where they get into physical altercations with others, while girls are more often prone to indirect aggression where they gossip and create rumors about the individuals of scorn (Pearson, 2021), with its aim being "to harm the victim, often by damaging the victim's social status or self-esteem" (Gavin & Porter, 2015, p. 34). In short, indirect aggression in girls and women is socially accepted and even encouraged by peer groups and authority figures:

> By emphasizing the importance of 'being nice' and maintaining relationships, parents teach girls that relational disruption is bad, leaving the way open for indirect aggression as a tool for both dealing with aggressive desires and maintaining the social façade of 'niceness.' (Gavin & Porter, 2015, p. 36)

That is not to say that indirect aggression is less harmful than direct aggression; in certain instances, indirect aggression can be more harmful than a simple physical altercation would be. Pearson (2021) noted instances where indirect aggression in the form of rumors led to women being killed by male family members in honor killings meant to correct the damage and shame that the woman had brought on the family.

Another concern within the scope of gender and violence is the level of attention that scholars and researchers pay to it. Prior to feminism's second wave in the 1970s, "of 314 studies of human aggression …, only 8 percent focused on women or girls" (Pearson, 2021, p. 39). In fact, feminism may have played a role in the feminine inclusion in

aggression studies. Mallicoat (2019) noted that “the inclusion of women and girls in criminological research was catalyzed by the second wave of the feminist movement in the late 60s and early 70s” (p. 25) and that “for decades criminologists by and large ignored the gender gap (or dropped girls and women from the analysis as many early longitudinal studies did), which had the effect of normalizing high levels of male violence” (p. 27) and essentially providing female violence to be nonexistent.

As with Krafft-Ebing’s theories regarding the relationship between sex and violence, there is a chicken-and-egg paradigm to be found in the relationship between social norms and accepting the female capacity for cruelty. Society deems women incapable of violence, and, later, researchers alter their studies to prove this. Researchers alter their studies due to gender norms, and these results—which prove men to be the main aggressors—later reinforce them. The inclusion of females and girls in aggression studies threatens the social norms and accepted conventions surrounding femininity, and, despite thousands of years showing the contrary, societies, especially Westernized ones, still have an aversion to seeing women as being capable of violence. That aversion may be a link to why early criminologists often categorized female criminals as more masculine than feminine, with Cesare Lombroso (2006) explicitly stating that “all female criminals tend to be masculine” (p. 55), with the only exception being a poisoner.

Gender and Serial Murder

Most serial killers are male, though the occurrence of female serial murderers has been increasing with time, particularly since the 1970s (Hickey, 2015). Hickey (2015)

estimated that 17% of all serial murderers were female, while Aamodt et al. (2020) had a more conservative estimate at 11%. Outside of gender, male and female serial murderers differ in multiple domains, including demographics, motivations, methods, and behaviors (Aamodt et al., 2020).

Differences Between Male and Female Murderers

The question as to why men and women kill so differently has been posed by countless professionals, and, yet, there is no clear answer. Harrison et al. (2019) used an evolutionary theoretical framework to tackle this question, arguing that male and female serial murderers fit the historical models of the male "hunter" and the female "gatherer." The male serial murderers hunted their victims by killing strangers they stalked, while the female serial murderers gathered their victims from those around them, including romantic partners, parents, friends, and children (Harrison et.al., 2019). Their research was centered on the argument that the differences between male and female serial murderers "may stem from sex-specific tendencies derived from labor divisions in the ancestral environment whereby men hunted animals as prey and women gathered nearby grains and plants as food" (Harrison et.al., 2019, p. 296). Using Murderpedia.org as a resource, as well to direct to other sources, all hypotheses were supported, validating their "hunter-gatherer" hypothesis. Harrison et al. (2019) found that "male serial killers stalked and "hunted" victims more frequently" (p. 304), while "FSKs [female serial killers] were more likely to kill a spouse or long-term partner and were 6 times more likely than MSKs [male serial killers] to kill relatives" (p. 305). Additionally, their research continued to

support previously known information about the victimology differences between male and female serial murderers—victims of male serial murderers were more likely to be adult individuals of the opposite sex (Harrison et.al., 2019). While the evolutionary approach should be considered and revisited in further research, it is also important to consider whether the differences between male and female serial murderers are mainly rooted in the ways aggression and violence have become gendered in modern Westernized societies. If indirect aggression is preferred over direct aggression for females as previous research has shown, then one can postulate that indirect murder is often seen as more palatable than direct murder.

Demographics

Demographically, male and female serial murderers differ in more categories than sex alone. Offenders may also differ in categories such as age, occupation, and location of the crimes, though there are aspects where male and female serial murderers do share some similarities (Hickey, 2015; Keeney & Heide, 1994).

Age

Per Aamodt et al. (2020), most serial murderers being killing at an average age of 28, though female serial murderers are, on average, older than their male counterparts at the onset of criminal activity.

Occupation

Male serial murderers and female serial murderers are likely to have jobs that prescribe to their specific gender; female serial murderers are more likely to have more feminine jobs, while males are more likely to engage in blue-collar work (Hickey, 2015; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). It should also be noted that male serial murderers served in the military at a higher average than the general population, though data on female serial murderers serving in the armed forces is unknown (Aamodt et al., 2020).

Location

Keeney and Heide (1994) found that female serial murderers often committed their crimes in Southern states, notably Florida, which had the highest offender population for that study. Notably, male serial murderers were more likely to commit their crimes in the Pacific Northwest (Hickey, 2015; Keeney & Heide, 1994).

Race

Historically, most serial murderers, both male and female, have been white (Aamodt et al., 2020; Hickey, 2015; Keeney & Heide, 1994), though there is an increasing percentage of minority serial murderers, particularly black serial murderers (Aamodt et al., 2020; Hickey, 2015). Aamodt et al. (2020) in their annual Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database report, noted that “the majority of serial killers were African Americans (50.8%) followed by Whites (36.5%), Hispanics (10.5%), Asians (1.8%), and

Native Americans (.4%)" (p. 34). It should be noted that motivation also typically differs between races; white offenders are more likely to kill while they enjoy it, while black and minority offenders are more likely to kill through "Gang or Criminal Enterprise" (Aamodt et al., 2020, p. 35) activity.

Victimology

Male and female serial murderers often differ in victimology (Hale & Bolin, 1998; Harrison et al., 2019; Hickey, 2015; Holmes et al., 1991; Gurian, 2011; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Kenney & Heide, 1994) based on several different factors. Female serial murderers are more likely to choose latent victims with whom they have a personal relationship with, while male serial murderers are more likely to victimize strangers (Hale & Bolin, 1998; Harrison et al., 2015, 2019; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Essentially, female serial murderers choose victims who are already helpless, while their male offenders choose victims and make them helpless throughout the commission of their crime. These victims could be incapacitated by illness or injury or defenseless due to age, whether extremely young or older than the offender (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Relationships with their victims are common for female serial murderers, with Hickey (2015) noting that one-third of female serial murderers profiled exclusively killed family members, "whereas about half of all these offenders murdered at least one member of their family" (p. 318). Hickey (2015) also argued that there has been an increase in the number of female serial murderers who participate in stranger-killing.

A further difference in serial murderer victimology between gender is the facilitation and risk of the victim (Hickey, 2015). The concepts of victim precipitation or victim facilitation are not meant to imply that the victims are to blame for their victimization, though both acknowledge that there are actions, whether intentional or unintentional, that a victim may take which increases their likelihood of victimization (Daigle, 2016). An example of this would be an individual who engages in sex work; while the offender is not intentionally seeking victimization, their behavior makes it more likely for them to be victimized. Hickey (2015) argued that "female offenders almost exclusively killed victims who were categorized as low-facilitation homicides" (p. 323). The victims of male serial murders may often precipitate or facilitate their victimization through their behaviors, primarily if they engage in sex work or other risky behaviors.

Additionally, victim demographics differ between male and female serial murderers (Aamodt et al., 2020). Female serial murderers are equally as likely to kill both male and females, while male serial murderers were more likely to have victims of one sex, most often females (Aamodt et al., 2020). Both Aamodt et al. (2020) and Hickey (2015) noted that female serial murderers were more likely to kill victims within any age range, notably children and the elderly, than their male counterparts, who often stuck to one specific age range.

Methods and Motives

At this point in the study of serial murder, it is well known that male and female serial murderers kill in different ways and for different reasons. The same can be said for

females who kill within a couple dynamic, especially when the partner is a male. While the reigning stereotype for male serial murderers is that they kill solely to fulfill sexual fantasies that often involve masochistic acts, that is not necessarily true. Per Hickey (2015) the top five motives for male serial murderers are delineated as follows: “sex sometimes - 47 percent, control sometimes - 31 percent, money sometimes - 18 percent, enjoyment sometimes - 15 percent, sex only - 8 percent” (p. 275). Hickey (2015) argued that the reason most people believe serial murder to be synonymous with lust murder is because of their prevalence in pop culture, leading the public to mistake the two as mutually inclusive. On the contrary, female serial murderers are often stereotyped as being Black Widows who kill their husbands for comfort, profit, or revenge. Where the male serial murderer is violent and sexually deviant, the female serial murderer is cool and calculated, justifying murder based on the amount of profit it provides. This preconception is somewhat proven by statistical analysis, with the following constituting the top five motives for female serial murderers: “money sometimes - 47 percent, money only - 26 percent, control sometimes - 14 percent, enjoyment sometimes - 11 percent, sex sometimes - 10 percent” (Hickey, 2015, p. 324). While the motive is one of the most significant ways in which male and female serial murderers differ, the method is the most apparent and immediately obvious.

Female murderers are more likely to use poisons to kill their victims, whereas male murderers are more likely to use more personal means of violence, including guns, knives, and strangling (Hickey, 2015). There is a degree of removal when women kill with poison—one noted female serial murderer was once quoted as saying that she was

able to rationalize one of her murders by telling herself that the poison killed her victim and that she did not (Vronsky, 2007)—that is not present when a male serial murderer kills someone by stabbing them, shooting them, or strangling them.

Monikers

The media's usage of monikers when discussing serial murderers is a controversial practice, one that often ends up belittling or trivializing both the offender and his actions. This is never clearer when contrasting the monikers given to male female serial murderers and the monikers given to female serial murderers (Harrison et al., 2019; Hickey, 2015; Vrosnky, 2007, 2018). Harrison et al. (2019) noted that the monikers given to female serial murderers often placed grater prominence on the gender of the offender than monikers given to male serial murderers, which they attributed to both the media and the offender's subversion of typical gender norms. These monikers could also highlight the offender's physical appearance, with Wuornos often being characterized as a monster, in part because of her physical appearance (Harrison et al., 2019). Conversely, "over ¾ of men had nicknames that underscored their gruesome MO versus slightly more than ½ of FSK's nicknames" (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 305-6). Hickey (2015) showed clear examples of this. Male serial murderers had monikers like "BTK Strangler," "Bedroom Basher," "Vampire Killer," and "Slavemaster" (p. 236-7) compared to women, who had monikers such as "Beautiful Blonde Killer," "Duchess of Death," "Giggling Grandma," and "Damsel of Death" (p. 331). Hickey (2015) also noted that monikers are often sexist or based on the offender's gender, arguing that these nicknames may be

based, in part, in a reluctance to view female serial murderers the same as male serial murderers in terms of dangerousness or lethality.

Female Murderers in Killing Teams

Within killing teams, males are much more likely to take a dominant role in the dynamic (Hickey, 2015; Vrosnky, 2007, 2018). While male-male killing partnerships are common and killer groups do occur, as in the case of the Manson family, male-female partnerships occur more often (Vronsky, 2007). Within killing partnerships, women often commit far more brutal crimes than they would have alone, with more elements of sexual motivation being present (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007, 2018). Most people within a killing team may have never killed if it were not for meeting their partner.

Within male-female killing partnerships, most women indicated that they engaged in the murders to please their partners (Gurian, 2011; Thompson & Ricard, 2009; Vronsky, 2007, 2018). Thompson and Ricard (2009) used a radical feminist theoretical framework to examine the case studies of three offenders: Martha Beck, Myra Hindley, and Karla Homolka. All three women had a male partner, and, apart from Martha Beck, the male acted as the leader in the relationship (Hickey, 2015; Thompson & Ricard, 2009). The study found that all three women participated in the crimes to maintain their relationships and please their partner (Thompson & Ricard, 2009). In most scenarios, the male partner may have deviant fantasies regarding other individuals, including keeping women as sex slaves or torturing women, which the submissive female partner helps fulfill (Vronsky, 2007; Ramsland, 2007). Gurian (2011) found that female partnered

murderers are more likely to engage in pleasure-motivated murders, while solo female serial murderers are more likely to kill for a purpose, such as financial gain. Perhaps because of this, the crimes committed by team murderers are often more violent, with higher occurrences of mutilation and torture (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007).

Victimology between solo serial murderers and team serial murderers also differs (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015). Team serial murderers mostly target female strangers, though team murderers are more likely to target both genders than solo male murderers (Hickey, 2015). Team murderers may also have more victims than their solo counterparts. Gurian (2011) found that team murderers had a victim average of eight to ten compared to solo murderers, who had an average of seven to nine victims. Contrastingly, the span of their crimes is often less than that of solo serial murderers (Vronsky, 2007).

Myth of the Compliant Victim

The myth of the compliant victim can be traced back to a 1992 study completed by FBI agent Roy Hazelwood, forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz, and Janet Warren. In that article, Hazelwood et al. (1992) defined a compliant victim as a person who enters "into a voluntary relationship but are manipulated into sadomasochistic activities for an extended time" (p. 14). Victims will become compliant through extensive abuse, whether physical, sexual, or emotional (Hazelwood et al., 1992). While the myth of the compliant victim is derided by contemporary professionals (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007), its

roots can be traced back to an unwillingness to accept female criminality and the rare occurrence of the female partner acting as the dominant one (Hickey, 2015).

