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## Examining Emergent Patterns of Behavior in White Female Sexual Homicide Offenders

Kristin Bemis  
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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Kristin Bemis

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2025

Abstract

Examining Emergent Patterns of Behavior in White Female Sexual Homicide Offenders

by

Kristin Bemis

MS, Walden University, 2021

BA, Georgia College and State University, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

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## Abstract

The majority of studies on sexual homicide offenders (SHOs) have been conducted on male sexual homicide offenders (MSHOs). In many aspects, this is due to society's reluctance to view women as capable of sexual murder. There have only been a handful of studies conducted on female sexual homicide offenders (FSHOs). However, these studies found substantial differences between MSHOs and FSHOs, as well as between White FSHOs and Black FSHOs. Since prior studies on FSHOs have all been quantitative, this study employed a qualitative case study approach to analyze FSHOs. Using rational choice theory, 12 White FSHO cases were examined, using both primary and secondary data sources. Out of these 12 cases, six were solo White FSHOs, and six were White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. Each phase of the crime committal process (pre-crime, crime, and post-crime) was analyzed to determine emergent patterns of behavior unique to White FSHOs. The most prevalent findings were the presence of control, overkill, and torture in direct correlation to the sexual aspects of the homicide. Additionally, while the data confirmed some of what was previously known about FSHOs, including racial and gender aspects of victim selection, other data on the intimate relationships between solo White FSHOs and their male victims, as well as the lack of firearm prevalence, conflicted with prior quantitative findings. This study contributes to positive social change by expanding the contextual knowledge of White FSHOs' behaviors, which may aid law enforcement in identifying and subsequently apprehending these individuals.

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## Dedication

For my husband, Stanton, who has been my rock and my buoy. You kept me steady and afloat when the crashing of life's waves nearly took me under. Your understanding, kindness, support, and love throughout this process have meant more to me than I could ever express. You helped me find the courage to pursue a life I had only ever dreamed of, and I am so happy I get to pursue that life with you. I love you bunches and bunches.

For my mom and sister, who have been my biggest cheerleaders since day one. Thank you for your tireless support and encouragement. You are both remarkable women whom I am incredibly proud of and love very, very much.

For the victims in this dissertation whose lives were taken much too soon and in the cruelest ways imaginable. I hope this research contributes to the understanding of these offenders, aiding in their apprehension and conviction, and potentially preventing future loss of life.

For God above, who gave me the strength of mind and body to complete this dissertation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

Sexual homicide is a rare phenomenon that is characterized by the key aspects of violation, violence, and the loss of life. While this form of murder is not a common occurrence, the depraved details of these crimes ignite fear and horror within the public and create the need for a more unified understanding of these offenders within the criminal justice system. Sexual homicide occurs in only 1% to 5% of all homicide cases (Beauregard & Martineau, 2016; Chan, 2019; Chan & Heide, 2016), with discrepancies in the rates of reported cases being due, in part, to the lack of unified criteria to distinguish sexual homicide (Chan, 2015). Sexual homicide offenders (SHOs) are most often adult (88%) males (95%) between the ages of 25 and 34 years old, depending on the country (Beauregard & Martineau, 2013; Chan et al., 2010; Chan et al., 2019b; Greenall & Richardson, 2015; Myers & Chan, 2012; Stefanska et al., 2015). Most victims of SHOs are females (79%) (Chan et al., 2019a), with 70%-80% of those female victims being 18 years or older (Chan, 2017b).

Furthermore, previous researchers who have studied SHOs have found that the results differ depending on race (Chan et al., 2024; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2010; Chan & Frei, 2013), with researchers finding that the majority of SHOs (59%-95%) and sexual homicide victims (63%-93%) are White (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2015; Stefanska et al., 2015; Karakasi et al., 2017). Internationally, Chan et al. (2024) referenced the pervasiveness of sexual homicide across different countries, with the percentage of sexual homicides in the United States at 0.84% (Chan, 2021), Canada at

2.7% (Kong et al., 2003), England and Wales at 3.7% (Frances & Soothill, 2000), Australia at 0.9% (Mouzos, 2003), Finland at 2.8% (Häkkinen-Nyholm et al., 2009), and Jamaica at 5% (Lemard & Hemenway, 2006).

Within the United States, homicides are entered into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR). These reports are compiled from data submitted voluntarily by local law enforcement agencies across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with a 90% participation rate, and contain demographic characteristics of homicide offenders, victims, and circumstances of the crime (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). As there is no category specifically for sexual homicide, these crimes are identified as homicides with the additional coding of 'rape' or 'other sexual offenses' (Kaplan, 2023). The data is entered into the SHR solely at the discretion of law enforcement officers and based upon the arrests, not convictions, of individuals (Chan, 2021).

Chan et al. (2024) reported that from 1976 to 2022, 791,358 offenders were arrested for homicide and entered into the SHR database. Out of this number, 6,201 offenders (0.78%) were coded with 'rape' or 'other sexual offenses.' The authors further determined that 3,362 of these cases were committed as single-victim-single-offender, while 2,839 cases had either unknown offenders, multiple offenders, or multiple victims. Of the single-victim-single-offender cases, 3,204 (95.3%) offenders were male and 158 (4.7%) were female. Though this is a relatively low number of female offenders, forming a better understanding of female-perpetrated sexual homicide can further the research on

this unique subtype of the offender, as well as aid law enforcement in the understanding, identification, and apprehension of these offenders.

In Chapter 1, I will outline the background and purpose of this study, provide the problem statement, research questions, theoretical framework, and nature of the study, and note any potential assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and necessary definitions for this study.

### **Background**

Sexual homicide has been acknowledged and studied as a unique phenomenon since Richard von Krafft-Ebing first published the seminal work *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. In this work, Krafft-Ebing explored how offenders integrated sexually deviant acts such as rape, mutilation, strangulation, necrophilia, and cannibalism with the perpetration of homicide. Furthermore, Krafft-Ebing coined the integration of these acts as lust murders, now more widely known as sexual homicide.

In the 1970s and 1980s, FBI Special Agents Robert Ressler and John Douglas, along with forensic nurse Ann Burgess, began to develop a more modern understanding of sexual homicide by examining a SHO's childhood and development in combination with behavioral indicators of sexual homicide found at crime scenes (Vronsky, 2018). This foray into the psyche and behaviors of SHOs resulted in Ressler, Douglas, and Burgess developing the first profiles of SHOs that could aid law enforcement in capturing this unique type of offender.

Since studies on sexual homicide began, many different definitions have been proposed, though no official or legal definition has ever been established. However, the

most widely accepted and employed definition for sexual homicide was proposed by Ressler et al. (1988) and predicated on physical evidence found either at the crime scene or throughout an investigation (see Beauregard, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; James & Beauregard, 2020; Kim et al., 2024; Stefanska et al., 2020). The criteria are, therefore, based solely upon an offender's actions during the crime committal process (pre-crime, crime, post-crime).

The lack of a standardized definition for sexual homicide can lead to recorded statistics being unavailable, ambiguous, and difficult to pinpoint at times, presenting complications in the identification of SHOs (Chan, 2019; Ressler et al., 1988). The issues of identification become even more pronounced in cases of female sexual homicide offenders (FSHOs). Between 1986 and 2015, there were approximately 47 empirical studies on sexual homicide, with 97% of those studies being conducted on male sexual homicide offenders (MSHOs). However, there have been only six studies on FSHOs between 2013 and 2024. Five of those studies were conducted in the United States (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013) and one in Scotland (Skott et al., 2019). This immense differential in the study of male versus female SHOs creates a greater need for studies on FSHOs.

Female sexual offending in and of itself is an under-researched area of study, particularly in equivalence to the preponderance of studies regarding male sexual offending (Chan, 2023). While officially, the number of incidents of female-perpetrated sexual violence is quite low (5%-6% of all sexual offenders), self-report studies have proposed that the actual number of female sexual offenders (FSOs) is much higher, but

the majority of these incidents go unreported (Chan et al., 2024; Cortoni et al., 2017; Groth, 1979; Saradjian, 2010). In a meta-analysis study by Cortoni et al. (2017), the authors found that the rate of female-perpetrated sexual assaults was six times higher in victimization surveys than in official, reported data. This is most likely due to society's inability to view women as active perpetrators of sexual violence, as well as negative societal attitudes toward the victims of female-perpetrated sexual violence (Khan et al., 2018).

Females, as active agents of aggression and violence, and males, as victims, do not fit into the heteronormative victim scripts usually studied by researchers (Allen & Bradley, 2018; Eckstein, 2016). Society views women as nurturers and often even as nonsexual (Denov, 2004). The idea of a sexually violent woman is antithetical to everything that a woman 'should' be. However, regardless of societal views, FSOs have been distinguished as a distinct type of offender (Chopin et al., 2023b; Cortoni & Stefanof, 2020; McIvor, 2017; Vandiver et al., 2017), and understanding FSOs' distinct offender typology further leads to appreciating FSHOs as distinct offenders who may not fit into the profile of SHOs that was established and developed based on researchers' understanding of MSHOs. (Chan et al., 2019a).

Similar to the low number of FSOs, female homicide offenders (FHOs) only made up 10.6% of homicide offenders in the United States in 2022 (FBI, 2023). From 2017 to 2021, the percentage of FHOs ranged between 8.8% and 11.5% of all homicide offenders in the United States (FBI, n.d.). Even within the framework of violent crimes, women are mainly studied in the domestic context of wives (or partners) and mothers

(Belknap et al., 2012; Campbell & Jensen, 2019; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Suonpää & Savolainen, 2019) or from cases where the FHO displays some type of mental illness (Carabellese et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). The driving narrative on women and homicide in the literature is that of societally biased gender and violence (Fridel & Fox, 2019; Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024; Santos-Hermoso et al., 2023).

In Fridel and Fox's (2019) study on patterns of MHOs and FHOs within the United States between 1976 and 2017, the authors delineated that men make up roughly 90% of all homicide offenders and that men are also the most likely to be the victim of a homicide offender as approximately 81% of male homicide offenders' (MHOs) victims are male, and 78% of FHOs' victims are male. When the percentage of FHOs' victims who are intimate partners (27%) and family members (23%) are added together, they represent precisely 50% of the victims of FHOs. However, it is notable that acquaintances make up 37% of FHOs' victims. The authors also found that FHOs tended to utilize cleaner methods of murder, with approximately 40% of all cases of poison, drownings, drugs, and asphyxiation being attributed to FHOs. Women particularly implement asphyxiation and drowning to kill children. Furthermore, scholars have found that FHOs, as a whole, are more likely to use firearms and edged weapons over other types of weapons when the victims are adults (Chan et al., 2019a; Heide et al., 2012).

The concept of women using less physically demanding weapons to commit homicide ties into the physical strength hypothesis proposed by Heide (1993). Initially, the physical strength hypothesis was proposed by Heide when examining the act of parricide (the killing of one's parents) and the differing choices of weapons between

juvenile and adult offenders who commit parricide. Heide's hypothesis posited that juvenile and female offenders are usually physically weaker than adult and male offenders. Therefore, the weaker offenders are more likely to use less physically demanding weapons, such as knives or firearms. In contrast, offenders with greater physical strength are more likely to exert that physical strength to overpower and kill their victim using methods such as personal weapons (i.e., strangulation, asphyxiation, beating, or drowning) or contact weapons (i.e., blunt objects).

In 2008, Chan and Heide applied the physical strength hypothesis to the study of sexual homicides and the determinate nature of physical strength between the offender and victim in highlighting the differences between sexual homicides committed by male and female offenders. Scholars have found that MSHOs most often use personal weapons (such as asphyxiation, strangulation, beatings, drownings, etc.), followed by edged weapons (such as knives) and contact weapons (such as blunt instruments) (Chan, 2019; Chan, 2021; Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Chan et al., 2019a; Kim et al., 2023). This presents a stark contrast to FSHOs, as scholars have found that their most common weapon of murder is firearms, with personal and edged weapons being less commonly used (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013). The differences in weapon choice between male and female SHOs point to the assertion that other differences between MSHOs and FSHOs may be present in each stage of the crime committal process and sets FSHOs apart as an entirely different subgroup of SHOs in need of their own understanding and classification.

Chan and Frei (2013) were the first to publish a study on FSHOs and found these offenders to be unique, with demographics that presented as different from MSHOs. Using data from the FBI's SHR reported between 1976 and 2007, the authors examined FSHOs' patterns, such as weapon use, epidemiology, victimology, and the relationship between the victim and the offender. They found that of the 204 cases of FSHOs reported, the majority of offenders were adults (87%), with substantially more male (73%) than female (27%) victims. The authors also found that there were slightly more White than Black FSHOs (51% and 49%, respectively) and that the weapon of choice for these offenders was most often firearms (50%), followed by edged weapons (26%). In contrast to FHOs, who primarily kill intimate partners and family members (Fridel & Fox, 2019), Chan and Frei (2013) found that FSHOs most often target friends or acquaintances (51%), followed by strangers (20%), intimate partners (16%), and a family member (13%). Additionally, the authors found that FSHOs are more likely to commit their crime on their own without a partner, as 72.5% of female-perpetrated sexual homicide cases consisted of either single perpetrator-single victim or single perpetrator-multiple victims. In comparison, only 27.5% of cases indicated either multiple perpetrators-single victim or multiple perpetrator-multiple victims.

A follow-up study by Chan et al., published in the same year (2013), examined the same sample of FSHOs with a heightened interest in the racial aspects of the offenders. The authors noted that this was specifically needed since previous findings by Chan and Frei (2013) pointed to significant racial differences between FSHOs and other female offender populations, such as FHOs and FSOs. Additionally, previous research on

MSHOs demonstrated considerable racial differences, including that Black MSHOs were overrepresented (41%) given their overall representation in the United States population (13%) and that White MSHOs were more likely to kill intra-racially. At the same time, Black MSHOs were more likely to kill both intra-racially and inter-racially (within their race and outside of their race, respectively) (Chan et al., 2010).

When examining the victim-offender relationship by race, Chan et al. (2013) found that approximately half of the FSHOs of both races killed friends, acquaintances, or someone who knew the offender in some manner, 44% for White FSHOs and 57% for Black FSHOs. However, White and Black FSHOs differed in their second most frequent victim-offender relationship, with White FSHOs killing their family members (24%) and Black FSHOs killing strangers (22%). Intimate partners were found to be the least reported victims of White FSHOs (15%) and the second least reported victims of Black FSHOs (13%), with family members being the least reported victims of Black FSHOs (9%). Furthermore, the authors found that the type of murder weapon also differed between White and Black FSHOs. Approximately 60% of White FSHOs used firearms as their murder weapon, while only 48% of Black FSHOs used firearms. The second most frequently used murder weapon by White FSHOs was personal weapons (17%), whereas edged weapons were the second most frequently used weapons by Black FSHOs (32%). In sum, this seminal work on FSHOs demonstrated the importance of race in the examination of pattern emergence amongst these offenders.

Chan et al. (2019a) further progressed the understanding of FSHOs by examining and comparing the different types of weapons used by male and female single-victim

SHOs. The types of weapons employed in sexual homicides form one of the most significant divergences in pattern emergence between male and female SHOs. For this research study, the authors used data reported to the SHR between 1976 and 2012 and found that 95% of the SHOs included were MSHOs, and only 5% were FSHOs. The authors also found that the methods of murder and crime scene behaviors are often not consistent across genders. MSHOs most commonly employed personal weapons (44%), such as strangulation, asphyxiation, beating, and drowning, followed by edged weapons (29%), firearms (14%), and contact weapons (13%). Whereas FSHOs most often utilized firearms (63%), followed by edged weapons (26%), personal weapons (7%), and contact weapons (4%). The authors further found that MSHOs were likely to select more physically demanding weapons than FSHOs (57% vs. 11%), while FSHOs were more likely to use less physically demanding weapons than MSHOs (89% vs. 43%).

Most recently, Chan et al. (2024) analyzed reported cases of single-victim FSHOs in the United States between 1976 and 2022. The authors found that, of these offenders, 75% were young adults (18 to 39 years old), 53% were Black, 44% were White, 2% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 1% were Asian. The victims of these FSHOs were mainly men (89%), with 53% being young adults and 31% being middle-aged adults (40 to 59 years old). Out of these victims, 59% were Black, 40% were White, and 1% were American Indian/Alaskan Native. The relationships between the FSHOs and their victims consisted mainly of acquaintances (42%) and strangers (34%), with the most often used weapon being a firearm (64%). Using a latent class analysis, the authors identified two

distinct subgroups of FSHOs: White intra-familial offenders and Black inter-familial offenders.

The White intra-familial offenders represented 40% of the total sample of FSHOs and were comprised of mainly White (95%) young adults (67%) who primarily killed intra-rationally (within one's own race; 97%). Their victims were mainly male (89%), middle-aged adults (48%), and young adults (41%), and there was a high combination of intra-familial (within one's own family) victims (52%). These intra-familial victims consisted of intimate partners (25%) and immediate family members (22%). However, there was still a high percentage of acquaintance victims (33%). Finally, this subgroup of FSHOs used firearms as their primary murder weapon (75%).

The Black inter-familial offender group represented 60% of the total sample of FSHOs and, similar to the White intra-familial offenders, was comprised primarily of Black (88%) young adults (81%) who killed mainly intra-rationally (97%). However, while the victims were still predominantly male (88%), victim age consisted mostly of young adults (60%), with only 20% of victims being middle-aged. The nature of the offender-victim relationship in this subgroup was mainly inter-familial (outside of one's family), consisting of acquaintances (47%) and strangers (24%), with intimate partners comprising only 15% of victims and immediate family members only 6%. For the murder weapon, these offenders used predominantly firearms (57%) or edged weapons (32%). The findings on the victim-offender relationship and murder weapons are consistent with the findings of Chan et al. in 2013.