While there are undoubtedly some cases where women were victimized and forced to do things they did not want to do, painting every female offender as a compliant victim removes responsibility and culpability from the offender. This is harmful to numerous people, including the victims' families. The myth of the compliant victim may have had an impact on offender sentencing. Females, on average, received lesser charges and lighter sentences than their male counterparts (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015).

Summary and Conclusions

Since the 1970s, research on serial murder has gained momentum. While most historical research focused solely on male serial murders, the inclusion of female serial murderers has revealed new insights into their behavior and how they differ from their male counterparts (Gurian, 2011; Harrison et al., 2015, 2019; Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007, 2018). Much of what is known about female serial murderers has been discovered through the application of typologies and methodologies originally developed for male offenders. Still, the comparison of what is known about female offenders and what is known about male offenders shows a stark absence of information. An increased understanding of the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers may increase understanding of female serial murderers themselves.

While professionals know that females kill for different reasons, use different methods, and are often served with different punishments (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015;

Holmes et al., 1991; Jurik & Winn, 1990; Vronsky, 2007, 2018), female serial murderers are still delegitimized and dismissed in varying ways, from monikers (Harrison et al., 2015; Hickey, 2015) to sentencing (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015). By drawing further attention to and increasing knowledge of female serial murderers, this analysis may be able to shed light on how and why these women become serial murderers.

In Chapter 3, a description of the study is provided. The role of the qualitative researcher is also explained, as is the study methodology. The study methodology includes information on the participant selection process, the coding method used, and the plan for data analysis. Also referenced are issues of trustworthiness, researcher biases, and study limitations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. Psychosocial characteristics refer to the influences of the psychosocial environment on an individual's thoughts and behaviors (Vizzoto et al., 2013; Walker & Hepp, 2016) and often are related to psychosocial factors (American Psychological Association, 2020). These factors can include childhood experiences, including trauma; mental illness; relationships; adult experiences; and social pressures. One of the key psychosocial factors that differ between men and women is the mode of aggression (Yourstone et al., 2008), which could have a large influence on the differences in how men and women kill their victims (Holmes et al., 1991; Vronsky, 2007). Other psychosocial factors could provide information on why these individuals became serial murderers, possibly providing data on potential risk factors.

In this chapter, the rationale for conducting the study is restated. Additionally, the role and responsibilities of the researcher are outlined and explained. The methodology, including criteria for participant selection and data collection methods utilized, is explained, as are issues of trustworthiness and any ethical concerns. Ethical concerns may relate both to the role of the researcher and any potential limitations that arise due to the study's methodology.

Research Design and Rationale

The study is designed with the intent of answering the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers?

Research Question 2: How do the psychosocial characteristics of solo female serial murderers differ from offenders who have one or more partners?

The phenomenon focused on is the female serial murderer. Specifically, the psychosocial characteristics of the female serial murderer were analyzed and grouped using a grounded theory analysis. Grounded theory analysis allows the development of theories from information discovered in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and is suited to researching phenomena (Birks et al., 2019; Chun Tie et al., 2019).

Role of the Researcher

In this study, the primary role of the researcher revolved around data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation. Because of the population assessed in the study, access to live participants was unlikely and not attempted. Data was collected from secondary sources, with the primary source of data being the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database. This is contrary to the traditional role of the qualitative researcher, which primarily involves conducting interviews with live participants and making observations

from those interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The usage of secondary data analysis creates and solves issues concerning the validity of the study.

There is no personal relationship negatively impacting the nature of the study. The researcher has no personal connection to female serial murderers and does not know anyone with a personal connection to any female serial murderers. Additionally, because live participants will not be utilized for data collection, there are no concerns about a potentially abusive power dynamic. Though there may be minimal concerns for a power dynamic, there are additional concerns for bias because of the usage of secondary data analysis. The data may reflect biases held by the individuals who collected the data originally. These potential biases were managed by data triangulation, which involves gathering and verifying data from multiple sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The subject of the study may also introduce the possibility of additional biases. Whether intentional or not, researchers may hold biases about serial murderers. In the case of female serial murderers, these biases may be additionally impacted because of the offender's gender.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The participation sample for this study was purposive in nature due to the subject matter. All the participants in the study were female serial murderers, whose crimes fit the FBI's (2008) definition of serial murder. The exclusion of male serial murderers is also appropriate because this study focuses solely on the psychosocial characteristics of

female serial murderers. Additionally, female serial murderers from outside of the United States and Canada were excluded from this study due to offenders from other countries not being included in the primary data resource, the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database.

Participants are known to meet the selection criteria for the study as all participants were gathered from the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database. Six solo female serial murderers and six females who were members of a killing team were selected for data analysis based on Creswell and Creswell's (2018) estimate of the amount of study participants needed for data saturation, which occurs when new insights stop being revealed due to the inclusion of new data. This sampling strategy is appropriate for this study due to constraints associated with studying serial murder. While live access to participants would be preferred, female serial murderers are notoriously reclusive and rare (Hickey, 2015), leading to the usage of secondary analysis.

Instrumentation

Per Creswell and Creswell (2018), the primary instrument in a qualitative study is the researcher. Because the researcher is the one who collects, analyzes, and interprets all data in the study, I served as the key instrument. Due to the central role the researcher plays in a qualitative study, it is also important to constantly examine any observations or conclusions for bias. Maintaining a uniform process for analyzing and coding data helped with limiting any potential researcher biases in the results of the study.

In addition to the researcher, another instrument utilized is a self-developed offender fact sheet, which was used to assist with the process of organizing participant characteristics. The fact sheet assisted with categorizing participants based on personality characteristics and background, with categories such as previous criminal activity, mental health history, and childhood experiences. The fact sheet not only helped with keeping the information on each study participant organized, but it also assisted with developing themes between separate participants. If participants had similar experiences or psychosocial factors, this was made clear when comparing fact sheets.

Data Collection

All the sources of data collected for the study were secondary in nature. Due to the rarity of female offenders and the unlikelihood of being both able to speak to them in person and gain a substantial amount of information through live interviews, data was collected from past studies, case files, and newspapers relating to the offenses. If applicable, primary documents like police records were requested directly from applicable agencies and departments using the Freedom of Information Act. Information was also collected from peer-reviewed publications found in journals such as Science Direct, EBSCO, and SAGE Journals.

The primary source of information on serial murderers was from the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, which has been gathering serial killer data since 1992 and has information on 5630 Canadian and American subjects, with 185 variables per subject (Florida Gulf Coast University, 2021). The Radford/FGCU Serial Killer

Database was first founded from a forensic psychology course where students had to create a timeline based on a serial killer's life, including information on the killer's demographics and crimes (Florida Gulf Coast University, 2021); this information was later stored and eventually expanded into an online database hosted at FGCU (Florida Gulf Coast University, 2021). In 2012, databases created by several forensic professionals—including Eric Hickey, James Alan Fox, Michael Newton, Janet McLellan, John White, Enzo Yaksic, Gerard Labuschagne, Jack Levin, Bryan Nelson, Kenna Quinet, Cloyd Steiger, and John White—were "merged into the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database" (Florida Gulf Coast University, 2021, p. 6). To determine eligibility for entry to the Database, each potential serial killer is screened with the FBI's definition of what a serial murderer is, and, to ensure credibility and accuracy, all information is screened and cross-referenced as thoroughly as possible (Florida Gulf Coast University, 2021).

Data Analysis Plan

The data used for this research study was collected from the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, public record, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly books. Criteria for inclusion in the study was judged by whether each participant met the FBI's 2008 definition of serial murder. The data utilized is applicable to the study's research question, which are as follows:

RQ1. What are the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers?

RQ2. How do the psychosocial characteristics of solo female serial murderers differ from offenders who have one or more partners?

Because the data that was collected is explicitly related to female serial murderers, both solo and within a team, and their psychosocial characteristics, there is minimal concern of the data not aligning with the study's research questions.

Data collected was manually coded, leading to the development of codes, concepts, categories, and theories (Schroth, 2019). Though coding softwares like NVIVO and MaxQDA exist and are generally useful when coding data for qualitative studies (Basit, 2003; Lauer et al., 2018; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019), there are concerns about its reliability (Lauer et al., 2018). Lauer et al. (2018) argued that softwares may be more likely to cause errors in data analysis, including discrepancies with being able to account for variations and layered meanings in language. Additionally, there may be concerns with researcher bias when using coding software. If a researcher begins coding with preconceived theories or notions, that may be reflected in the data, rather than theories or notions developing from the data as is intended (Lauer et al., 2018). Still, numerous scholars cite that the usage of softwares is preferable to manual coding in studies where there is a large amount of data that needs to be analyzed (Basit, 2003; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Because the sample size for this study is large enough to outweigh the concerns of software error, all data will be manually coded. If there are concerns about time or reliability, a switch to a coding software such as NVIVO may be considered.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility of the study was established through processes such as triangulation, saturation, and reflexivity. While data was primarily gathered from the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, all data was cross-referenced against other sources, including books published by professionals; primary source documents like court records; and peer-reviewed journals. Gathering the data from multiple sources limited any biases from tainting the data in its use in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2019) also noted that study credibility can be derived from data saturation. In a qualitative study, saturation is reached when the integration of new data does not add anything new to the information derived from the study. Data saturation was reached in this study through the number of cases analyzed. The study consisted of six cases of solo female serial murderers and six cases of female murderers who were part of a team or group dynamic, which aligns with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) proposed number of cases needed for data saturation.

One of the most important parts of conducting a qualitative study is managing researcher bias. Researcher bias is ultimately and unfortunately inevitable, but I managed that bias by engaging in self-reflection and maintaining a uniform process of data analysis. The collection of reliable data also helped limit the inclusion of any potential biases on my end.

Transferability

Transferability of a study is established when a researcher provides information that shows the study's methodology and findings are applicable to environments outside of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Generalizability is a somewhat controversial topic, as some qualitative researchers argue that the idea of generalizing findings to a wider group is antithetical to the foundational premises of qualitative research (Carminati, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2021). Because of that, the idea of transferability was developed (Carminati, 2018). Transferability in this study was established through maintaining data triangulation and a strict and uniform coding process, though transferability is often determined by the reader of the study, not the author (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is defined as "the stability of findings over time" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Study dependability is often achieved using an audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), which emphasizes transparency above all else. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed record of all that is done throughout the duration of the study. Korstjens and Moser (2018) argued that a substantial audit trail should contain information related to decisions made throughout the study, notes taken through data analysis, and any potential theories that emerge through the life of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research is concerned with how other researchers could confirm the findings of the current study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The primary way to achieve confirmability is to ensure that all conclusions are reflective of the data rather than information pushed by the author. The neutrality of the researcher needs to be maintained throughout all parts of the study, but especially through data collection and presentation of findings. Confirmability can be achieved through accurately presenting the data collected; in this study, I attempted to convey the words and actions of the offenders studied as accurately as possible. Reflexivity is also integral to confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). While the setting of data collection and relationship with participants may not be as important due to the usage of secondary data analysis, staying aware of any potential biases may help ensure confirmability.

Intracoder Reliability

Intracoder reliability was maintained through the coding process. The data was coded manually. The data was coded and recoded multiple times, with the potential for codes being abandoned or merged throughout the process of data analysis. Repeated analysis helped ensure reliability of codes and themes, though there were concerns to account for, such as fatigue and common human error. Intercoder reliability is not a concern, as I was the only coder in the study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures in qualitative research are important as qualitative research often focuses on the lived experiences of the participants in the study. Common ethical concerns in qualitative research include minimizing conflicts of interest, protecting participant confidentiality, and avoiding participant exploitation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Due to the use of secondary data analysis, there are fewer concerns for ethical misconduct within this study.

Because of the lack of live participants, there is no need for a confidentiality agreement. There are also minimal concerns for an unethical relationship between researcher and participant; most of the offenders studied were incarcerated or deceased, and there was no contact between parties through the duration of the study.

One ethical concern is the usage of the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database. Because the database is not publicly accessible and needs to be requested, written permission was obtained before any data is gathered or analyzed. Additionally, any data that was collected was stored in an encrypted file on a private server for five years after the completion of the study. Permission from Walden University's IRB was requested prior to any data collection of analysis.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology of the proposed qualitative study. After restating the purpose of the study and the research questions, I discussed and

rationalized the study design, including the role of the researcher and different aspects of the methodology. Information related to the study methodology included participation selection logic, instrumentation, and the plan for data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and intracoder reliability, were also discussed. I ended the chapter with a focus on any potential ethical concerns related to the research study.

In Chapter 4, I will provide the results of the study, as well as the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Serial murder is a rare phenomenon, yet it remains a high topic of interest, both for professionals and in the realm of pop culture. Emphasizing the concept of serial murder as a phenomenon is essential. Serial murder is not common, and serial murderers themselves are incredibly rare (Aamodt et al., 2020). While predictions and statistics differ between sources, data shows that the number of active serial murderers operating in the United States peaked in the 1980s, with victim numbers peaking in 1987 (4787 victims) and gradually declining each year (Aamodt et al., 2020). FBI statistics show similar rates—they hypothesize that serial murder comprises less than one percent of all killings in the United States (Aamodt et al., 2020). From 2016 to 2019, the last year with an available data set at the time this research was conducted, Aamodt et al. (2020) estimated that number of victims of serial murderers was eight. However, the authors noted that, due to the common inability to explicitly tie victims to serial murderers until years after the fact, data from recent years should not be seen as concrete proof. The comparison of serial murder with other rates of violent crime is stark. In 2019, the number of violent crimes totaled 1,203,808 (U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, 2020). In breaking that number down, officials reported the following crime statistics- 16,425 murders; 139,815 rapes; 267,988 robberies; and 821,182 aggravated assaults (U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, 2020). While these numbers are all just estimates that are not inclusive of unreported violent crimes, basic math shows that the occurrence of serial killings is statistically insignificant in comparison with other violent offenses.