The differences in weapon patterns found between MSHOs and FSHOs indicate substantial disparities between these distinct populations of SHOs and, therefore, should be studied accordingly (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019; Chan & Frei, 2013). Specifically, Chan et al. (2019a) posited that in-depth studies on FSHOs could illuminate further divergences from MSHOs' patterns of behavior and could potentially reveal key aspects of the crime committal process distinctive to FSHOs, including whether the offender brought a weapon or used one found at the scene, potential connections between the use of a firearm and consensual sex before the homicide, and evidence of sadism.

While previous studies have explored the statistical demographics of FSHOs, there have been no studies on the contextual aspects of FSHOs' behavior during their crime committal process. This can be ameliorated by analyzing FSHO cases using a case study approach. By examining FSHOs' cases in detail, emergent patterns of behavior may be identified, providing law enforcement and forensic professionals with further knowledge and understanding of this unique subtype of SHO.

### **Problem Statement**

Previous knowledge and research into SHOs have been almost exclusively gained through the study of MSHOs (Chan et al., 2024). It was not until 2013 that the first research studies on FSHOs were conducted by Chan and Frei and Chan et al. In the following years, a handful of studies on FSHOs were published, all of which were quantitative studies that examined the demographic aspects of FSHOs (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2019; Chan et al., 2024; Skott et al., 2019), prompting the authors to point out the

need for further examination of FSHOs' behavior from an in-depth and contextual perspective.

Due to the focus on MSHOs and the lack of qualitative research on FSHOs, little is known regarding the crime committal process of FSHOs, particularly on how the offender's gender and race inform premeditated criminal, sexual, and homicidal behavior. Identifying behavioral pattern emergence through case study analysis of FSHOs' crime committal process could lead to a better understanding of the behavioral differences between male and female SHOs. Understanding the unique behavioral patterns of FSHOs could aid law enforcement in the apprehension of these offenders and contribute to the scholarly research on FSHOs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore emergent patterns of behavior discovered throughout the examination of the crime committal process of White FSHOs. The crime committal process refers to the consideration of a crime as an entire event, including pre-crime, crime, and post-crime stages (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c). This method of analysis has been utilized in more recent research on sexual homicide as it provides a contextual and situational understanding of SHOs' actions during each stage of their crime (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Schlesinger, 2021). Discerning behavioral patterns from the crime committal process of White FSHOs could provide new knowledge of these offenders' actions and behaviors, including premeditation, method of homicide, sexual elements, indications of sadism, crime scene behaviors, mutilation of the victim's body, and forensic awareness strategies.

Previous scholars have pointed out the need to explore FSHOs on a more in-depth basis, constituting a gap in the literature that I will address in this research study (Chan, 2021; Chan & Beauregard, 2019; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Additionally, any new knowledge of White FSHOs that may be gained from this study could further aid law enforcement agencies in apprehending these offenders.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

Research Question 2: How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Approaching sexual homicide from a rational choice perspective has been known as an effective manner in which to analyze this type of crime (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Chopin et al., 2020a; Chopin et al., 2023b; Cornish & Clarke, 1987; James & Beauregard, 2020; Verbora, 2023). Utilizing rational choice theory provides the advantage of examining each step taken by the offender in the crime committal process (Douglas et al., 2013) and puts forth a framework built upon an offender's self-interest and rationality being at the core of their decision-making process (Clark & Cornish, 1985; Piquero & Tibbetts, 2001). Crucially, offenders use a cost-

benefit analysis to determine if the reward of the crime outweighs the inherent risks (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b).

Indicative of the rational choice approach is the understanding that self-interest and rationality underlie the principles on which an offender bases their decision-making process (Chopin et al., 2020a; Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Piquero & Tibbetts, 2001). Understanding rational choice theory can aid in understanding sexual homicide as an entire event, including pre-crime, crime, and post-crime actions (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c). Multiple factors throughout the crime committal process, such as situational circumstances or offender-victim interactions, could impact the offender's decision-making process (Chan et al., 2024). Significantly, using a rational choice model allows scholars to identify patterns within subgroups of offenders, such as White FSHOs who displayed premeditated and sexually deviant behaviors that are included in these case studies.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was a qualitative, descriptive case study design in which I examined the crime committal process of White FSHOs. Researchers use descriptive case study design to narrate and examine real-world situations, allowing them to observe and evaluate patterns that may be present (Schoch, 2020; Shanahan et al., 2018). A descriptive case study approach was particularly appropriate for this study as it is best utilized in the early stages of research (Benbasat et al., 1987). Unlike most qualitative designs, which focus on interviewing and observing active participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I did not include interviews or interactions with live participants for

several reasons. First, the cases included in this study were bracketed into a period of the last 100 years. Therefore, some of the individuals analyzed in this study are no longer living and, consequently, cannot be interviewed. Secondly, access to the remaining incarcerated individuals was not likely and was not attempted. Therefore, the data were collected from archival sources, including court documents, police reports, documentaries, news articles, peer-reviewed articles, and scholarly books. Triangulation, the collection of data from multiple sources, enables further data verification and the management of potential bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patnaik & Pandey, 2019; Yin, 2009). The data for this qualitative study were collected and coded manually to allow for the emergence of patterns throughout the analysis of the offenders' crime committal process.

### **Definitions**

*Battered Woman Syndrome:* Coined in 1979 by Lenore Walker as a subcategory of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in which a woman is controlled by a partner (usually a man) through coercion and abuse (psychological, physical, and/or sexual), which results in particular symptoms (Walker, 2009)

*Contact weapons:* Blunt instruments used in a manner to cause bodily harm (Chan, 2019; Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Chan et al., 2019a; Kim et al., 2023).

*Crime committal process:* The events and actions of offenders before (pre-crime), during (crime), and after (post-crime) the criminal offense (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c; Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b).

*Edged weapons:* Instruments with a blade, such as knives, used in a manner to cause bodily harm (Chan, 2019; Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Chan et al., 2019a; Kim et al., 2023).

*Foreign object insertion:* The act of an offender violating a victim by the nonconsensual insertion of an item or object into any orifice of a victim (Beauregard et al., 2022).

*Inter-racial killing:* When the victim and offender are from different races (Chan et al., 2010).

*Intra-racial killing:* When the victim and offender are of the same race (Chan et al., 2010).

*Mutilation:* Defined by Stone and Brucato (2019) as “the removal or irreparable disfigurement, by any means, of some smaller portion of one of those larger sections of a living or dead person” (p.83).

*Necrophilia:* A paraphilia in which offenders have sexual intercourse with dead bodies (Chan, 2019).

*Overkill:* While there is no official definition, the most common classification for overkill comes from Ressler et al. (1988), who stated that overkill is “the infliction of more injury than is necessary to kill a person” (p. 55).

*Personal weapons:* Methods of murder that require close contact, such as asphyxiation, strangulation, beatings, and drownings (Chan, 2019; Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Chan et al., 2019a; Kim et al., 2023).

*Premeditation (legal)*: When a defendant considers an act and its consequences for any length of time and decides to follow through with said act (Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

*Sexual sadism*: While there is no official definition, hallmarks include overkill, physical restraints, sexual humiliation, and mutilation of victims, with the offender's goal being to achieve sexual arousal by inflicting extreme and nonconsensual pain, suffering, control, and humiliation upon their victim (Kim et al., 2023).

*Sodomy*: Defined as “any sexual act involving the sex organs of one person and the mouth or anus of another (*Bass v. State*, 2020, p. 8).”

*Torture*: Acts inflicted to cause severe physical or psychological pain and suffering (18 U.S.C. 2340A).

### **Acronyms**

*FHO*: Female homicide offender

*FSO*: Female sexual offender

*FSHO*: Female sexual homicide offender

*MHO*: Male homicide offender

*MSO*: Male sexual offender

*MSHO*: Male sexual homicide offender

*SHO*: Sexual homicide offender

*SHR*: (FBI) Supplemental homicide report

### **Assumptions**

My predominant assumption in this study was that FSHOs constitute a unique subgroup of SHOs, characterized by distinct patterns of behavior during their pre-crime, crime, and post-crime stages. This assumption was primary to the root aspects of this research study and, therefore, necessary. I also assumed that the data collected would be accurate and trustworthy. I used the triangulation of primary data (court documents and police reports) and secondary data (peer-reviewed articles, news articles, prior interviews, and scholarly books) to verify the accuracy of the data.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

My goal in this study was to analyze the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process of White FSHOs. I focused on White FSHOs from the United States who fit the FBI's criteria for sexual homicide. The participants consisted of six solo White FSHOs and six White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. Data was collected via court documents, police records, documentaries, peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, and news articles.

Delimitations included the exclusion of MSHOs, FSHOs of color, and FSHOs outside of the United States. MSHOs were excluded from this study due to the majority of prior research on SHOs sampling only male populations (Chan, 2019). This constituted a gap in the literature as only a handful of studies have been published on FSHOs (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Additionally, the exclusion of FSHOs of color was appropriate as the highest percentage of all FHOs (Fridel & Fox, 2019), as well as 59%-95% of SHOs and

63%-93% of sexual homicide victims are White (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2015; Stefanska et al., 2015; Karakasi et al., 2017). Nearly all previous research on FSHOs has been conducted using sample populations from the United States (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013), and therefore, to compare this research with previous research on FSHOs, I only used a sample population from within the United States.

### **Limitations**

One prevalent limitation of this study was the lack of live participants. The ability to interview FSHOs in person was not likely, as some are incarcerated, some have already passed, and some have been released from prison and have changed their names. Therefore, data for this study were collected from primary sources, including publicly available court documents, police records, state inmate information, video recordings of trials, and documentaries featuring interviews with investigators, forensic analysts, and pathologists who worked on the case. Secondary sources of data consisted of newspaper articles from the time period of the murders that detailed trial testimony, more recently published online articles, books written by subject matter experts, and peer-reviewed articles. Additional limitations included sources sometimes providing conflicting information; however, this was mitigated through meticulous triangulation to ensure the most accurate information was included in this study.

### **Significance**

The impact of gender on the study and reporting of FSHOs is deeply rooted in societal expectations and understanding of gender roles as they relate to violent and

sexual crimes. In their study on FSHOs using data obtained through the FBI's SHR database, Chan et al. (2013) noted that the social understanding of sexual homicide could impact law enforcement officers' coding of a female-perpetrated homicide as sexual in the SHR. The authors theorized that issues with the classification of sexual homicide, as well as society's reluctance to view women as either violent or sexual offenders, could all play a part in the reporting of FSHOs. Therefore, understanding FSHOs as a distinct subgroup of SHOs is important culturally, socially, and academically.

Unlike the sexually overt aspects of MSHOs' crime committal process, the sexual aspects and behaviors demonstrated by FSHOs were not overt unless the woman is committing the sexual act in a manner that mimics male anatomy (such as with foreign object insertion) or removes male anatomy (as in the removal of male genitalia, such as castration). Identifying less overt patterns of sexual behaviors that occur during the crime committal process of FSHOs could aid in more accurate reporting of these offenders. At this time, the reliability of the data entered into the SHR to classify a homicide as sexual is unknown, as the coding of data is up to the discretion of law enforcement officers (Chan, 2015; Ressler et al., 1988). This lack of reliable quantitative data for FSHOs undermines the potential prevalence of these offenders. Identifying offender behavior during the crime committal process of FSHOs could expand the knowledge of these unique offenders for those in the forensic fields and law enforcement, potentially aiding in investigative strategies such as prioritization of suspects using offender profiling (Chan et al., 2024).

## Summary

While interest in FSHOs has undoubtedly developed over recent years, much is still unknown about this unique subgroup of SHOs. As a result, FSHOs are an underestimated threat that can be difficult to identify due to a lack of classification, societal stereotypes, and misinformed biases that are pervasive throughout popular culture, law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and the media. However, scholars have found that women are just as capable of enacting sexual violence as men are and, therefore, should not be criminally underestimated (Chan, 2023; Chan et al., 2024).

Previous studies on SHOs conducted using data from the FBI's SHR have found behavioral differences between MSHOs (Chan & Beauregard, 2016; Chan et al., 2010; Chan & Heide, 2008) and FSHOs (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013). Additionally, scholars have found behavioral disparities between White and Black FSHOs (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013). However, previous studies on FSHOs have all been conducted with a quantitative design, leading scholars to emphasize the need for a qualitative understanding of the situational and contextual aspects of FSHOs' behavior throughout the crime committal process (Chan, 2021; Chan & Beauregard, 2019; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Kim et al., 2023; Skott et al., 2019).

Using a qualitative case study analysis to discern behavioral patterns from the crime committal process of White FSHOs could provide new knowledge of these offenders' actions and behaviors, including premeditation, influence of a partner, method

of homicide, sexual elements, indications of sadism, crime scene behaviors, mutilation of the victim's body, and forensic awareness strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the premeditated criminal process of White FSHOs to discover any emergent patterns that may further define this subgroup of SHOs.

Despite the low prevalence rates of FSHOs, the fact remains that they do exist, and therefore, scholars have emphasized that their existence warrants further exploration to understand these offenders and aid law enforcement in their investigative strategies (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). In Chapter 2, I will thoroughly review recent and seminal research. Topics that are discussed include rational choice theory, understanding women as sexual offenders and homicide offenders, a historical and modern understanding of sexual homicide, sexual homicide pre-crime, crime, and post-crime behaviors, where the literature currently stands on female sexual homicide offenses, and finally, the impact of race and gender on the treatment of offenders within the criminal justice system.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The occurrence of sexual homicide is rare, with a prevalence rate of only 1% to 5% of all homicides committed in a year (Chan, 2019). Out of that small number of SHOs, approximately 95% are MSHOs, with only 5% or less being FSHOs (Chan et al., 2019a). The lack of literature and research conducted on White FSHOs can potentially be linked to the lack of cases in which the perpetrator has been identified and classified as an FSHO due to sexual homicide parameters being primarily based upon information sourced from studies on MSHOs (Chan et al., 2024). Additionally, as there is no legal definition of sexual homicide, most SHOs are convicted solely of some form of murder charge (be it capital murder, manslaughter, culpable homicide, etc.) without any accompanying sexual charges (Chan, 2019; Skott et al., 2019). While this does not usually affect the perception of males as SHOs, it may affect the perception of females as SHOs.

At present, there is not much known about the specific crime of female-perpetrated sexual homicide due to the scarce amount of research that has been conducted on this subgroup of SHOs. Thus far, only a handful of studies have been published that examine and report findings on FSHOs (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Despite these studies cultivating the first research on FSHOs, they are only able to provide quantitative research that examines the demographics of these offenders as reported by law

enforcement officers and have not been able to delve into FSHOs on a deeper qualitative level to provide research on developmental, pre-crime, crime, or post-crime behaviors.

In 2013, Chan and Frei and Chan et al. published the first studies that solely analyzed FSHOs as their own offender population, as previous research on sexual homicide had been conducted by studying male offenders. Chan et al. (2013) argued that the small number of known FSHOs does not mean there should be less research, as this offender population is unique, violent, and worthy of being studied for those characteristics that set it apart from MSHOs. Furthermore, previous researchers who have studied SHOs have found the results differ depending on race (Chan et al., 2010; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013) with researchers examining the racial backgrounds of SHOs and sexual homicide victims having found that the majority of both the offenders and victims are White. According to Chan (2019), Chan et al. (2015), Stefanska et al. (2015), and Karakasi et al. (2017), 59%-95% of SHOs and 63%-93% of sexual homicide victims have been found to be White. There is an additional basis for studying FSHOs from a racial standpoint, as prior studies of nonsexual female homicide offenders have recognized race as a significant variable in the analysis of these crimes (Ressler et al., 1988; Skott et al., 2019). Specifically, Fridel and Fox (2019) found that White females constituted the highest percentage of all FHOs. This provides justification for the analysis of White FSHO case studies included in this paper.

The purpose of this study was to examine the premeditated criminal process of White FSHOs to discover any emergent patterns that may further define this unique subgroup of SHOs. Using a qualitative case study approach increases the likelihood of

identifying offender patterns when observing behaviors demonstrated during pre-crime, crime, and post-crime stages (Chan, 2019). Additionally, this approach enables an examination that extends beyond mere numbers. It involves focusing on descriptors of individual stories to allow for deeper analysis and evaluation of particular behavioral aspects of the crime (Patnaik & Pandey, 2019). Within this literature review, I summarized the literature search strategy and the existing literature on rational choice theory, which serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. I also included an exhaustive analysis of the literature on FSOs, FHOs, sexual homicide, and FSHOs.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I gathered information for this literature review using scholarly articles and books written by subject matter experts that included data on the rational choice theory, FSOs, FHOs, FSHOs, historical and modern understanding of sexual homicide, FBI criteria for classification of sexual homicide, SHOs' developmental, pre-crime, crime, and post-crime behaviors, sexual homicide internationally, male victims of sexual homicide, the physical strength hypothesis, gender bias in the criminal justice system, and female offenders and racial bias within the criminal justice system. The databases used to identify peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles were: EBSCOHost, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycBooks, ProQuest Ebook Central, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar. Keywords used to search for peer-reviewed scholarly articles in this study were: *Sexual homicide, rational choice, Rational choice AND crime, Rational choice AND sexual offending, female sexual offender, female sexual homicide offender, female sexual murderer, crime scene, sexual homicide AND crime scene, sadism, sexual homicide AND*

*sadism, lust murder, sexual deviance, sex offenders, White female sex offenders, White female homicide offenders, male and female sex offenders AND comparison, classification of crimes, paraphilias, paraphilias AND homicide, non-serial sexual homicide, depravity of crime.*

There is an abundance of articles on sexual offenders and sexual homicides. It became essential to sort articles into specific categories relating to this study so as not to be overwhelmed by the amount of literature. Most research has focused on overarching statistics of sexual homicides; very few have focused on in-depth case studies of SHOs, and articles have focused mainly on MSHOs.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

### **Rational Choice Theory**

Theoretical frameworks are the structure on which a dissertation is built (Grant & Osanloo, 2014); therefore, it is one of the most critical steps in constructing the dissertation. One theory that was present throughout the literature reviewed and is closely associated with criminal reasoning is rational choice theory. Rational choice theory is a framework that is used to examine the decision-making process of criminals and how they employ a cost-benefit analysis of their crimes, and can be implemented to aid scholars in understanding the lived experiences of offenders and how those experiences play into their choices (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Chopin et al., 2023b; Cornish & Clarke, 1987).