The reasons for the decline in serial murder may vary—since the 1970s and 1980s, where serial killing was at its peak, there have been major cultural shifts in terms of personal safety and stranger awareness, as well as advancements in forensic techniques and law enforcement understanding of homicide and the psychology behind it (Vronsky, 2018)—but the general public's fascination with serial killers has not declined in the same rates actual serial killers have. Movies, novels, and true crime series have propelled serial murderers into the spotlight. Ed Gein, with his skin suit and furniture made from human breasts, was the inspiration for classic movies like *Psycho* (1960), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *The Silence of the Lambs* (first as a novel published in 1988 and later as an Academy Award-winning film released in 1991), while the character Dexter Morgan from the series of novels and the television series inspired several individuals to commit murders. These individuals—whether real or fictional—exist in a small facet of society, though they are often glamorized and blown out of proportion, turning serial murder from a rare phenomenon to an everyday occurrence, something a layperson walking down the street must be careful to avoid, women most especially.

The study of serial murder often takes both a sexual and sexualized approach, meaning that the only serial murderer worth knowing, or understanding is a cis-gendered male offender who kills for some form of sexual release or gratification. While sexual gratification is one of the motivations behind most serial murders (Hickey, 2015), focusing primarily on it neglects other aspects and experiences, namely those of female murderers who may kill for other purposes (Harrison et al., 2017). The concept of a female serial murderer, who is not incredibly rare within an already small percentage of

murderers, is an idea that has only recently begun to gather a similar amount of attention as that of their male counterparts. While female serial murderers have been researched since the mid-1980s (Hickey, 1986), a distinct gap becomes obvious when what is known about female serial murderers is compared to what is known about male serial murderers.

Setting

As the study was conducted using secondary data analysis, there were no organizational or personal conditions that influenced participants throughout data collection. All data was collected from pre-existing data sets, public records, or published information, none of which could be impacted, either positively or negatively, by conditions stemming from the setting of the current study.

Demographics

The participants of this study consisted of 12 individuals separated into two groups: solo female serial murderers and female serial murderers who worked in a team with at least one other individual. Age representation was determined based on the offender's age at the time of capture.

Within the group of solo female serial murderers, the ages represented ranged from 19 years at the youngest to 59 years at the oldest, with the median age being 39.5 years. All solo female serial murderers were White (Not Hispanic or Latino). All the solo female serial murderers were residents of the United States at the time of capture. The

states of residence include Florida (two participants), Oklahoma (one participant), Texas (one participant), California (one participant), and North Carolina (one participant).

Within the group of female serial murderers who worked in a team, the ages represented ranged from 22 years at the youngest and 49 years at the oldest, with the median age being 30.5 years. All team female serial murderers were White (Not Hispanic or Latino). All but one offender resided in the United States, with the outlier residing in Canada. For the participants who resided in the United States, the states of residence include Michigan (two participants), California (two participants), and Washington (one participant).

All the participants selected were Caucasian females, so there is no variation between solo murderers and team murderers in terms of race representation. It is worth noting that the serial murderers who worked in a team have a younger age of capture when compared to their solo counterparts. There is a difference of nine years between both median ages. This is consistent with research that shows women who work within killing teams are often caught sooner than women who kill alone (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007).

Case Study 1: Aileen Wuornos

Aileen Wuornos was born in Oakland County, Michigan on February 29, 1956 (Florida Department of Corrections, 2022; Hickey, 2015). Her childhood was marked by patterns of instability and trauma; she was born to a teen mother who abandoned her with her maternal grandparents, and her father was an alleged schizophrenic who committed

suicide while incarcerated for sex crimes against children and attempted murder (Hickey, 2015; Muderpedia, n.d.). Throughout her childhood, Wuornos experienced patterns of sexual and physical abuse. She was sexually abused by her grandfather, had an incestuous relationship with her brother, and engaged in sexual activities in exchange for material items (Murderpedia, n.d.). Wuornos began drinking at age 12 and using drugs at age 13 (Chicago Tribune, 1991). At age 13, she was sexually assaulted and became pregnant; she later gave birth at a home for unwed mothers, and the child was put up for adoption (Hickey, 2015). After being kicked out of her home at 15 (Hickey, 2015), Wuornos began working as a prostitute at the age of 16 (*Wuornos v. State*, 1994).

Outside of the murders, Wuornos had an extensive criminal history. In May 1974, Wuornos was arrested for driving under the influence (DUI), disorderly conduct, and firing a pistol at a moving vehicle (Murderpedia, n.d.). Though these crimes occurred in Colorado, most, if not all, of her other adult crimes were committed in the state of Florida. These arrests speak to both a pattern of stealing and of violent crimes, including armed robbery, grand theft auto, and resisting arrest (Murderpedia, n.d.). Wuornos also served time in prison for armed robbery of a convenience store (Florida Department of Corrections, 2022; Hickey, 2015). While residing in Florida, Wuornos married L. Gratz Fell in 1976. The relationship was abusive, and it was annulled after nine weeks (Murderpedia, n.d.).

Wuornos is believed to have started killing some time in December 1989, and the last body was located in November 1990 (Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, n.d.). The initial cause for Wuornos's killings is one that is surrounded in debate and will likely

always be. Initially, Wuornos claimed that she killed her first victim, 51-year-old Richard Mallory, in self-defense after he attempted to sexually assault her, though the prosecution argued that the murder was committed with robbery as the primary motive (Hickey, 2015; Murderpedia, n.d.; *Wuornos v. State*, 1994). While Mallory does have a history of sexual assault and an alleged diagnosis of sociopathy, this information was not allowed to be stated at trial as it was considered irrelevant (Vronsky, 2007; *Wuornos v. State*, 1994). It should be stated that Wuornos pawned some of Mallory's property after the murder (*Wuornos v. State*, 1994). All of Wuornos's victims were adult white men: David Spears, age 43; Charles Carskaddon, age 40; Peter Siems, age 65; Troy Burress, age 50; Charles "Dick" Humphreys, age 56; and Walter Jeno Antonio, age 62 (Murderpedia, n.d.). The recovered bodies of the victims were occasionally found nude or partially disrobed, and all showed signs of robbery (Hickey, 2015). The cause of death for all victims was shooting (Hickey, 2015; Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, n.d.).

Wuornos initially became involved with the investigation after she and Tyria Moore, her girlfriend, abandoned Siems' car; her fingerprints were later found within the vehicle (Murderpedia, n.d.; *Wuornos v. State*, 1994). On January 9, 1991, Wuornos was arrested, and Tyria Moore agreed to elicit a confession from Wuornos in exchange for prosecutorial immunity (Hickey, 2015; Murderpedia, n.d.; Vronsky, 2007; *Wuornos v. State*, 1994). Wuornos confessed to the murders, though she stipulated that the acts were committed in self-defense and that all the men had tried to assault her physically or sexually while she was working as a prostitute (Hickey, 2015; *Wuornos v. State*, 1994). During the trial of Richard Mallory's murder, prior bad acts were admitted under the

Williams Rule, and prosecutors used her criminal history to show a lifelong pattern of criminal activity (*Wuornos v. State,* 1994). Wuornos was convicted of the murder in January 1992, and forensic psychologists testified that Wuornos could be diagnosed with both borderline personality disorder (BPD) and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), though BPD was the most common diagnosis (CourtTV, 1992). Additionally, one forensic psychologist found signs of "organicity" (CourtTV, 1992), which is an outdated term used to describe "brain damage or dysfunction" (American Psychological Association, 2022). That forensic psychologist also argued that Wuornos's childhood led to her being unable to develop a sense of identity or self-worth, which later led to a deficit in coping skills and decision-making abilities (CourtTV, 1992).

Throughout the following years, Wuornos would either plead no contest or guilty to all murders except for that of Peter Siems, whose body was never found (Murderpedia, n.d.). In total, she received five death sentences (Murderpedia, n.d.). Wuornos told inconsistent stories about the motivations behind the murders, eventually recanting the allegations of self-defense (Vronsky, 2007). Wuornos was executed by lethal injection on October 9, 2002, and her last words were, "I'd just like to say I'm sailing with the Rock and I'll be back like Independence Day with Jesus, June 6, like the movie, big mothership and all. I'll be back" (Vronsky, 2007, p. 178).

Case Study 2: Christine Falling

Christine Falling was born in Taylor County, Florida on March 12, 1963 (Florida Department of Corrections, 2022; Hickey, 2015). Christine was abandoned by her

teenage birth mother shortly after birth and was subsequently adopted, though that family unit was also marked by patterns of instability, leading to Falling and her sister being abandoned at children's refuge in Orlando when she was nine years old (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). Falling experienced health issues throughout her life, including obesity, developmental delays, and epilepsy (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). As a child, Falling displayed patterns of animal cruelty, dropping cats from high places and wringing their necks (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007).

Falling was first married at age fourteen, though the marriage was abusive on both sides. During one argument, Falling threw a 25-pound stereo at her husband (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). The marriage ended within six weeks (Hickey, 2015). After her divorce, Falling began displaying behaviors consistent with a diagnosis of factitious disorder imposed on self (formerly known as Munchausen Syndrome). Factitious disorder is a "serious mental disorder in which someone deceives others by appearing sick, by purposely getting sick or by self-injury" (Mayo Clinic, para. 1, n.d.), with symptoms ranging from mild to severe. Falling would visit the hospital emergency room at least 50 times within a two-year period (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007), claiming injuries such as "snakebites, red spots, bleeding tonsils, dislocated bones, falls, burns from hot grease, and vaginal bleeding" (Vronsky, 2007, p. 285).

Falling began working as a babysitter at age 16 (Vronsky, 2007). The first known murder occurred on February 25, 1980, when Falling was 16 years old (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). Two-year-old Cassidy Johnson was initially stated to have died of encephalitis (Vronsky, 2007). One year later, Falling killed four-year-old Jeffrey Davis,

and the cause of death was ruled to be myocarditis (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). Three days after Davis's death, Falling killed two-year-old Joseph Spring (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). Due to the circumstances of three children dying while in Falling's care, "physicians explored a variety of medical evaluations" (Hickey, 2015, p. 328), though no concrete medical explanation was found. Relatives defended Falling from accusations of wrongdoing (Vronsky, 2007).

Falling later found work caring for 77-year-old Joseph Swindle, though he was found dead on her first day of work (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). Due to his age, no autopsy was performed, and the cause of death was ruled as natural causes (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). In July 1981, Falling was helping babysit eight-month-old Jennifer Daniels, her step-niece; when Falling was left alone with the child, Daniels stopped breathing (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). The cause of death was determined to be sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). In July 1982, Falling killed ten-week-old Travis Coleman (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). Due to the circumstances and deaths surrounding Falling, an autopsy was performed, and it was determined that the child was smothered (Vronsky, 2007). Falling was charged with three counts of murder, though she pleaded guilty and received a sentence of life imprisonment (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007).

Falling did not provide a motive for any of the murders, though scholars have theorized that the murders may have been a result of factitious disorder imposed on another (previously Munchausen Syndrome by proxy) (Vronsky, 2007). While in prison, Falling has received twenty-four violations, including ones for possession of contraband,

arson, and disorderly conduct, among others (Florida Department of Corrections, 2022). Though she became eligible for parole in 2006, she was denied (Hickey, 2015).

Case Study 3: Dorothea Puente

Much of the information surrounding Dorothea Puente's childhood is inconsistent as she was a pathological liar who told multiple stories about her upbringing and throughout her childhood (Vronsky, 2007). What is known is that Dorothea Puente was born on January 9, 1929, in San Bernardino, California (Vronsky, 2007). Born to two alcoholics, Puente was abused by both parents and was often neglected, leading to her having to scavenge for food (Vronsky, 2007). Her mother was also an alleged prostitute (Murderpedia, n.d.). Her father died when Puente was eight, and her mother subsequently lost custody, with Puente and her siblings being placed in an orphanage (Vronsky, 2007). Shortly after, her mother died in a motorcycle accident (Vronsky, 2007).

Puente began working as a prostitute at age 16, and married at age 17 (Vronsky, 2007). While she initially told people that her husband died two years after they married, this is untrue, and the marriage ended after her husband left her (Vronsky, 2007). Her first criminal arrest occurred in 1948, and she married for a second time in 1952 (Vronsky, 2007). The marriage was insatiable and violent, and they divorced in 1966 after fourteen years of marriage (Vronsky, 2007). In 1960, Puente was arrested for managing and owning a brothel, and she served ninety days in jail; immediately after her release, she was arrested for vagrancy and served another 90 days in jail (Murderpedia, n.d.; Vronsky, 2007). In 1966, Puente married Roberto Puente; though the marriage only

lasted two years, she would retain his last name for the rest of her life (Murderpedia, n.d.). Soon after her divorce from Puente, she began managing a boarding house (Vronsky, 2007). In 1976, Puente married for a fourth time, though the marriage only lasted several weeks before annulment (Vronsky, 2007).

While running her boarding house, Puente was convicted of 34 counts of treasury fraud due to continuing to cash benefits checks from a resident who had been incarcerated (Murderpedia, n.d.; Vronsky, 2007). Despite her incarceration, Puente was still receiving SSI benefits due to a 1978 diagnosis of schizophrenia (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). The first alleged murder was that of sixty-one-year-old Ruth Monroe, who was a friend and roommate of Puente (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006). While living with Puente, Monroe's health began to deteriorate, and, on April 28, 1982, she died (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006). Monroe was shown to have overdosed on Tylenol and codeine, which she was prescribed; there were suspicions that Monroe had committed suicide due to the terminal illness of her husband, though the coroner ruled the cause of death as undetermined (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006).

While in prison for grand theft and forgery charges stemming from drugging and stealing from someone, Puente became involved with seventy-seven-year-old Everson Gillmouth (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). In December 1985, after Puente and Gillmouth moved in together and opened a joint checking account that granted Puente access to Gillmouth's SSA benefits and pension, Puente offered a handyman a truck in exchange for building a storage box and dumping it for her (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). On January 1, 1986, a body was found, though it was not

identified as Gillmouth's until 1988 (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006). The cause of death was unable to be determined due to advanced decomposition (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006). Though the "conditions of her federal parole didn't permit her to run a boarding house" (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006), Puente began renting out rooms for Social Security recipients with varying illnesses or ailments (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007).

The timeline for the rest of Puente's murders is difficult to determine, though the disappearance of Bert Montoya alerted social workers and authorities to inconsistencies within Puente's stories and behavior (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). In November 1988, authorities found seven bodies buried in the yard of Puente's San Francisco home: Dorothy Miller, age 64; Benjamin Fink, age 55; Betty Palmer, age 78; James Gallop, age 62; Vera Faye Martin, age 64; Leona Carpenter, age 78; and Bert Montoya, age 55 (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). Puente's victims suffered from several disorders, diseases, or ailments, including schizophrenia, alcoholism, and drug addiction (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006). Per *Puente v. Mitchell* (2006), the bodies had been buried for a minimum of seven weeks and a maximum of two years; due to advanced rates of decomposition, the causes of death were unable to be determined, though the bodies all had traces of flurazepam, a sleeping pill Puente had been prescribed since at least 1985.

Because Puente was not initially a suspect at the time the bodies were found, she was able to leave the property under the guise of getting coffee; instead, Puente fled (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). A warrant was issued for her arrest on November 14, 1988, and she was captured on November 16, 1988, after she approached

an elderly man at a bar, offered to take care of him, and asked to move in with him (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). During the subsequent trial, Puente alleged that, though she may have buried the bodies in her yard, there was no evidence to show that she murdered them instead of them dying of old age or because of their various disabilities (*Puente v. Mitchell,* 2006). Essentially, her defense equated to the idea that, while Puente did steal from her victims, she did not kill them. The prosecution was able to show a financial motive for the crimes, as Puente was receiving approximately $5000 a month from the varying benefits she was stealing from the residents of her illegal boarding house (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). Ultimately, Puente was found guilty of two counts of first-degree murder and one count of second-degree murder; because the jury was unable to decide a verdict on the other six counts, the presiding judge declared a mistrial for those counts (*Puente v. Mitchell,* 2006; Vronsky, 2007). Puente was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, failing to appeal her case in 2006 (*Puente v. Mitchell*, 2006). On March 27, 2011, still incarcerated, Puente died of natural causes (Murderpedia, n.d.).

Case Study 4: Velma Barfield

Velma Barfield was born on October 23 or 29, 1932 in rural North Carolina (Murderpedia, n.d.; Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Barfield was raised in a household with an abusive father. He would beat the children with a "strap" (Vronsky, 2007, p. 192) and was also abusive to her mother, with Velma occasionally witnessing her father's abuse (Vronsky, 2007). Barfield resented her mother for appearing weak and doing

nothing to stop the abuse, though she did not hold similar resentment for her father (Vronsky, 2007). Barfield began stealing at seven, though she was caught after stealing $8 from a neighbor (Vronsky, 2007). At thirteen, she was raped by her father (Vronsky, 2007), though her siblings denied that their father was ever sexually abusive toward Velma or anyone else (Newton, 1990).

In 1949, she married her first husband, Thomas Burke (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). She had a son in 1951 and a daughter in 1953 (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). The family was happy for an extended period, with none of the trauma Barfield experienced as a child, though things began to go downhill after Barfield had a hysterectomy (Vronsky, 2007). Her personality began to change; she became depressed, started using diet pills, and started overspending (Vronsky, 2007). In 1964, Barfield developed an addiction to painkillers, exacerbated by her husband's increasing drinking (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). In 1968, Barfield also became addicted to Valium, and she "eventually became addicted to … Elavil, Sinequan, Tranxene, and Tylenol III" (Vronsky, 2007, p. 197). To support her addictions, Barfield would get different prescriptions from different doctors (Vronsky, 2007). During this period, Barfield's relationship with her husband began to deteriorate, primarily due to her husband losing his job and his increasing dependence on alcohol (Newton, 1990). In April 1969, Burke died of smoke inhalation in a house fire; while Velma initially denied involvement, she later admitted to her son that she may have killed him, though she was unable to remember (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007).

In 1970, Velma married Jennings Barfield, whose last name she would keep for the remainder of her life, though the relationship was unstable due to Velma's drug addiction (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Within a six-month period, Velma overdosed three separate times, and, in 1971, Velma killed Jennings by poisoning him with ant and roach poison, though his death was attributed to natural causes (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Velma later argued that she was able to rationalize the murder by telling herself that Jennings' preexisting conditions, not the poison, killed him (Vronsky, 2007). In April 1973, Barfield pleaded guilty to attempting to pass a bad check, though she was sentenced to six months on a suspended sentence; in November 1973, she was arrested for passing a bad check, though intervention from her children stopped her from being incarcerated (Vronsky, 2007).

In 1974, Barfield was living with her mother, Lillie Bullard, though she later killed her with ant and roach poison after fearing her mother would learn that she received a $1000 loan by forging her signature (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Like with Jennings Barfield, her death was attributed to natural causes (Newton, 1990). In March 1974, Velma was arrested for passing bad checks. This time, she was sentenced to six months in prison, only serving four (Vronsky, 2007).

In 1976, Barfield began working as a maid for Dollie Edwards, whom Barfield later poisoned (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). It was at this time that she met Stuart Taylor, who she would be romantically involved with until his death (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). In 1977, Barfield began working as a home aide for Record and John Lee (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). After forging a check in John Lee's name, Barfield

began poisoning him, and he died on June 3, 1977; though Barfield began poisoning Record Lee, she stopped for unknown reasons and left their employment (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007).

After being caught fraudulently cashing checks in Stuart Taylor's name on three separate occasions, Barfield began poisoning him, and he died on February 4, 1978 (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Taylor's relatives refuted the initial cause of death, gastroenteritis, and a full autopsy was performed, revealing the presence of arsenic (Newton, 1990). Prior to Barfield's arrest for Stuart Taylor's murder, she attempted to poison her daughter and son-in-law (Vronsky, 2007).

During trial, Barfield argued that she only intended to make Taylor sick, not kill him (Vronsky, 2007). Additionally, when being cross-examined, Barfield became aggressive and entered an argument with the prosecutor (Vronsky, 2007). During the trial, psychologists argued that Barfield was sane at the time of the crimes and did not meet the diagnostic criteria for any mental health diagnoses (*State v. Barfield*, 1979). Barfield was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). While on death row, Barfield became a born-again Christian and maintained that she never wanted to kill any of her victims—instead, she stated that she was under the influence of drugs at the time of the crimes (Vronsky, 2007). After her appeals and attempts at clemency were denied, Barfield was executed by lethal injection on November 2, 1984 (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007).

Case Study #5: Genene Jones

Genene Jones was born on June 13, 1950, and was adopted immediately after birth (Murderpedia, n.d.; Vronsky, 2007). While her childhood was relatively happy, she often argued with her mother and older sister, though she was close with her father (Vronsky, 2007). As a child, she would lie compulsively and do other things to obtain attention from her peers, including car racing (Vronsky, 2007). In 1967, Jones's brother died, and her father died in 1968 (Vronsky, 2007). After the death of her father, Jones married Jimmy DeLany, and their first child was born in 1972 (Elkind, 1983; Vronsky, 2007). She and her husband divorced in June 1974, and another brother died of testicular cancer shortly after (Vronsky, 2007). After her brother's death, Jones developed a fear of cancer and would often go to the hospital and doctor, complaining of rashes and wanting to be checked (Vronsky, 2007).

In May 1977, Jones graduated from nursing school as a licensed vocational nurse (LVN), passing her exam with flying colors (Elkind, 1983; Vronsky, 2007). In April 1978, she was fired from her first nursing job after confronting a patient who had complained about her, though she later found work in the pediatric intensive unit (PICU) at Bexar County's Medical Center (Elkind, 1983; Vronsky, 2007). Genene would often make predictions about PICU patients dying, and, as her predictions came true, other nurses began to believe that Jones was killing her patients (Elkind, 1983; Vronsky, 2007). Doctors at the hospital had concerns that someone was overdosing children on Heparin, an anticoagulant, and suspicion quickly fell on Jones (Elkind, 1983). At the Medical

Center, there were 42 deaths between January 1, 1981, and March 17, 1982; 22 of those deaths were Genene's patients, and she was present at the deaths of seven other patients (Vronsky, 2007). In March 1982, as a response to the patient deaths, the hospital's PICU was restructured so that the minimum requirement was to be an RN; as an LVN, Jones was laid off, though no additional action was taken (Vronsky, 2007).

On August 23, 1982, Jones began working for Dr. Kathy Holland, a recently graduated pediatrician who set up an office in Kerrville, Texas (Elkind, 1983; Vronsky, 2007). Though Dr. Holland was aware that there were suspicions about Jones being linked to multiple deaths at Bexar County's Medical Center, she proceeded with hiring her (Elkind, 1983). Additionally, while working for Holland, Jones's nursing license was expired—throughout the duration of her employment with Holland, Jones was practicing without a valid nursing license (Elkind, 1983). After Jones started working at the practice, there were numerous incidents of children going into respiratory arrest (Vronsky, 2007). On September 17, 1982, Chelsea McLellan died after receiving two injections from Jones; later that day, Jones caused the respiratory arrest of another child (Elkind, 1983; Vronsky, 2007). On October 12, 1982, a grand jury was convened to investigate the death of Chelsea McClellan and the injuries of eight other children (Vronsky, 2007).

On February 15, 1984, Jones was convicted of infanticide and sentenced to 99 years in prison for the murder of Chelsea McClellan, as well as an additional 60 years for harming another child (Elking, 1983, 2022; Kaye, 2013; Vronsky, 2007). Bexar County's Medical Center and the University of Texas Medical School destroyed documentation,

limiting the amount of information the grand jury had access to while investigating the Bexar County deaths (Elkind, 1983; Vronsky, 2007). Jones was denied parole for the first time in 1989, though she applied every three years until 2014; during one of her parole hearings, she allegedly confessed to multiple murders, including some that she had never been charged with, though she would later deny this (Elkind, 2022). Her nursing license was not revoked until 2011, and growing concerns about her release began to grow due to a 1977 Texas mandatory release law that was designed to combat prison overcrowding (Bever, 2017; Elkind, 2022; Kaye, 2013).

To prevent her release, Jones was indicted for the 1981 murder of Joshua Sawyer in 2017 (Bever, 2017; Elkind, 2022). Prosecutors alleged that Jones had killed Sawyer with an overdose of Dilantin, an anticonvulsant (Elkind, 2022). Multiple indictments for four other deaths followed, and Jones plead guilty to the murder of Sawyer in exchange for the other four charges being dismissed (Elkind, 2022). Jones was sentenced to life in prison and will be ineligible for parole until she is 87 years old in 2037 (Elkind, 2022).

Case Study #6: Nancy "Nannie" Doss

Nancy "Nannie" Doss was born on November 4, 1905, in Calhoun County, Alabama (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.; Murderpedia, n.d.). Her father was abusive and domineering, and her education was inconsistent as her father would pull her and her siblings out of school to work on the family farm (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). When she was seven years old, she allegedly hit her head on a metal bar while riding on a train; she would later argue that this was the cause of her behavior (Encyclopedia of Alabama,

n.d.). She also alleged that she was molested several times before turning eighteen (Murderpedia, n.d.).

In 1921, at age sixteen, Doss married Charles Braggs (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). Between 1921 and 1927, the couple would have four children, though the marriage was often tumultuous (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). In 1927, two of Doss's children died, and their deaths were attributed to food poisoning; after this, her husband left her, taking one of their surviving children and leaving the other in Doss's care (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). Shortly after, Doss married her second husband and abandoned her two-year-old daughter, though her ex-husband was quickly notified and came to collect the child (Murderpedia, n.d.). While married to her second husband, Doss allegedly killed two of her grandchildren, though there is limited documentation supporting this and later records would show she only killed one grandchild (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.; Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990). After the death of her two-year-old grandson, Doss did receive $500 from a life insurance policy (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). In 1945, she killed her second husband by pouring rat poison into his moonshine (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.).

In 1950, Doss killed Arlie Lanning, her third husband, with rat poison and killed her sister shortly afterwards (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). In 1952, Doss's fourth husband, Richard Morton, began having affairs with other women, and it was during this time that Doss killed her mother (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). Shortly after that, Doss killed Lanning by putting arsenic in his coffee (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). Doss also killed two of her sisters while visiting them (Newton, 1990). In June 1954, Doss

married her fifth husband, Samuel Doss (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). The marriage was tumultuous, and Doss left her husband prior to him taking out two life insurance policies listing her as the beneficiary (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). She initially tried to kill him with a poisoned fruit cake, but, when this attempt failed, she spiked his coffee with arsenic (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). Samuel Doss's physician was suspicious of the circumstances of his death and convinced Doss to allow an autopsy, which revealed the presence of arsenic (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.). Doss was quickly arrested, and she confessed to killing her husbands as well as several other family members (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.; Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990). During her confession, Doss would laugh and giggle, earning her the moniker of "The Giggling Granny" or "The Jolly Widow" (Hickey, 2015).

Doss was declared insane at the age of 50, avoiding the death penalty, though she was sentenced to life in prison (Encyclopedia of Alabama, n.d.; Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990). Doss had killed four husbands, two children, one nephew, one grandchild, two sisters, and her mother (Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990). Doss only collected $1500 total from all the insurance policies, so it does not seem like financial gain was the primary motivator for all the murders (Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990). In fact, "Doss was offended when asked if her motive was money (Hickey, 2015, p. 320) and claimed that she killed for romance. While incarcerated, Doss died of leukemia in 1965.