Applied to the field of criminology in the 1980s by Cornish and Clarke, the rational choice theory model considers how offenders' perception of the world and their

thought processes can lead and be crucial to their decision-making process when committing a crime. Within the rational choice model, Clarke and Cornish (1985) examined how multiple academic disciplines, such as cognitive psychology, the sociology of deviance, economics, and criminology, all play a part in the rational choices that perpetuate criminal offenses. The authors further posited that there are two levels of decisions within the rational choice theory that are prevalent during the crime committal process. These levels are the macro level, which encompasses the broad decision that offenders make when committing a crime, and the micro level, which involves all the steps and decisions that offenders take to achieve their overall goal of committing the crime. Therefore, this theory is grounded in risk and reward, and how these dynamics affect criminals' choices and decisions during their crime committal process.

Indicative of the rational choice approach is understanding how self-interest and rationality are the underlying principles on which an offender bases their decision-making process (Chopin et al., 2020a; Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Piquero & Tibbetts, 2001). Understanding rational choice theory can aid in understanding the intent of a crime. Furthermore, this theory is crucial to understanding how personal beliefs and situational aspects of the crime's environment affect offenders' decision-making process (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007). The rational choice includes the modus operandi of an offender that can be influenced by the rational choices they make during the crime committal process (James & Beauregard, 2020), as well as the amount of forensic awareness the offender demonstrated when committing their crime, such as choices made to avoid police detection. Most recently, Chopin and Beauregard (2023b) confirmed that

SHOs could employ rational choice throughout their crime committal process, including adaptation when needed. Furthermore, Verbora (2023) broke rational choice theory down into four main choices an offender must make: (a) whether or not to commit a crime, (b) whether or not a particular target will be selected, (c) how frequently to offend, and (d) whether or not to cease criminal activity.

By understanding the four main choices of the rational choice model presented by Verbora (2023), scholars can begin to identify patterns within subgroups of offenders, such as White FSHOs who displayed premeditated and sexually deviant behaviors that are included in these case studies. Importantly, scholars must understand how rational choice influences each stage of the crime committal process (pre-crime, crime, post-crime) and the patterns therein. Therefore, sexual homicide must be considered an entire criminal event instead of just one action (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c). An example of this can be seen in organized offenders, who tend to make sophisticated, rational choices that reduce the likelihood of police detection. In contrast, disorganized offenders tend to make impulsive and unsophisticated rational choices, increasing the likelihood of police detection (James & Beauregard, 2020). Therefore, within this paper, I analyze the rational choices of White FSHOs to determine if any emergent patterns in behavior are evident before, during, and after the crime. By applying rational choice theory to analyze the different phases of criminality (pre-crime, crime, and post-crime), scholars can observe that offenders must balance the rewards gained from the crime with the risk of being caught, which informs the cost-benefit analysis (Chopin & Beauregard,

2023b). Understanding offenders' rational choices at the detailed level of a case study will provide further depth of insight into the psyches of these White FSHOs.

When studying emergent patterns of behavior in White FSHOs, there is a need to understand how rational choice played a part in their crime committal process. According to Chan and Frei (2013), Chan et al. (2024), and Skott et al. (2019), society has a difficult time viewing women as capable of sexual offending because that does not fit into the stereotype of what women are capable of. However, scholars understand that women are capable of sexual offending and sexual homicide, but what is unknown is the decision-making process that results in women committing premeditated homicide that displays deviant sexual behavior. Another area to consider, given the limited information available about White FSHOs, is the specific relevance of rational choice theory in understanding an offender's forensic awareness strategies employed to evade police detection (Chopin et al., 2020a). In sum, rational choice theory is a suitable guideline for better understanding the patterns of behavior in White FSHOs, from pre-crime actions and behaviors through to post-crime actions and behaviors.

### **Understanding Women as Sexual Offenders**

Understanding FSOs is a core facet that scholars need to be aware of when studying FSHOs. Examining the psychosocial and operational functions of FSOs lays the groundwork for further analysis of FSHOs. In examining FSOs, it is also critical to analyze their similarities and differences to MSOs, particularly when it comes to societal and gendered views. Societal views of sexual offenders tend to be more traditional, with the male as the perpetrator and the female as the victim (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010;

Mallicoat, 2022; Mellor & Deering, 2010). Societal views of sexual offenders are further stereotyped by media depictions of sex offenders as men and victims as women, with these mutually affirming views on sexual offenders resulting in women not being taken seriously as actual actors of sexual violence (Chan, 2023; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Therefore, FSOs can be recognized as their own type of offender as they often do not fit into the profiles of sexual offenders established by criminal justice researchers who developed the typology based on MSOs (Turner et al., 2008). Understanding FSOs' distinct offender typology further leads to appreciating FSHOs as distinct offenders who may not fit into the profile of SHOs that was established and developed based on researchers' understanding of MSHOs. Creating gendered typologies would involve providing comprehension of the implementation of sexual behaviors by the different genders of offenders (Chan et al., 2019a).

FSOs are a unique subgroup of sexual offenders. Women who are incarcerated for sexual offenses make up between 1% and 6% of all incarcerated offenders, depending on the studies' methodology (Cortoni et al., 2010; Embry & Lyons, 2012). While these figures are relatively low, it is estimated that the rate of female-perpetrated sexual assaults is much higher, but many go unreported (Chan et al., 2024; Cortoni et al., 2017; Saradjian, 2010). In a meta-analysis study by Cortoni et al. (2017), it was found that the rate of female-perpetrated sexual assaults was six times higher in victimization surveys than in official, reported data. Further studies of female-perpetrated sexual crimes have also revealed that the characteristics of the female offenders' crime patterns differ

depending on whether the crime is committed by a solo female offender or with a co-offender (Ten Bensele et al., 2019).

The motivations and characteristics of FSOs are idiosyncratic to their own heterogeneous population (Cortoni & Stefanof, 2020; McIvor, 2017; Vandiver et al., 2017). Due to the differences between MSOs and FSOs, researchers have focused efforts on determining FSO-specific typologies (Chopin et al., 2023b), with most of the typologies striving to surmise the motivations of FSOs from combined studies of offender characteristics and crime scene behavior (Cortoni & Gannon, 2016; McIvor, 2017; Robertiello & Terry, 2007).

The typologies of FSOs have evolved over the years, with Matthews et al. (1989) being the first to publish an empirical typology of these offenders, which consisted of three categories: teacher/lover, predisposed females, and female offenders coerced by a male offender. Other typologies focused on specific characteristics of victims and offenders along with the victimization severity (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004), the parameters of FSOs' criminal history (Sandler & Freeman, 2007), the 'how' rather than the 'who' of female perpetrated sexual assault (Wijkman et al., 2010), a proposed typology accounting for the motivations of FSOs (Wijkman et al., 2014), and the most recent typology based on the analysis of crime scene behaviors of FSOs (Almond et al., 2017).

In a study conducted by Chopin et al. (2023b), the authors employed a theoretical framework to build upon the knowledge established in previous typologies, a novel approach that had not been taken before. The theoretical framework adopted was rational

choice, and the analysis of FSOs' crimes using a crime script approach. The creation of crime scripts came in 1994 when Cornish merged a cognitive science concept with criminology to allow for the organization of knowledge about a particular crime to improve understanding of the crime. Cornish used the crime script approach to divide information about the crime into multiple steps consisting of the following: (a) preparation, (b) entry, (c) pre-condition, (d) instrumental pre-condition, (e) instrumental initiation, (f) instrumental actualization, (g) doing, (h) post-condition, and (i) exit (1994). The benefit of crime script analysis is that it allows for the joint examination of the crime in its entirety and the offender's decisions from the rational choice approach.