Case Study 7: Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo

Karla Homolka was born on May 4, 1970, in Ontario, Canada (Murderpedia, n.d.). There is nothing to suggest any childhood traumatization or abuse, though people who were close to Karla often considered her to be spoiled, materialistic, and narcissistic (Vronsky, 2007). There is no information to suggest that Homolka's early life was anything but typical (Vronsky, 2007).

In October 1987, at age seventeen, Karla Homolka met Paul Bernardo, age twenty-three, at a hotel bar (Kilty & Frigon, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). They began a sexual relationship the first night they met, beginning to date shortly thereafter (Kilty & Frigon, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). During this time, Bernardo was committing a series of rapes in Scarborough, Ontario; in total, fourteen women, ranging in age from their teens to their twenties, were assaulted (Campbell, 1996). The assaults began in May 1987, five months before Homolka and Bernardo met, and ended in May 1990 (Campbell, 1996). Homolka was not aware of Bernardo's crimes at the beginning of the relationship, though the relationship quickly became violent (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996; Kilty & Frigon, 2006; Vronsky, 2006).

Within six months of their relationship starting, Bernardo began to sexually, physically, and emotionally abuse Homolka, though there is no official documentation supporting this prior to the 1993 incident (Galligan, 1996; Kilty & Frigon, 2006). Bernardo referred to Homolka as his sex slave, and, per Homolka, she later began to see herself as such, feeling powerless to resist Bernardo's demands (Galligan, 1996). Per

Homolka, refusing Bernardo would result in physical or verbal abuse, and, ultimately, she would still end up doing what he originally wanted her to do (Galligan, 1996).

By 1990, Bernardo had become obsessed with Homolka's fifteen-year-old sister, Tammy (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996; Kilty & Frigan, 2006; Vronsky, 2006). By December 1990, Homolka had agreed to "give" Bernardo Tammy's virginity as a Christmas present (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996; Kilty & Frigan, 2006; Vronsky, 2006). After giving her alcoholic beverages throughout the night, Bernardo put Halcion, a Benzodiazepine, in Tammy's drink; after she fell unconscious, Homolka put a Halothane (anesthetic) soaked cloth over Tammy's face while Bernardo penetrated Tammy vaginally (Campbell, 1996). Homolka performed additional sexual acts on her sister, and, following this, Bernardo again raped Tammy vaginally and anally (Campbell, 1996). During the assault, Tammy vomited, choked, and stopped breathing (Campbell, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Bernardo and Homolka contacted emergency services after concealing evidence, though Tammy Homolka was declared deceased shortly after (Campbell, 1996). The autopsy concluded that the cause of death was asphyxiation caused by vomit aspiration, and the death was determined to be accidental (Campbell, 1996).

On June 6, 1991, Karla brought a fifteen-year-old girl, known in subsequent records as "Jane Doe," to her home and drugged her, slipping sedatives in her drinks (Vronsky, 2007). When Jane Doe fell unconscious, Homolka presented her to Bernardo as a wedding present (Vronsky, 2007). Both Bernardo and Homolka sexually assaulted the unconscious child, recording the acts and seemingly performing for the camera (Galligan,1996; Vronsky, 2007). Jane Does was unaware of what took place when

Bernardo and Homolka drove her home the following morning (Galligan, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Jane Doe would return to the Bernardo/Homolka residence on several different occasions, eventually entering a sexual relationship with Bernardo after repeated advances (Galligan, 1996).

On June 15, 1991, Bernardo abducted Leslie Mahaffy, age fourteen, at knifepoint (Campbell, 1996). Both Homolka and Bernardo sexually assaulted Mahaffy, filming the subsequent sexual assaults (Campbell, 1996). Bernardo and Homolka would later argue over who killed Mahaffy, with Bernardo accusing Homolka of poisoning her with Halcion (Campbell, 1996). It is commonly accepted, however, that Bernardo killed Mahaffy by strangling her with a black electric cord (Vronsky, 2007). After murdering Mahaffy, Bernardo dismembered and cut up Mahaffy's body prior to encasing the body parts in concrete (Campbell, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Bernardo and Homolka drove the concrete blocks out to Lake Gibson and deposited them in the water (Vronsky, 2007). On June 29, 1991, the same day as Bernardo and Homolka's wedding, Leslie Mahaffy's body was found (Campbell, 1996; Vronsky, 2007).

On April 16, 1992, Homolka and Bernardo abducted fifteen-year-old Kristen French (Campbell, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Per Vronsky (2007), Homolka asked French for directions while Bernardo came behind French and pushed her into the vehicle. Additionally, per Campbell's (1996) extensive report on the Paul Bernardo case, witnesses seemed to see Bernardo, unidentified at the time, struggling with something. After abducting French, Bernardo and Homolka both sexually assaulted and tortured French over a span of three days (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996; Kilty & Frigon, 2006;

Vronsky, 2007). While French was being held captive at the home, Bernardo left Homolka alone with French on two separate occasions; despite French begging for Homolka to allow her to escape, Homolka refused (Vronsky, 2007). On the third day of French's captivity, April 18, 1992, Bernardo murdered French by strangling her (Campbell, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Again, Bernardo and Homolka would later argue over who had killed French, and there would be circumstantial evidence to suggest that Homolka may have been the murderer, though nothing was able to be concretely proven (Vronsky, 2007). After attending Easter dinner at Homolka's parents' house, Bernardo and Homolka dumped French's body on the side of the road, leaving it in a location that was near to both Leslie Mahaffy's home and burial site (Campbell, 1996; Vronsky, 2007).

After the murder of Kristen French, Bernardo and Homolka's relationship began to deteriorate, with Bernardo beginning to physically assault Homolka on an almost daily basis (Vronsky, 2007). On January 5, 1993, Homolka left Bernardo after he severely beat her, requiring her to be hospitalized (Kilty & Frigon, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). Bernardo had allegedly beaten Homolka with a Maglite (Vronsky, 2007). Homolka went to live with relatives in Toronto, where she quickly entered a new relationship (Vronsky, 2007).

On February 1, 1993, police received DNA test results indicating that Bernardo was the Scarborough Rapist, though this information was not shared with the taskforce investigating the murders of Mahaffy and French (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996). On February 9, investigators met with Homolka in Toronto; though she provided information about Bernardo's abuse, she did not provide any information about the murders or sexual

assaults (Galligan, 1996). After the police left, Homolka confessed her involvement to relatives, who took her to a lawyer the following day (Galligan, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). On February 17, Bernardo was arrested "on charges relating to the Scarborough rapes and for the murders of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French" (Galligan, 1996, p. 45). A search warrant for the residence was granted on February 19, and searches of the home would continue from then to April 30; DNA evidence, including hair fragments belonging to Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy's blood, was located at the home (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996).

On May 13, Homolka, who had maintained contact with law enforcement after her initial interview, entered into an agreement with the Crown; in exchange for testifying against Bernardo, "she would plead guilty to two charges of manslaughter in the deaths of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French and that a joint recommendation would be made to the court that she be sentenced to 12 years imprisonment on each charge with the sentences to be served concurrently with each other" (Galligan, 1996, p. 47). Homolka presented herself as a compliant victim, or someone who was forced to participate in the crimes under threat of harm (Kilty & Frigon, 2006). During this time, Bernardo's lawyer retrieved tapes that had footage of the rapes and torture, though he did not give them to the prosecution as the law dictated (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). The videotapes, as well as what they revealed about Homolka, would later cause significant controversy (Campbell, 1996; Galligan, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). On May 18, Bernardo was formally charged with the rapes and murders, and, on July 6, Homolka pleaded guilty to the two charges of manslaughter (Galligan, 1996).

The videotapes, provided to the police in September 1994, showed that Homolka was far more involved in the torture, sexual assault, and murder of both Mahaffy and French than she had originally indicated (Galligan, 1996; Vronsky, 2007). Because Homolka had already pleaded guilty to the charges of manslaughter, no additional charges against her were laid, through an investigation was conducted (Galligan, 1996). Homolka testified during Bernardo's trial, and Bernardo admitted to the rapes, though he denied that he had killed Mahaffy or French, instead blaming their deaths on Karla (Vronsky, 2007). In 1995, Bernardo was sentenced to life in prison (Galligan, 1996; Vronsky, 2007).

During the investigation and while in prison, Homolka was examined by four different psychologists, all of whom diagnosed her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and memory problems (Galligan, 1996), though Vronsky (2007) argued that Homolka had read up on Battered Women Syndrome (BWS) and PTSD prior to these examinations to cast herself in a better light, allowing some questions on the presence of malingering. Homolka remained a fixture in the Canadian news until her release in July 2005 (Vronsky, 2007). Though the press has found Homolka in recent years, she currently lives in Canada under a new name while Bernardo remains incarcerated (Vronsky, 2007). During the trial, she and Bernardo earned the moniker of the "Ken and Barbie Killers" (Hickey, 2015).

Case Study 8: Charlene Gallego and Gerald Gallego

Charlene Gallego was born in Stockton, California on October 10, 1956 (Murderpedia, n.d.). Charlene was born to a wealthy, well-connected family, and there is nothing to indicate that she experienced any trauma or suffered any childhood abuse (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). After being tested in high school, Charlene received an alleged IQ score of 160 (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Despite her upbringing, Charlene began using drugs at age twelve and qualified as an alcoholic at age fourteen (Newton, 1990). Prior to meeting Gerald Gallego in September 1977, Charlene had been married twice, though both marriages ended in divorce; one marriage ended after her husband refused to hire a prostitute to engage in threesomes with them, and the second ended after her husband discovered she was using drugs (Newton, 1990).

Charlene and Gerald first met while she was buying drugs from him at a club (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). The two quickly moved in together, and they involved a teenage girl in their sexual relationship, though the situation became violent when Gerald caught Charlene and the girl having sex without him (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Their relationship became physically violent, with both Gerald and Charlene acting abusively (Newton, 1990). After Gerald became impotent, Charlene suggested that they kidnap, rape, and murder young girls (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007).

On September 11, 1978, Rhonda Scheffler, age seventeen, and Kippi Vaught, age sixteen, disappeared; their bodies were found two days later (Newton, 1990). Both Scheffler and Vaught had been sodomized by Gerald and forced to perform oral sex on

Charlene, after which Charlene would bite them; both victims were subsequently bound, beaten with a tire iron, and shot in the head (Newton, 1990). Shortly after, on September 30, Charlene and Gerald married even though Gerald was still legally married to his previous wife (Newton, 1990).

On June 24, 1979, Brenda Judd, age fourteen, and Sandra Colley, age thirteen, were abducted from Reno, Nevada (Newton, 1990). Gerald began sexually assaulting the victims without waiting for Charlene, enraging her to the point that she began shooting at him, eventually grazing his arm with a bullet (Newton, 1990). After, Gerald watched Charlene sexually assault both victims before shooting them (Newton, 1990); their bodies were not found until 1999 (Vronsky, 2007). On April 24, 1980, Karen Chipman and Stacey Redican were kidnapped from Reno; though their remains were not discovered until July, both showed signs of sexual assault and were beaten to death (Newton, 1990).

On June 8, 1980, Linda Aguilar, age twenty-one and four months pregnant, was abducted; she was sexually assaulted, her skull was shattered, and her wrists and ankles were bound with nylon cord (Newton, 1990). Her body was not found until June 22, and evidence from the autopsy indicated that she may have been buried alive (Newton, 1990). On July 17, 1980, Virginia Mochel, age thirty-four, was abducted (Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990). Prior to being strangled to death by Gerald, she was repeatedly sodomized and flogged; her remains were not found until October 30 (Newton, 1990).

The end of the Gallegos' spree began with the abductions and murders of twenty-two-year-old Craig Miller and twenty-one-year-old Beth Sowers (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). The two were abducted on July 20, 1980, though a friend witnessed the

abduction, writing down the license plate number and contacting the police after Miller was found deceased on July 21 (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). Sowers' remains would not be found until November (Newton, 1990). Officers went to the home the plate was registered to, but left after not finding Charlene suspicious (Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). After discovering Gerald's criminal history, which included several sexual offenses (Newton, 1990; Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007), police began searching for the couple, though they would evade capture until Charlene contacted her parents, asking for money (Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990).

Because Charlene was not legally married to Gerald, she was able to testify against him; she made a deal with the prosecution, providing testimony for all ten murders in exchange for a reduced sentence (Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). In her testimony, Charlene admitted to luring girls to the car for Gerald; she also admitted to holding victims at gunpoint so Gerald could sexually assault them and to watching Gerald beat some of the victims to death (Hickey, 2015). Both were convicted of murder, though, because of her plea deal, Charlene only received a sixteen-year sentence (Hickey, 2015; Newton, 1990; Vronsky, 2007). In the California court, Gerald was sentenced to death on June 22, 1983, and received a second death sentence from the Nevada court in June 1983 (Newton, 1990). While Charlene was released from prison in 1997, Gerald died from cancer on July 18, 2002 (Newton, 1990; Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007).

Case Study 9: Gwendolyn Graham and Catherine Wood

Gwendolyn Graham was born in California on August 6, 1963 (Murderpedia, n.d.; Newton, 1990). Graham was often described as quiet and sad, and she later alleged that her father had been sexually abusive toward her when she was a child (Newton, 1990). She would describe her relationship with her mother as strained (Cauffiel, 1992). Graham also allegedly self-harmed due to her father's prolonged sexual abuse, which was said to have continued throughout her teen years; she would burn herself with cigarettes and cut herself with razor blades (Cauffiel, 1992). She dropped out of high school in her senior year, though she later earned her GED (Cauffiel, 1992). Graham would often become aggressive and physically violent while drinking, once getting into a physical confrontation with her then-girlfriend which resulted in both needing stitches (Cauffiel, 1992).

Catherine Wood, who was born in Michigan on March 7, 1962 (Murderpedia, n.d.). She would later claim that her father was an alcoholic and physically abusive Vietnam War veteran who made sexual advances toward her (Cauffiel, 1992). She also believed that her mother never loved her and often told unbelievable stories or outrageous lies, once telling her husband that she often wondered what it would feel like to stab someone (Cauffiel, 1992). She and her husband met in 1979, and she quickly became pregnant while she was still in high school; while Wood went to a school for pregnant mothers, she and her husband wed (Cauffiel, 1992). She and her husband went through marriage struggles in 1984 and separated, though they reconciled after entering couple's

counseling (Cauffiel, 1992). While working at Alpine Manor Nursing Home, Wood began a lesbian relationship with one of her coworkers, eventually leading to her asking her husband for a divorce (Cauffiel, 1992). Wood had previous experience with same-sex relationships; when she was fourteen or fifteen, she was romantically and sexually involved with a girl who often disguised herself as a boy (Cauffiel, 1992).

Graham began working as a nurse's aide at Alpine Manor Nursing Home in 1986, and she and Wood had entered a relationship by the end of that year (Newton, 1990). Graham and Wood often engaged in sadomasochistic sex, with Graham restraining and strangling Wood during sex (Newton, 1990). Allegedly, Graham was the one who introduced the idea of killing patients (Newton, 1990). Graham and Wood initially planned to choose their victims so that their initials would spell MURDER, though this was abandoned after the victims put up too much of a fight; instead, Wood and Graham chose patients who were infirm and incapable of fighting back (Newton, 1990; Ramsland, 2007).

The murders were committed between January and March of 1987, with Graham and Wood murdering five residents: Marguerite Chambers, age sixty; Edith Cole, age eighty-nine; Myrtle Luce, age ninety-five; Mae Mason, age seventy-nine; and Belle Burkhard, age seventy-four (Cauffiel, 1992; Newton, 1990). Cauffiel (1992) also argued that Graham and Wood had murdered eighty-six-year-old Maurice Spanogle, though this was not one of the cases Graham and Wood would be charged with. Graham would often kill the victims by holding a washcloth over their mouths until they suffocated; Wood would stand by as a lookout (Newton, 1990; Ramsland, 2007). After the murders,

Graham would take trophies like personal effects and jewelry from the crime scene (Ramsland, 2007).

Graham and Wood's relationship cooled by April 1987, and varying circumstances, including Graham starting a new relationship and Wood being moved to a new shift, ended their relationship (Newton, 1990). In August 1987, Wood confessed to her ex-husband, who waited fourteen months before contacting the police (Newton, 1990). Both Wood and Graham were arrested in December 1988, and Wood quickly entered a plea deal with the prosecution, pleading guilty to two charges second degree murder in exchange for a thirty-to-forty-year sentence; in exchange, she testified against Graham (Michigan Department of Corrections, n.d.; Newton, 1990). Graham allegedly killed to relieve personal tension, and Wood testified that she was concerned Graham would continue killing in Texas (Newton, 1990; Ramsland, 2007). On November 2, 1989, Graham was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole (Newton, 1990). On January 17, 2020, Catherine Wood was released from prison (Baker, 2020).

Case Study 10: Michelle Knotek and David Knotek

Michelle "Shelly" Knotek was born in Raymond, Washington on April 15, 1954 (Murderpedia, n.d.). She spent most of her early childhood with her biological mother, who was an alcoholic and alleged prostitute (Olsen, 2019). Shelly was later abandoned by her biological mother, moving in with her father and stepmother; shortly afterward, her mother was murdered by either an ex-boyfriend or during a drug deal that had gone bad (Olsen, 2019). As a child, Shelly was described as cruel and a compulsive liar (Olsen,

2019). She would neglect to complete her homework, chop up glass and put them in her siblings' shoes, and was often truant from school; when she was fourteen, she accused her father of raping her, though a medical exam later proved this to be a lie (Olsen, 2019). Shelly also showed early behavior consistent with child cruelty; as a babysitter, she would lock and barricade children in their rooms (Olsen, 2019). Due to her behavior, she was often sent between relatives and schools; at one point, she accused her step-grandparents of sexual abuse, and her stepmother alleged that Shelly was responsible for the divorce of her aunt and uncle (Olsen, 2019).

In February 1973, at age eighteen, Shelly married for the first time (Olsen, 2019). During this period, she was fired from two jobs for absenteeism and faked severe injuries, including an overdose and a sexual assault (Olsen, 2019). During this marriage, she was often emotionally abusive, forcing her husband to sleep outside in his car and accusing him of being unable to provide for their family (Olsen, 2019). Her first child was born in February 1975, and, shortly after, Shelly divorced her husband and abandoned her daughter with her father and stepmother (Olsen, 2019). In June 1978, Shelly married her second husband, and, in August 1978, her second child was born (Olsen, 2019). This marriage was volatile and physically abusive, with both Shelly and her husband acting violently toward each other (Olsen, 2019).

After divorcing her second husband in 1983, Shelly became involved with David Knotek, who she would marry in December 1987 (Olsen, 2019). Like with her two previous husbands, Shelly was physically and verbally abusive toward David Knotek; she was also abusive toward her daughters (Olsen, 2019). She would physically and verbally

abuse them in addition to withholding showers; Shelly would also make the children "wallow," an act where they would go to the backyard naked, get sprayed with a hose, and have to roll in the mud (Olsen, 2019). In 1988, Shelly and David took in Shelly's nephew, Shane Watson (Olsen, 2019). Shelly would make Watson do chores from sunrise to sunset and began to take away his furniture, eventually forcing him to sleep in a closet with a blanket (Olsen, 2019). She would also make Shane and her oldest daughter slow dance nude (Olsen, 2019). During one incident, Shelly duct taped Shane's ankles and wrists together before applying Icy Hot to his penis (Olsen, 2019).

In December 1988, Kathy Loreno, age thirty-six, moved into the Knotek household due to disagreements with her family (Olsen, 2019). In June 1989, Shelly's third child was born; shortly after the child's birth, one of her daughters found Shelly holding a pillow over the newborn's face and faking a medical episode (Olsen, 2019). Though things at the home were fine for a period after Loreno moved into the household, Shelly began to abuse Loreno physically, emotionally, and sexually (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). Shelly would often push Loreno down the stairs; force her to do chores nude; withhold access to food, restrooms, and showers; cut off her hair; drug her with Prozac; pour bleach on her skin; and waterboard her (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). Shelly would also have the children and her husband physically assault Loreno; during one incident, Shane and David Knotek kicked her in the abdomen and head while wearing steel-toed boots (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). Loreno was eventually forced to move into a shed outside, and she lost over one hundred pounds due to the cumulative effects of the abuse and torture (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). In June

1994, Loreno died due to prolonged abuse; David Knotek burned her remains and discarded her ashes on the beach (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006).

In February 1995, Shane Watson disappeared; though Shelly told her daughters and other relatives that Shane had run away, taking a job as a fisherman on Kodiak Island, it was eventually revealed that David Knotek had shot him (Kamb & Barker, 2003; Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). After Loreno's death, Shelly was paranoid that Shane would go to the police over the circumstances of Loreno's death; one of her daughters eventually informed her that Shane had pictures of Loreno being tortured (Olsen, 2019). Because of this, Shelly ordered her husband to shoot and kill Shane (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). After shooting Shane, David Knotek burned his remains and scattered the ashes at sea (Kamb & Barker, 2003; Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). The circumstances of Shane's disappearance and murder would be unknown until August 2003 (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006).

After Loreno and Shane's deaths, Shelly resumed abusing her children, leading to her two oldest children running away from home (Olsen, 2019). Shelly began physically, sexually, and verbally abusing her youngest daughter, examining her nude body, withholding food, and locking her out of the home (Olsen, 2019). She would also force her daughter to go outside, nude, and run in place or do jumping jacks (Olsen, 2019). Between 1999 and October 2001, Ron Woodworth, age fifty-seven, moved into the Knotek home after experiencing a breakup and issues with his family (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). Shelly quickly began abusing Woodworth, beating him, restricting access to the bathroom, and making him jump off the roof (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*,

2006). Shelly isolated Woodworth from his family and friends, made him work outside in his underwear, and would not allow him to interact with other members of her family (Olsen, 2019). Per David Knotek, Woodworth died in July 2003; due to a burn ban being in effect, David was unable to burn Woodworth's body as he had done with Loreno and Shane (Olsen, 2019). Instead, he buried Woodworth's body in the backyard (Kamb & Barker, 2003; Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006).

During this time, Shelly is also suspected of playing a role in the suspicious death of James McClintok, who was in her care when he died (Kamb & Barker, 2003). After McClintok's death, Shelly became his executor, though McClintok left his home, worth $137,000, to his dog, Sissy (Kamb & Barker, 2003). Though Shelly reported that Sissy had died, gaining access to McClintok's assets, Sissy was later found alive on the Knotek property (Kamb & Barker, 2003).

In August 2003, after the youngest Knotek sibling confessed to being abused by Shelly, the two older Knotek daughters contacted the police, revealing what had happened to Loreno and Woodworth (Barker, 2003; Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006). Police found Woodworth's body on the Knotek property, and David Knotek quickly confessed (Barker, 2003; Olsen, 2019). David Knotek was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for the murder of Shane Watson, and Shelly Knotek entered an Alford plea for one count of second-degree murder and one count of first-degree manslaughter (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek,* 2006). Shelly Knotek was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison and is set to be released in 2022 (Olsen, 2019; *State v. Knotek*, 2006).

Case Study 11: Carol Bundy and Douglas Clark

Carol Bundy was born in Louisiana on August 26, 1942 (Murderpedia, n.d.; Vronsky, 2007). Though Bundy's childhood did have happy experiences, both of her parents were violent alcoholics, and her mother was physically and emotionally abusive towards her because of her appearance (Farr, 1992; Meares, 2020; Ramsland, 2009). After her mother died when she was fourteen, Bundy's father began sexually abusing her and her sister (Farr, 1992; Meares, 2020). The sexual abuse began the night her mother died and continued until her father remarried (Farr, 1992). After her father remarried, he began to verbally and physically abuse Carol (Farr, 1992). Bundy's father also attempted to kill his family, though his plan was stopped after his then-wife fought back; though she refused to press charges, Bundy's father was charged with disturbing the peace, and Carol and her sister were placed in various foster homes (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009). Bundy's father eventually regained custody (Farr, 1992).

Bundy dropped out of high school in the ninth grade and quickly realized that she could attract attention from other people if she had sex with them (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009). When she was seventeen, she married a fifty-six-year-old man, though the marriage ended after her husband suggested she prostitute herself for money (Ramsland, 2009; Vronsky, 2007). Though Bundy left her husband because of his suggestions, she would later admit that she engaged in prostitution while residing in Oregon (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Vronsky, 2007). Bundy would marry two more times before turning thirty-five, but her relationships were often characterized by violent behavior (Farr, 1992;

Ramsland, 2009). In 1962, Bundy's father committed suicide, and she came to blame herself for it (Farr, 1992).

In January 1979, Bundy left her abusive husband, moving into an apartment complex managed by Jack Murray, with whom Bundy quickly began having an affair (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; Ramsland, 2009; Vronsky, 2007). Bundy quickly became obsessed with Murray, giving him over $10,000 and once bribing his wife to leave him (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; Ramsland, 2009). Because Murray sang at a county western bar, Bundy would often go and watch him; it was there that she met Doug Clark in January 1980 (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; Ramsland, 2009). Clark moved into Bundy's home the same night they met, and Bundy quickly fell in love with him (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990).

Clark, who would often initiate relationships with women in exchange for material gain, quickly began taking advantage of Bundy, beginning and on-and-off relationship where he was involved with other women (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; *People v. Clark*, 1992; Ramsland, 2009). Clark and Bundy began to discuss different sexual fantasies, including sadomasochistic behavior and necrophilia (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). During this time, Clark had Bundy purchase two .25 caliber pistols from a pawnshop; they also began sexually abusing an eleven-year-old girl who lived in Bundy's apartment complex (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; Ramsland, 2009; *People v. Clark*, 1992). Bundy would photograph the abuse, eventually putting the pictures in a photo album (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009).

On May 31, 1980, Clark told Bundy about the murder of Marnette Comer (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). Comer's body was not found until June 30, 1980; the skin was dried and mummified, and the coroner estimated that she had been dead between twenty and ninety days (*People v. Clark*, 1992). Comer had been shot three times in the chest (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). On June 12, 1980, the bodies of sixteen-year-old Cynthia Chandler and fifteen-year-old Gina Marano were found; Marano had been shot in the head twice, and Chandler had been shot in the head and chest (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; *People v. Clark*, 1992). There was evidence suggesting that Chandler had been raped; though the coroner could not find evidence suggested Marano was raped, they could not rule out post-mortem sexual activity (*People v. Clark*, 1992). While there was no evidence showing that Bundy had performed necrophiliac activity on either girl, Clark confessed to Bundy that he had anally and vaginally assaulted both Chandler and Marano after they had died (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). Per Ramsland (2009), there was some evidence to suggest that Bundy may have been present during the murders of Chandler and Marano, though this was not presented at court.

On June 23, 1980, Clark killed Karen Jones and Exxie Wilson (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; *People v. Clark*, 1992). Jones was killed by a single shot to her head, and Clark later admitted to killing her because she had witnessed him with Wilson (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990). Clark shot Wilson in the head while she performed oral sex on him; after she unintentionally bit his penis while dying, Clark decapitated her (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). The body of Karen Jones and the headless body of Exxie Wilson were both found on June 24 (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; *People v. Clark*, 1992). Wilson's

head, in a pine box and wrapped in a shirt that said, “Daddy’s Girl,” was found on June 27 (Farr, 1992; Newton, 1990; *People v. Clark*, 1992). Prior to disposing of Wilson’s head, Bundy would put makeup on the head, describing it as a personal Barbie doll; Clark would also engage in necrophiliac oral sex with Wilson’s head (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; *People v. Clark*, 1992).