The rational choice approach considers the offender's actions from the perspective of a cost-benefit analysis, which includes every decision, step, and action an offender takes to successfully carry out their crime (Chopin et al., 2023b; Cornish & Clarke, 1987). Even though the crime script approach has been used in numerous studies published regarding sexual violence (Chopin & Beauregard, 2020b; Chui & Leclerc, 2021; Cook et al., 2019; Cornish, 1998; Fortin et al., 2018), the study by Chopin et al. (2023b) was the first to apply a crime script approach to female offenders who committed sexual assault.

The goal of the Chopin et al. (2023b) study was to examine the crime commission process of FSOs in extensive detail to furnish a theoretically grounded approach to the analysis of these crimes to determine, empirically, if sexual assaults perpetrated by extrafamilial solo females portrayed different scripts as the various typologies would suggest and how the characteristics of the offender, victim, and crime impacted the

differing scripts. This study revealed four different crime scripts used by solo, extrafamilial FSOs. Though the study took place in France and not North America, and while these exact scripts may not translate precisely to the crime scripts of FSHOs, what the authors have accomplished is the validation of female-specific crime scripts as well as the presence of rational choice decision making in sexual offending providing a foundation for this current study to examine the crime scripts of White FSHOs for any emergent script patterns. Furthermore, the authors posited that a more in-depth understanding of FSOs' crime scripts and rational choice decisions could be furnished using a qualitative design, outlining the gap I aim to fill with this paper.

### **Misconceptions of Female Sexual Offenders**

Societal stereotypes that portray women as victims and incapable of sexual violence only serve to minimize the harm done by FSOs. Due to this minimization, many in society, the media, and the criminal justice system view the damage done by FSOs to be less damaging physically and psychologically to their victims, with the harm done by male perpetrators seen as much more destructive (Denov, 2004; Mallicoat, 2022). However, just the opposite may be true. A study conducted by Denov in 2004 found that victims of both MSOs and FSOs were more traumatized by their female perpetrators than their male perpetrators because of the violation of trust that is naturally given to women. Women are viewed in society as nurturing protectors. Therefore, the status that makes society view FSOs as unlikely sexual offenders is also the reason that the crimes of FSOs are often considered more traumatic by their victims (Denov, 2004; Gannon & Cortoni, 2010; Mallicoat, 2022; Strickland, 2008).

## **Understanding Women as Homicide Offenders**

Though the literature on FHOs may be scarce, the studies that have been conducted reveal evidence that the patterns of behavior differ depending on the type of homicide. The different types of female-perpetrated homicide result in diverse behavior and characteristic patterns, specifically regarding sexual homicide, and therefore, are phenomena that should be studied in further detail (Skott et al., 2019). This evidence provides a layer of foundation for this paper, displaying the multifaceted dimensions of female offenders, inferring that FSHOs will have their own unique patterns of behaviors that will differ from other nonsexual FHOs, as well as MSHOs.

There has not been an overabundance of studies conducted on FHOs. The research that has been carried out on FHOs has mainly viewed the female offender as only committing intimate partner homicide (IPH) or filicide (the killing of one's children). Even within the framework of violent crimes, women are mainly studied in the domestic context of wives (or partners) and mothers (Belknap et al., 2012; Campbell & Jensen, 2019; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Suonpää & Savolainen, 2019) or from cases where the FHO displays some type of mental illness (Carabellese et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

Given the domestic sphere from which most FHOs are studied, it is important to discuss female-perpetrated intimate partner homicide. Intimate partner homicide (IPH) is driven by different motivations between the genders. Male perpetrators of IPH commit their crimes usually due to their need to establish dominance and utilize violence as a method of control over their victims (Graham et al., 2022). Whereas female-perpetrated

IPH is most often viewed by scholars as a culmination of long-standing abuse at the hands of their victim and as a last resort to protect their lives and their children's lives (Belknap et al., 2012; Caman et al., 2016; Johnson, 2008). The greater use of guns by male perpetrators of IPH over female perpetrators of IPH can be seen as rooted in American societal perception of the gendered stereotype of guns as inherently masculine (Mencken & Froese, 2019; Metzl, 2019).

Within non-sexual homicide, male perpetrators are more likely than female perpetrators to utilize a firearm as their method of murder (Fridel & Fox, 2019; Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024). The ownership and use of guns are often associated with masculine traits, such as aggression, power, control, and confidence (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024; Froese, 2020; Mencken & Froese, 2019; Metzl, 2019; Warner, 2020). However, within the constructs of sexual homicide, guns are most often utilized by SHOs who experience a strength differential between themselves and their victim. Therefore, the SHOs who choose firearms as their method of murder are mainly FSHOs rather than MSHOs. In most situations, though, the ownership of guns for many women is less about seeking the empowerment that firearms afford men and more about assuaging fear and the likelihood of victimization (Warner, 2020).

Within the cases of both male and female-perpetrated IPH, Fridel and Zimmerman (2024) found that 91% occurred between a single victim and perpetrator. In the case of male-perpetrated IPH, the use of firearms was linked to the male offender's need to reassert power and control, particularly after a relationship had ended. Male offenders were less likely to use firearms in IPH when a history of abuse had already

established dominance over their victim. Whereas, in the case of female-perpetrated IPH, the female offender was more likely to use a gun when their male victim abused the offender just prior to the incident or had a weapon, which indicated that self-defense is the most likely reason for the use of a firearm in instances of female-perpetrated IPH. However, if the victim of a female-perpetrated IPH was impaired by substances, such as alcohol, or had mental health problems, female offenders were less likely to use a gun as the method of murder due to the victim being less threatening to the offender. The authors posited that these results point to male and female perpetrators of IPH using different methods of murder to achieve distinct and divergent goals. These results are not unlike male and female SHOs who also use different methods of murder due to situational circumstances and the pursuit of different sexual goals.

Though there are not many studies that examine FHOs outside of traditionally feminine roles, a study conducted in 2023 by Santos-Hermoso et al. analyzed the characteristics of female-perpetrated homicide from a perspective both within and outside of the domestic sphere. From their findings on FHOs, the authors posited that homicides of children have been found to mainly be associated with FHOs, that FHOs demonstrated a greater degree of mental illness than MHOs at the time of the criminal event, that FHOs often do not have a criminal record before the commission of the homicide, and that female perpetrated homicide usually takes place within a home, in the afternoon, and with no witnesses present (Moen et al., 2016; Nagata et al., 2016; Santos-Hermoso, 2023; Sea et al., 2017; Trägårdh et al., 2016).

Furthermore, studies that have compared FHOs with MHOs have generally found that women predominantly kill their own family members, while MHOs primarily kill strangers and acquaintances (González et al., 2018; Sea et al., 2017; Trägårdh et al., 2016). In the case of homicide, it has been noted that women usually kill men, and men typically kill women (Santos-Hermoso et al., 2023; Sea et al., 2017). Through studies on female-perpetrated homicide, scholars have also consistently found that male offenders tend to use firearms as their method of murder more than female offenders. Instead, FHOs are seen to more often use asphyxiation as their method of murder, particularly in cases where the victim is a child (Fox & Fridel, 2017; Moen et al., 2016) or weapons are found at the scene of the homicide (Santos-Hermoso et al., 2023; Sea et al., 2017).

Given that much of the research on FHOs has been conducted from the viewpoint of the offender as a victim of domestic abuse, sexual abuse, manipulation by a male accomplice, or suffering from a mental illness, the driving narrative on women and homicide in the literature is that of societally biased gender and violence (Fridel & Fox, 2019; Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024; Santos-Hermoso et al., 2023). In Fridel and Fox's (2019) study on patterns of MHOs and FHOs within the United States between 1976 and 2017, the authors delineated that men make up roughly 90% of all homicide offenders and that men are also the most likely to be the victim of a homicide offender as approximately 81% of MHOs' victims are male and 78% of FHOs' are male. When the percentage of FHOs' victims who are intimate partners (27%) and family members (23%) is added together, they represent precisely 50% of the victims of FHOs. However, it is notable that acquaintances make up 37% of FHOs' victims. The authors also found that

FHOs tended to utilize cleaner methods of murder, with approximately 40% of all cases of poison, drownings, drugs, and asphyxiation being attributed to FHOs. Asphyxiation and drowning are particularly implemented by women to kill children.

Regarding the victims' race, Fridel and Zimmerman (2024) found that 53% of the victims of male-perpetrated IPH were White, while only 30% were African American. For female-perpetrated IPH, the opposite was observed, as 47% of the victims were African American and 40% were White. However, this difference was not as significant as the victims of male-perpetrated IPH. In analyzing the offender characteristics by gender and race, the authors found that 45% of male perpetrators of IPH were White and 33% were Black, differing from the finding of Fridel and Fox (2019), who analyzed all forms of homicide together and found the percentage of Black MHOs was higher at 57% than White MHOs at 41%. In contrast to MHOs, Fridel and Fox (2019) found that White females, at 52%, made up the highest percentage of all FHOs, with Black women accounting for 44% of FHOs. However, when analyzing only IPH, the racial percentages for FHOs were split relatively evenly between White and Black offenders at 40% and 39%, respectively (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024).