Bundy was also involved in the murder of Jane Doe 18, who has remained unidentified (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). The murder occurred in late July or early August; Clark shot her in the head while she was performing oral sex on him and later had sex with the dead body (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). Bundy had given Clark the gun used to kill Jane Doe 18; her body was located on August 26, 1980, after Bundy had confessed to the murder of Jack Murray (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992).

Bundy had made comments to Murray suggesting her and Clark’s involvement in the Sunset Strip Killings, and she began to panic once Murray indicated he would be contacting the police (Newton, 1990). On August 5, 1980, Bundy killed Murray; Bundy “shot him in the head, decapitated him, and cut his body with a knife” (*People v. Clark*, 1992, para. 5). Clark later assisted Bundy in disposing of Murray’s head, which has never been found (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). On August 11, 1980, Bundy confessed to Murray’s murder and later provided evidence of Clark’s involvement in the deaths of Chandler, Marano, Comer, Wilson, Jones, and Jane Doe 18 (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992). During her interrogation, Bundy made sexual advances to one of the detectives questioning her (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009).

Bundy testified for the defense during Clark's trial, having been granted prosecutorial immunity for involvement in crimes other than the murders of Jack Murray and Jane Does 18 (Newton, 1990). During trial, Clark attempted to blame Bundy and Murray for the crimes, arguing that Bundy was blaming him because he had rejected her advances (Newton, 1990). In March 1983, Clark was found guilty of six counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder; he was sentenced to death (*People v. Clark*, 1992; Ramsland, 2009).

On May 2, 1982, Bundy admitted to killing Murray, stating that she did it to protect Clark (Ramsland, 2009). She accepted a plea deal, and, on May 31, 1983, Bundy received two prison sentences: 25 years to life for participating in the murder of one of Clark's victims and 27 years to life for the murder of Murray (Ramsland, 2009). Bundy died in prison on December 9, 2003 (Ramsland, 2009).

Data Collection

Participants were initially found using the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database. The Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database provided information on demographics, method, and number of victims. Additional data was requested from the respective law enforcement agencies and state attorney offices, though, due to when some participants committed their crimes, some information was unavailable. Several jurisdictions denied the records requests due to the records being protected and not falling under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). All the data was secondary in nature and retrieved from a variety of sources, including published law proceedings, peer-reviewed research, true-

crime books, and newspaper articles. Some participants had more readily available information than others. Data was collected from a variety of sources and compared before being transcribed into a narrative. In cases where the female serial murderer had a male partner, information on him was not included unless it directly related to the female offender. Most of the actual data collection process is aligned with the description of the intended data collection process described in Chapter 3.

Before coding, I read, examined, and transcribed all data three times. Coding was done manually. The coding process was completed in a way that addressed the study's research questions. The psychosocial characteristics of the female serial murderers was the primary focus of the coding process; other relevant information is included, and descriptive statistics delineating method and motive are also included.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was aligned with the traditional grounded theory process. Initial codes were developed by reading through each offender case study at least three times. These codes were them cross-examined to the codes in the other case studies within that specific cohort; initially, solo female serial murderers were only examined against other solo female serial murderers and team female serial murderers were only examined against other team female serial murderers. These codes were later grouped into larger themes. Data to support these findings is also included, though, in most cases, direct quotations from the offenders were unavailable.

For the solo female offenders, two to nine codes were generated per case, leading to the development of four themes: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of attention-seeking behavior, presence of antisocial behavior, and presence of romantic instability. For the female offenders who worked with at least one other person, four to ten codes were generated per case, leading to the development of five themes: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, presence of sexual deviance, presence of team disintegration, and presence of romantic instability.

For example, the case of Dorothea Puente (see Case Study 3) generated nine codes:

1. Neglect
2. Physical abuse
3. Parents with substance abuse issues
4. Abandonment
5. Criminal history prior to arrest for murders
6. Presence of mental illness (chronic schizophrenia)
7. Multiple marriages
8. Early promiscuity
9. Compulsive lying

These codes, along with the codes generated when examining the data of other offenders, lead to the development of the following themes: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, and presence of romantic instability.

As an example of a team offender, the case of Charlene Gallego (see Case Study 8) generated nine codes:

1. No childhood trauma
2. Substance abuse
3. Sexual promiscuity
4. Sexual element to crimes
5. Multiple marriages
6. Experience with domestic violence
7. Evidence of pedophilia
8. Alleged that she killed because her partner (Gerald Gallego) wanted to
9. Testified against partner at trial

These codes, along with the codes generated when examining the data of other offenders, lead to the development of the following themes: presence of antisocial behavior, presence of sexual deviance, presence of romantic instability, and presence of team disintegration.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As stated in Chapter 3, several different methods were utilized to ensure trustworthiness throughout the duration of the study. All data was collected from reputable sources, including court proceedings, peer-reviewed published research, and novels relating to the specific cases. If inconsistent data was provided by one source, it

was examined against the other sources until the most reliable information was located and included. This is aligned with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) methods of establishing credibility. Data triangulation was utilized throughout the entire research process, and I also examined myself for signs of researcher bias when conducting data analysis.

Transferability of the study is often determined by the reader of the study, not by the author (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), though efforts to ensure transferability were made throughout the entirety of the study. The methodology of the study was clearly outlined through Chapters 1, 3, and 4, with clear information for how the study was designed and how data was collected and analyzed. Though this study was conducted on a specific population, the findings may be able to be transferred into studies researching other serial murderers and their psychosocial characteristics.

Dependability of the study refers to "the stability of findings over time" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Dependability can be achieved through the usage of an audit trail, which allows the researcher to keep a clear log of study progress, but also through the coding process. In this case, dependability was ensured through reading through each piece of data multiple times, cross-referencing pieces of data against each other, and repeating the coding process three times to ensure accurate results.

In this study, confirmability was primarily achieved by ensuring that all conclusions are reflective of the data rather than information I deemed important. Aligned with the idea of limiting researcher bias, I did my best to always ensure neutrality while still representing the data reliably. The actions of the participants in the

study were represented as accurately as possible, with extra care made to ensure that all information was correct.

Results

The results of the study are organized by research questions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What are the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers?

Solo Female Serial Murderers

The solo female serial murderers examined in this study are Aileen Wuornos, Christine Falling, Dorothea Puente, Velma Barfield, Genene Jones, and Nancy "Nannie" Doss. Before delineating the themes found through the data analysis process, it is important to look at the methods these women used to commit their crimes. Four out of six (66%) of the women used poison to kill their victims; two (Velma Barfield and Nannie Doss) used arsenic and two (Dorothea Puente and Genene Jones) used different types of medication. One woman (16%) smothered her victims, and another (16%) shot them. Statistically speaking, the four women who used poison to kill their victims used methods that are commonly used by female serial murderers, as is the woman who smothered her victims (Hickey, 2015). Because Wuornos shot her victims, she can be

seen as an anomaly; male serial murderers are more likely to shoot their victims than female serial murderers (Hickey, 2015).

Through coding and analyzing the data, four themes were found: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of attention-seeking behavior, presence of antisocial behavior, and presence of romantic instability. Each theme is further delineated below, as is a table indicating which offender shows each theme.

Presence of early childhood trauma

Out of the six solo female serial murderers, six (100%) reported experiencing some form of childhood trauma. Childhood trauma in this case is said to include sexual abuse, substance abuse by a parent, neglect, physical abuse, verbal abuse, and parental abandonment. Out of the six women who experienced some form of childhood trauma, four (66%) experienced more than one form. Specifically, in the case of Aileen Wuornos, she was neglected, physically abused, sexually abused; additionally, she was abandoned by her birth mother and adopted by her maternal grandparents, both of whom struggled with alcohol abuse.

The overwhelming presence of early childhood trauma in the lives of the selected offenders is consistent with prior research. As noted by Hickey (2015), Harrison et al. (2015), and Schurman-Kauflin (2000), serial murderers often experience childhood trauma, in any form, at higher rates than the average population, potentially influencing their later social development, specifically regarding healthy coping mechanisms.

Presence of Attention-Seeking Behavior

Three (50%) of the six offenders showed the presence of attention-seeking behaviors. Two (66%) of the three showed this through repeated hospital visits with no clear illness. In the case of Christine Falling, she visited local hospitals more than fifty times in a two-year-period, presenting with medical issues both real and nonexistent. Two (66%) of the three offenders showcased attention seeking behavior through compulsive lying. Dorothea Puente often lied about her family background and different circumstances, once alleging that she had been born in Mexico and raised with thirteen siblings. One (33%) of the offenders who fit the criteria of this theme showcased both repeated hospital visits and compulsive lying.

Presence of Antisocial Behavior

Four (66%) of the offenders showed the presence of antisocial behaviors. In this case, antisocial fits the American Psychological Association's (n.d.) definition of "denoting or exhibiting behavior that sharply deviates from social norms and also violates other people's rights" (para. 1). Relating to these offenders, these behaviors included animal cruelty, criminal history prior to the arrests for murder, and substance abuse. Two (50%) of the four offenders showcased more than one type of antisocial behavior. Specifically, both Aileen Wuornos and Velma Barfield had a history of both repeated arrests and substance misuse.

Presence of Romantic Instability

Six (100%) of the six offenders experienced some form of romantic or marital instability in their lives. Three (50%) were married more than one time. Barfield married twice, killing both husbands, and was engaged at the time she murdered her fiancé. Puente married four times, and Doss married five times, murdering four of her husbands. Three (50%) experienced some form of domestic violence within their romantic relationships, either as a perpetrator or a victim. Wuornos and Falling both divorced their respective husbands after incidents of domestic violence.

Table 1

Presence of Themes Relating to Psychosocial Characteristics of Solo Female Serial Murderers

Offender Name	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Aileen Wuornos	X		X	X
Christine Falling	X	X	X	X
Dorothea Puente	X	X	X	X
Velma Barfield	X		X	X
Genene Jones	X	X		X
Nancy Doss	X			X

Note. The four themes gathered from the solo female serial murderers are presented in the table as follows: presence of early childhood trauma (Theme 1), presence of attention seeking behavior (Theme 2), presence of antisocial behavior (Theme 3), and presence of romantic instability (Theme 4).

Team Female Serial Murderers

The team female serial murderers examined in this study are Karla Homolka, Charlene Gallego, Gwendolyn Graham, Catherine Wood, Michelle "Shelly" Knotek, and Carol Bundy. As with the solo female serial murderers examined in this study, it is important to review the methods utilized to commit the murders. As these women (apart from Graham and Wood) killed with a male partner, the circumstances of the crime may differ. Within killing partnerships, women often commit far more brutal crimes than they would have alone, with more elements of sexual motivation being present (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007, 2018); because of this, the killing methods used also differ greatly from the methods used by solo female serial murderers. Two (33%) of the women participated in crimes where multiple methods were used to kill the victims; these methods included poisoning, strangulation, shooting, and beating. Two (33%) smothered their victims, though it should be noted that these women killed together. One (16%) killed her victims through prolonged abuse and torture, and one (16%) killed her victims through stabbing, though postmortem mutilation was also present.

It is also worth noting that all women were in a romantic or sexual relationship with the person they killed with. Homolka, Gallego, and Knotek were all married to their respective partners, though Gallego's marriage was invalid. Graham and Wood were in a romantic relationship at the time the crimes were committed, and Bundy was also in a relationship with Clark when the crimes were committed.

Through coding and analyzing the data, five themes were developed: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, presence of sexual deviance, presence of team disintegration, and presence of romantic instability. Each theme is further delineated below, as is a table indicating which offender shows each theme.

Presence of early childhood trauma

Four (66%) of the six offenders experienced some forms of early childhood trauma. Of those four, all four (100%) experienced more than one form of childhood maltreatment. The most common maltreatment experienced was sexual abuse, with three (75%) of the four reporting experiencing childhood sexual abuse; in all three of those cases, the perpetrator was the father. It is worth noting that Shelly Knotek, the only offender to not experience childhood sexual abuse within this subgroup, accused her father of sexually assaulting her; after a medical examination, this was proven to be false.

Presence of antisocial behavior

Four (66%) of the six offenders displayed some forms of antisocial behavior. Relating to these offenders, these behaviors included sexual promiscuity, illegal behavior prior to involvement in the murders, abusive behavior toward others, substance abuse, evidence of pedophilia, and evidence of domestic violence. Of these four, three (75%) displayed more than one type of antisocial behavior.

Presence of Sexual Deviance

Four (66%) of the six offenders displayed some form of sexual deviance, either within the crimes or before their crimes. Sexual deviance in this case is meant to include pedophilic behaviors, sexual assault, incest, and a sexual element to the crimes committed. Of those four, all (100%) exhibited various types of pedophilic behavior—Knotek forced her children and nephew to remove their clothes before physically and emotionally abusing them; Bundy sexually abused an eleven-year-old with two different men; Homolka sexually assaulted at least four teenage girls, including her own sister; and Gallego sexually assaulted several underage girls. Additionally, three (75%) of the four sexually assaulted their murder victims prior to killing them, and Bundy's partner, Doug Clark, engaged in necrophiliac activities with the victims' bodies.

Presence of Team Disintegration

Six (100%) of the six offenders experienced some form of team disintegration throughout the process, including before criminal charges were brought. Two (33%) separated prior to the murders being discovered, and the remaining four (66%) separated after. Four (66%) testified against their partners during criminal court proceedings in exchange for more lenient sentences; the remaining two (33%) had their partners testify against them. Four (66%) indicated that they only participated in the crimes because their partners wanted them to, with Homolka arguing she participated under threat of violence.