Researchers have found that the majority of violent crimes worldwide are committed by men (Beatton et al., 2018; de Vogel & de Spa, 2019; Fridel & Fox, 2019; Jackson & Motley, 2019; Van der Heijden & Pluskota, 2018). This statistic holds true in considering homicide, as only 5-15% of homicides recorded worldwide are committed by women (González et al., 2018; Liem & Pridemore, 2014; Santos et al., 2019; UNODC, 2019). Due to the lack of research conducted on FHOs, scholars investigating homicides

and developing prevention and treatment programs have built upon an understanding based upon MHOs, and therefore, this understanding may not have any actual application to FHOs (Caman et al., 2016; de Vogel & de Spa, 2019). Furthermore, Santos-Hermoso et al. (2023) found that there were significant divergences between male and female perpetrators of homicide regarding offender characteristics, victim characteristics, and the criminal event. This difference in criminality provides further proof that women are their own type of offender and need to be studied as such to provide more accurate knowledge to law enforcement and the criminal justice system as a whole.

### **Historical and Modern Understanding of Sexual Homicide**

The knowledge that SHOs exist has been present since ancient times (Vronsky, 2018). However, the earliest recorded case of sexual homicide, or rape-murder, occurred in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was committed by Gilles de Rais (1404-1440), a French nobleman and a battlefield comrade to Joan of Arc, who was convicted of raping, torturing, and killing approximately 40 to 140 children (Chan, 2019; Longpré et al., 2020; Vronsky, 2018). Probably the most well-known historical case of sexual homicide, though, can be attributed to Jack the Ripper, who, in 1888, terrorized the Whitechapel district in London, England, by reportedly murdering and viciously mutilating five women known to be prostitutes (Chan, 2019). Another historical figure who was likely the first known FSHO was the 16th-century Hungarian countess Elizabeth Bathory (1560-1614), who was convicted of the sexually sadistic torture and murders of young female servants and daughters of minor noble families (Vronsky, 2007).

Though SHOs have appeared throughout history, the first person to study sexually deviant behavior in detail was Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who published the seminal work *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. Within this work, Krafft-Ebing provided multiple definitions for what type of sexual deviance constituted lust-murder (Krafft-Ebing & Chaddock, 1892). These definitions included rape, mutilation, strangulation, necrophilia, and cannibalism. Krafft-Ebing surmised that the lack of resistance that a corpse provides allows it to be dominated entirely to fulfill offenders' deviant sexual desires and studied the integration of sexual deviancy with homicide. In his book, he published a range of sexually deviant behaviors and crimes that he had gathered from reports from psychiatrists. Two sexually deviant acts that were particularly impactful from Krafft-Ebing's work were lust murder (sexual homicide) and sadism, coined by Krafft-Ebing and which received its name from the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), the French libertine imprisoned for committing sexual atrocities and known for writing the novel *The One Hundred Twenty Days of Sodom*, a manuscript of extreme sexual violence (Vronsky, 2018).

Similar to the modern views of women who display sexually deviant behaviors, Krafft-Ebing portrayed sexual sadism as an inherently masculine trait that only appears in women whose deportment is in opposition to the expected traditional femininity. However, Krafft-Ebing did understand that there are women capable of sexual sadism. As such, two accounts of women committing acts of sexual sadism were included in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and both accounts involved biting as a form of sexual arousal, also known as *odaxelagnia* (Krafft-Ebing & Chaddock, 1892). Unfortunately, society's

views on sexually sadistic women have not progressed much in the roughly 140 years since Krafft-Ebing's publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The underestimation of violent women is a chronic deficiency of the criminal justice system that exists to this day.

Despite being constrained by the societal bias of his time, Krafft-Ebing produced an incredible work that laid the foundations for the modern understanding of sexual homicide. The intricate relationship between sexual pleasure and cruelty that is embodied in sexual sadism was explored at length by Krafft-Ebing, who pioneered insight into the formation of sexually deviant behavior. Krafft-Ebing was also extraordinary in his recognition that sexual killings can often be traced back to the emergence of paraphilias linked to a key childhood experience (Vronsky, 2018).

The development of the modern understanding of sexual homicide became most prominent in the 1970s and 1980s when Special Agents Robert Ressler and John Douglas of the FBI Behavioral Science Unit (now known as the Behavioral Analysis Unit) and Ann Burgess, a forensic nurse, conducted interviews of incarcerated serial and solo SHOs. Those interviews aimed to understand the SHO's life as a whole. The interviews explored the SHO's childhood, sexual fantasies, motivations for their crimes, etc., to begin to build a system to profile this unique type of offender. This system could then be applied by using behavioral indicators found at sexual homicide crime scenes to aid law enforcement in capturing this type of offender (Vronsky, 2018). The research compiled from these interviews was published in the 1988 book *Sexual Homicide*, which became a pioneering roadmap to understanding sexual homicide crime scene behavior.

## **Classification Issues**

Since studies on sexual homicide began, many different definitions have been proposed, though no official or legal definition for sexual homicide has ever been established. Some definitions require evidence of an intentional homicide with some sexual element present (Douglas et al., 2013; Meloy, 2000; Myers, 2002; Ressler et al., 1988), while others have stated that the act of killing serves as the offender's sexual gratification and therefore sexual activity does not always have to be present (Krafft-Ebing & Chaddock, 1892; Money, 1990; Schlesinger, 2021). Another definition is that sexual homicides "result from one person killing another in the context of power, control, sexuality, and aggressive brutality" (Burgess et al., 1986, p. 252). The issue with these broad definitions is that they require an understanding of an offender's motivations, which is not a practical way for investigators to identify a homicide as sexual because the true motivation for the crime is known only to the offender. Therefore, the most widely adopted and reliable criteria of sexual homicide is the FBI's definition proposed by Ressler et al. (1988), as it is based solely on physical evidence found either at the crime scene or throughout an investigation, such as forensic evidence discovered from the body during a pathologist's examination of the victim's body (see Beauregard, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; James & Beauregard, 2020; Kim et al., 2024; Stefanska et al., 2020). To be considered a sexual homicide using the FBI definition, the crime scene must include at least one of the following elements:

- (a) victim lacks attire (totally or partially), (b) exposure of the sexual parts of the victim's body, (c) the body is found in a sexually explicit position, (d) an object

has been inserted into a body cavity (anus, vagina, or mouth), (e) there is evidence of sexual intercourse, (f) there is evidence of substitutive sexual activity (e.g., masturbation and ejaculation at the crime scene), or of sadistic sexual fantasies (e.g., genital mutilation) (Ressler et al., 1988, p. xiii).

Despite being the most widely accepted criteria for sexual homicide, the FBI criteria have still been criticized over the years for being too broad and leading to the potential presence of false positives (Beauregard & Martineau, 2017; Kerr et al., 2013; Stefanska et al., 2016). Therefore, different researchers have put forward more stringent criteria for sexual homicide. Clarke and Carter (2000) recommended conducting a situational context analysis to reduce false positives. Chan (2015) introduced criteria that require sexual motivation, either confessed by the offender in a way that is legally admissible or discovered in personal property (diary, computer, etc.) belonging to the offender, which denotes the sexual components within the crime. More recently, Chopin and Beauregard (2019c) proposed that a case should meet at least two out of the six FBI criteria to be considered a sexual homicide to decrease the number of false positives. For example, if a body is found naked but no other evidence of sexual contact is found at the crime scene or on the victim's body, the case would technically meet the FBI's criteria for sexual homicide as the "victim lacks attire." However, the lack of clothing could simply be a forensic countermeasure taken by the offender to avoid police detection and not be indicative of any sexual motivation. Therefore, physical evidence taken in context matters a great deal in cases of sexual homicide.

A further determination for sexual homicide was established in 2020 by Stefanska et al., who conducted an empirical study to create a checklist to assess how homicides and sexual elements are related. The authors developed an 8-item checklist from this study to assess behavioral indicators and help identify sexual homicides. The 8-item checklist consisted of the following: a) Sexual Sadism Scale (SeSaS) score of 4 or more; b) use of disinhibitors that are sexually related; c) stalking the victim; d) using restraints; e) evidence of post-mortem sexual activity; f) evidence of additional sexual activities (such as masturbation); g) an unusual interest in the crime following the murder; h) evidence of biting. This 8-item checklist was intended to be used by a clinician when a decision cannot be made regarding whether or not a homicide involves a sexual offense. Despite this checklist being immensely helpful for clinicians, for my study, I did not use this checklist, as the cases included in my case studies already satisfy the criteria of sexual homicide as laid out by Ressler et al. (1988) in the FBI's criteria for sexual homicide.