The breakdown of the killing relationship is common within killing teams (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007). Additionally, Vronsky (2007) argued that women in killing teams are more likely to receive lenient sentences than their male counterparts. This is true for four (66%) of these offenders. In the case of Gwendolyn Graham, her partner, Catherine Wood, testified against her; Graham was sentenced to life in prison, while Wood received a reduced sentence and was released in 2020. In the case of Michelle Knotek, her husband testified against her, receiving a reduced sentence; David Knotek was released from prison 2016 after serving thirteen years, while Michelle Knotek is expected to be released in 2022.

Presence of Romantic Instability

Four (66%) of the six women experienced some form of romantic instability, including multiple marriages and experiences of domestic violence. Two (50%) of these women were the aggressors in their relationships, with Charlene Gallego once shooting at her husband and Michelle Knotek systematically physically and emotionally abusing all three of her husbands. Three (75%) women experienced some form of domestic violence as a victim, though there were cases in which some of these women also responded with violence. Three (75%) were married more than once; all three of these women were married three times at the time of their incarceration. Two have since been released; both have married again.

Table 2

Presence of Themes Relating to Psychosocial Characteristics of Team Female Serial Murderers

Offender Name	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Karla Homolka			X	X	X
Charlene Gallego	X	X	X	X	X
Gwendolyn Graham	X	X		X	
Catherine Wood	X			X	
Michelle Knotek	X	X	X	X	X
Carol Bundy	X	X	X	X	X

Note. The five themes gathered from the team female serial murderers are presented in the table as follows: presence of early childhood trauma (Theme 1), presence of antisocial behavior (Theme 2), presence of sexual deviance (Theme 3), presence of team disintegration (Theme 4), and presence of romantic instability (Theme 5).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How do the psychosocial characteristics of solo female serial murderers differ from offenders who have one or more partners?

When comparing the themes generated from each group, it is apparent that solo female serial murderers and female serial murderers who have one or more partner have more in common than was initially suspected. There was an overlap in three of the themes: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, and presence of romantic instability. Out of all twelve participants, ten (83%) experienced some form of childhood trauma. Out of those ten, eight (80%) experienced more than one type of childhood maltreatment or trauma. All six solo female serial murderers experienced childhood maltreatment, while only four team offenders did. While claiming

that solo female serial murderers experience childhood maltreatment at a higher rate than female team serial murderers is not something that can be done based on the results of this study alone, future studies may benefit from analyzing this angle and seeing if these results are applicable outside the bounds of the current study.

Regarding antisocial behavior, eight (66%) showed a history of antisocial behavior. Four were solo female serial murderers, and four worked within a team, showing an equal disbursement between the two groups. Additionally, the same amount (three) of women in each specific group showed evidence of displaying more than one type of antisocial behavior. Ten (83%) of all offenders experienced some form of romantic instability, with the most common type being multiple marriages. While all six solo female serial murderers experienced some form of romantic instability, only four female team serial murderers did even though all six female serial murderers worked with their romantic partners during their crimes.

A theme where solo offenders and team offenders differed was the theme detailing the presence of team disintegration. Though this is a difference between the two groups, I would argue that it is insignificant in terms of its relevance to the study. There would be no way for a relationship to break down with solo female serial murderers because they were *solo* offenders; they killed alone, with no one else there to take responsibility once they were caught by law enforcement.

The most significant difference between solo female serial murderers and female serial murderers who worked with a partner is the presence of sexual deviance. None of the crimes committed by solo female serial murderers displayed any form of sexual

element. The same cannot be said for the crimes committed by female serial murderers who worked within a team. Four (66%) of those offenders committed sexual offenses against their victims, ranging in severity from molestation to sexual assault. The partner of one of the female offenders also committed acts of necrophilia with the bodies of the victims; the female offender was aware of this and often shared in her partner's necrophiliac fantasies. These results are aligned with what previous researchers have concluded; when men and women kill together, the murders are often more violent, depraved, and sexually motivated than when women kill alone (Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007, 2018).

Motivation, while not a specific psychosocial characteristic, was another area where solo serial murderers and team serial murderers differed. Solo female serial murderers killed for various reasons, but the most common motivation (three offenders) was financial gain or covering up financial crimes. One claimed to kill for romance, one killed for attention, and one could not provide any motivation for her murders, though it is suspected that it may have been a symptom of Factitious disorder. Five (83%) of the women who killed with one or more partner did so because they wanted to and because they took pleasure from the acts they committed; in four (80%) of those cases, the female offender was the one who suggested that they rape, torture, mutilate, and murder their victims. The exception—Karla Homolka—later claimed that she was forced to participate in the sexual assaults and murders under threat of violence, though the relative truthfulness of this statement may never be conclusively known.

Table 3. Comparison of themes relating to psychosocial characteristics of solo and team female serial murderers

Offender Name	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
Aileen Wuornos	X	X		X		
Christine Falling	X	X	X	X		
Dorothea Puente	X	X	X	X		
Velma Barfield	X	X		X		
Genene Jones	X		X	X		
Nancy Doss	X			X		
Karla Homolka				X	X	X
Charlene Gallego		X		X	X	X
Gwendolyn Graham	X	X				X
Catherine Wood						X
Michelle Knotek	X	X		X	X	X
Carol Bundy	X	X		X	X	X

Note. The six themes gathered from the solo and team female serial murderers are presented in the table as follows: presence of early childhood trauma (Theme 1), presence of antisocial behavior (Theme 2), presence of attention seeking behavior (Theme 3), presence of romantic instability (Theme 4), presence of sexual deviance (Theme 5), and presence of team disintegration (Theme 6).

Summary

This study consisted of an examination of the psychosocial characteristics of twelve female serial murderers, of which six were solo murderers and six worked with at least one other person to commit their crimes. After collecting data from various public records and the Radford/FGCU Serial Killer Database, I analyzed the data, forming different codes and themes for each group. Themes generated from the analysis of solo female serial murderers included the presence of early childhood trauma, presence of attention-seeking behavior, presence of antisocial behavior, and presence of romantic instability. The themes generated from the analysis of team female serial murderers include the presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, presence of sexual deviance, presence of team disintegration, and presence of romantic instability.

The findings in this study, though different from what was initially suspected, were sufficient to answer both research questions. While solo offenders and team offenders did differ in methods, motivations, and elements of the crimes committed, there were more similarities between the two groups than differences.

Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the study. In Chapter 5, I will interpret the findings of the study as well as assess the overall study, including its limitations and implications for further research. Finally, I will discuss the possible benefits of the study, including its potential social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. Psychosocial characteristics refer to the influences of the psychosocial environment on an individual's thoughts and behaviors (Vizzoto et al., 2013; Walker & Hepp, 2016) and often are related to psychosocial factors (American Psychological Association, 2020). These factors can include childhood experiences, including trauma; mental illness; relationships; adult experiences; and social pressures. One of the key psychosocial factors that differ between men and women is the mode of aggression (Yourstone et al., 2008), which could have a large influence on the differences in how men and women kill their victims (Holmes et al., 1991; Vronsky, 2007). Other psychosocial factors could provide information on why these individuals became serial murderers, possibly providing data on potential risk factors.

The nature of the study is a qualitative study as it is designed to examine females who are serial murderers, who are relatively rare in criminological research. Most of the analysis was completed through secondary data analysis. Due to the improbability of conducting in-person interviews, data was collected from archival interviews done by other professionals. Additional information was gathered from other forms of data available in each case, including public records, videos, peer-reviewed books authored by professionals, and peer-reviewed studies published in journals. The information was examined to address common characteristics and deviations within the selected case

studies. This qualitative analysis allowed themes and patterns between the studied offenders to become apparent through manual coding.

To address the gap in information about the psychosocial characteristics of solo and team female serial murderers, I studied twelve female serial murderers, six of whom were solo murderers and six of whom worked with one other person to commit their murders. By analyzing data on their psychosocial characteristics, I was able to generate six themes between the two groups: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, presence of attention seeking behavior, presence of romantic instability, presence of sexual deviance, and presence of team disintegration. The methods used and motivations for the murders were also discussed.

The research questions, which relate to the findings, themes, and subsequent discussion, are as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers?

Research Question 2: How do the psychosocial characteristics of solo female serial murderers differ from offenders who have one or more partners?

Interpretation of the Findings

Serial murder has been studied by various researchers and law enforcement agencies since the 1970s, though the research on female serial murderers is relatively new (Harrison et al., 2015, 2019; Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007, 2018). Most research on female serial murderers has compared them to male serial murderers in the following

categories: methodology, motives, and subsequent treatment by the media (Aamodt et al., 2020; Hale & Bolin, 1998; Harrison et al., 2015, 2019; Hickey, 2015; Holmes et al., 1991). While the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers is generally included within research studies as secondary information, this study focused solely on the differences and similarities of the psychosocial characteristics of solo female serial murderers and female serial murderers who worked with at least one other person. The themes derived from this study aligned with prior research, confirming much of what is known about female serial murderers.

Due to the lack of prior focus on psychosocial characteristics, I used grounded theory analysis and an archival method to develop a thematic analysis of six solo female serial murderers and six female serial murderers who worked within a team. This resulted in six themes being identified: presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, presence of attention seeking behavior, presence of romantic instability, presence of sexual deviance, and presence of team disintegration. There was more overlap between the two groups than I previously expected; three of the themes—presence of early childhood trauma, presence of antisocial behavior, and presence of romantic instability—were shared throughout both groups. These findings confirm prior research about the presence of childhood adversity in the early lives of female serial murderers (Harrison et al., 2015; Hickey, 2015), as well as the importance of the romantic relationship within partnered serial murderers (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007, 2018). The data gleaned within this study does somewhat contradict previous claims that female serial murderers are more dissimilar than alike (Vronsky, 2007); the women

analyzed in this study shared many things in common, ranging from childhood experiences to court outcomes.

The descriptive data on methodology also confirms prior research (Hickey, 2015; Vronsky, 2007); women who worked with a partner often employed more directly aggressive methods to kill their victims than women who worked alone. They were also the only women in this study whose crimes had sexual elements. Hickey (2015) and Vronsky (2007) have both acknowledged that serial killing teams often commit more violent crimes; this is theorized to be caused by the presence of the male partner, who is more likely to kill for sexual gratification.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were present within the study. One of the major limitations related to data collection; because the study used an archival tradition using secondary data analysis, there was no access to live participants, introducing the concern for bias from primary data collectors. This was managed as much as possible by using data triangulation and multiple sources. Additionally, there was an unexpected limitation in accessing primary records from law enforcement agencies and courts. Two separate agencies denied the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, citing state law that made criminal information confidential. Other agencies required fees for sending records, which was not feasible within the confines of this study.

As with any other qualitative study, one limitation was my role as the data collector, analyzer, and presenter. Because I was the only one to do these tasks, there

could be human error present, potentially impacting the study's confirmability, credibility, and dependability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I tried to manage this as much as possible by transcribing the data three times before analysis and double checking all codes and themes derived from the data.

An unexpected limitation was found when trying to find information on the study participants. Outside of issues with primary record requests, some individuals had more data available than others. In more infamous cases, like Aileen Wuornos, multiple sources of data spanning her entire life were easily located; in cases that were relatively unknown or less covered by the media, information was harder to access and find, limiting the possibilities for data triangulation and comparison between sources.

A final limitation is caused by the subject of this study. Female serial murderers are rare individuals, consisting of a small subgroup within an already small percentage of the average population. Because of that, data derived and information gleaned from this study may not be applicable to the larger population.

Recommendations

This study focused on the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers, both solo and in a team. Future researchers may benefit from speaking directly to the female offenders and gathering primary data from them, as they may have deeper insights than what can be provided from secondary data analysis. Schurman-Kauflin (2000) did this with success. Researchers may also want to look at specific stages in the female

serial murderer's life, such as childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, to determine if a specific stage of life has more of an impact than another.

This study focused solely on white offenders. Future researchers may benefit from researching female serial murderers of other races to see if there are different cultural or psychosocial characteristics that impact their later crimes. Additionally, as this study focused solely on murderers from the United States and Canada, future researchers should look at offenders from different locations such as Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Outside of the scope of serial murderers, researchers may benefit from examining the psychosocial characteristics of mass murderers, spree murderers, and individuals who commit a single-event homicide. By comparing the differences in psychosocial characteristics between the groups, a researcher may be able to develop a resource that lists different risk factors for each type of murderer.

Implications

This study encourages positive social change by studying the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. Though this will not have as much of an impact on the general public, it confirms prior research and may provide more information for future researchers, law enforcement agencies, and the justice system, who are more likely to encounter female serial murderers due to their line of work. Additionally, it provides more information aligned with behavioral analysis, potentially allowing the completion of a profile on the average solo female serial murderer and the average female team serial murderer.

The study of serial murder generally provides information that is more useful for understanding an offender after they are arrested, but analyzing commonalities may provide information necessary to the investigatory process. An increased understanding of female serial murderers and how they operate may be able to shorten the time female offenders are active and assist law enforcement with identifying, understanding, and arresting them. Providing information on the common psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers may allow law enforcement to discern suspects who are statistically more likely to commit these types of offenses

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to discern the psychosocial characteristics of female serial murderers. After completing a thematic analysis, the data confirmed much of what was previously known about female serial murderers. The study showed that, while there are differences between solo and team offenders, many female serial murderers share common experiences, such as childhood trauma, romantic instability, and a long pattern of antisocial behavior. The themes developed in this study are important for both future researchers and the law enforcement community; by understanding female serial murderers and how their psychosocial characteristics have shaped them, we are closer to catching them before they kill.

Like men, women commit serial murder. While the gap in research surrounding female serial murderers has increasingly shrank, there is still much that we do not know about them, and there are still people who view them as a joke rather than an actual threat

to safety. Combined, the women analyzed in this study killed a total of 68 people, though the number may be higher. Because of this, they do pose a valid threat to public safety. Increased understanding of their psychosocial characteristics may limit that threat, potentially saving lives before they are lost.

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