The lack of a standardized definition for sexual homicide can lead to sexual homicide-recorded statistics being unavailable, ambiguous, and difficult to pinpoint at times (Chan, 2019; Ressler et al., 1988). In the United States, national statistics on homicides are compiled in the SHR, in which local law enforcement agencies throughout the 50 states and the District of Columbia voluntarily submit information regarding homicides. The participation rate of local law enforcement agencies that submit data to the SHR is over 90% (Chan et al., 2019a). Within the SHR, sexual homicide is coded by law enforcement officers as a homicide, with the circumstances being further coded as

"rape" or "other sexual offenses." There is no specific way to code sexual homicide as its own crime in the SHR, and it is essential to note that the SHR does not give specifics about the nature of the sexual element, so there is no data on why these homicides might have been coded the way they were. It is not the criminal justice system, i.e., medical examiner, courts, jury, judge, etc., that decides the classification of homicide as sexual in the SHR; it is solely law enforcement that determines how to enter the classification (Chan, 2021). Furthermore, due to there not being any specific classification for sexual homicide, it is unknown what, or if any, training was given to law enforcement officers on how to recognize and record a homicide as sexual in the SHR database (Chan et al., 2019a; Skott et al., 2019).

While the SHR is one of the most comprehensive databases of homicide in the United States, it is not without its flaws. The SHR only provides basic demographic information on offenders, victims, and the circumstances of an offense, which does not allow for a more in-depth study of offenders, such as their motivation, psychopathy, or criminal history (Chan et al., 2019a). Most important is that the determination of whether or not a homicide is coded as sexual in nature using by selecting "rape" or "other sexual offenses" is made by police officers who enter the crime information into the SHR. This determination is not made based on an offender's charges or convictions; it is strictly made based on local law enforcement's arrest of an individual and their understanding of what makes a homicide sexual (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Another limitation of the SHR is the amount of missing data within the reports. It is estimated that 7% of homicides committed within the United States are

missing from the SHR, as well as 35% of offenders' information, 2% of victims' information, and 40% of information on offender-victim relationships (Fridel & Fox, 2019). Given the lack of research and understanding of FSHOs, it is possible that the reported number of FSHOs may not reflect the true number of these cases (Karakasi et al., 2017).

Researchers have found that sexual homicide, as a phenomenon, is plagued by misclassification that affects the statistical data reports on this type of crime. This misclassification often stems from the lack of an official definition for sexual homicide among researchers and law enforcement (Chan & Frei, 2013; Georgoulis et al., 2023). The scarcity of data is an overarching issue when researching sexual homicide (Kim et al., 2024). While the occurrence of sexual homicides is rare, studies regarding sexual homicides and SHOs are significant for those in the field of criminal justice (Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c). More recently, scholars have opted to use larger samples of sexual homicides (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021c; Skott et al., 2021) and have separated victims into more specific categories such as male, female, child, adult, and elderly (Beauregard & Proulx, 2007; Chopin & Beauregard, 2020a; Chopin & Beauregard, 2020b; Myers & Chan, 2012; Proulx et al., 2018). Scholars have also begun to study subgroups of SHOs, with FSHOs being particularly important for this study (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Furthermore, recent studies on SHOs have included offenders' mental health, developmental/behavioral issues, and offense histories in their analyses (Beauregard & DeLisi, 2018; Chopin et al., 2023a; DeLisi & Beauregard, 2018) as well as specific and unusual crime scene patterns such as foreign

object insertion (Beauregard et al., 2022), necrophilia (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021b; Higgs et al., 2017), and overkill (Chopin & Beauregard, 2021a; Stefanska et al., 2018). There has also been more recent research conducted that examines sexual homicide from the contextual and situational aspects of the pre-crime, crime, and post-crime phases (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Schlesinger, 2021), as was the approach for this study.

### **The Importance of Context in Cases of Sexual Homicide**

Understanding sexual homicide from a contextual perspective is essential for researchers and investigators. Cases of sexual homicide are nuanced and complex, with a variety of factors, including situational context and the influence of both the offender and victim, that should be considered when conducting research into this phenomenon (Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c; Kim et al., 2024). In examining sexual homicide and situational context, Carter and Hollin (2014) presented definitions for two sexual homicide profiles: direct and indirect. These profiles are tools used to analyze how a homicide is linked to a sexual element (Stefanska et al., 2017). The direct profile occurs when the act of homicide serves as the offender's sexual stimulation, with the sexual element being present during the kill or immediately after. The indirect profile of sexual homicide can be seen when the sexual element occurs before the homicide and can be present when the killing serves to ensure the victim cannot identify the offender or, in cases where the prior sexual activity was consensual, the violence did not serve to stimulate the SHO sexually. However, the homicide still occurred in a sexual context. This is evident in several of the FSHO cases that I examined in this study.

Building upon the Carter and Hollin (2014) definitions for direct and indirect profiles of SHOs, Stefanska et al. (2017) questioned whether the FBI criteria for sexual homicide were too inclusive, as they allow for situations where the violence comes after a consensual sexual encounter. However, the consensuality of the sexual encounter does not necessarily negate the sexual context in which the homicide occurred (Kim et al., 2024), especially in cases of FSHOs. FSHOs may need their victim to engage in sexual activity consensually if the victims are male due to the differentials in physical strength.

### **Sexual Homicide as Opposed to Rape Homicide**

In many instances, sexual homicide is seen as a hybrid offense, the escalation of rape to homicide (Chopin & Beauregard, 2019a). Subsequently, there have been several studies conducted to assess sexual homicide as the outcome of rape (Beauregard & Mieczkowski, 2012; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019a; Mieczkowski & Beauregard, 2010). Furthermore, a study conducted in France by Chopin and Beauregard (2019c) examined differences between rapes that escalated to sexual homicide and rapes that did not result in homicide. The authors found the most important factors that determined a rape escalating to sexual homicide were the blows/beatings by the offender and victim resistance, suggesting two types of SHOs, intentional and non-intentional. In intentional sexual homicides, the goal was to kill, but in unintentional sexual homicides, the goal was more likely some other crime (rape, robbery, etc.) that escalated to sexual homicide. This distinction should be considered when examining MSHOs as opposed to FSHOs, as disconnecting the biased association between sexual homicide and rape homicide could be crucial in creating an FSHO typology. The sexual elements in sexual homicide can

range from rape to sexual assault to consensual sexual contact just prior to the murder, which is symbolic of sexual motivation, and may not necessarily require overt sexual evidence at the crime scene (Douglass et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2024).

### **Developmental Sequela (Traumatic and Personality Disorders)**

The crime-committal process of sexual homicide begins in the psychological, sociological, and physical developmental stages of SHOs (Chan, 2019). Researchers believe a significant component in the motivation of violent sexual offenders occurs when a person experiences trauma or other factors in their childhood or adolescence that result in a lack of psychological, sociological, and physical development (Beauregard & Martineau, 2017; Chan, 2015; DeLisi & Beauregard, 2018). Developmental traumas can include psychological factors such as abuse and neglect, sociological factors such as unstable family environment, and physical factors such as head injuries that serve as fundamental to the formation of violent behaviors (Lee, 2015; Richards et al., 2016), specifically in cases of sexual homicide (Chan & Heide, 2009). Sexual abuse that occurred in childhood or adolescence has been found to have a particularly significant relationship with sexual homicide (DeLisi & Beauregard, 2018; Ressler et al., 1988).

Scholars have found that personality disorders and problematic behavioral issues in adolescence can be the result of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that disrupt and impair the natural development of cognitive and affective processing within an individual (Beauregard & DeLisi, 2018; Chopin et al., 2023a). Researchers have further found connections between ACEs and adult sexual offending (Drury et al., 2019; Krahé & Berger, 2017; Miley et al., 2020), with some studies being able to specifically link

childhood polyvictimization with the severity of sexual crimes later perpetrated in adulthood (Finkelhor et al., 2007). DeLisi and Beauregard (2018) found that offenders with childhood polyvictimization or who witnessed several traumatic events in childhood were more likely to commit sexual homicide as adults. The connections found between sexual homicide and ACEs have previously been more theoretical rather than empirical. However, Chopin et al. (2023a) proposed the first empirical investigation into this matter. They explored how personality disorders and maladaptive behaviors develop in adolescence as a result of traumatic experiences in childhood and how the combination of all these factors creates the internal risk of an adult committing sexual homicide.

In the study conducted by Chopin et al. (2023a), the authors found that how ACEs impact an individual will depend on whether or not the child was directly victimized by violence or whether the child was a witness. There was a significant association found between direct victimization and avoidant and borderline personality disorders, but witnessing victimization was significantly associated with antisocial personality disorder. These findings result in a more in-depth understanding of how ACEs can impact the development of internal risk factors of individuals that can lead to sexual homicide; however, there will always be more complex nuances that cannot be seen, as each individual is a complex amalgamation of their biological, psychological, and social experiences. Though my study cannot delve into the developmental histories of the case studies included, it is still essential to know how the developmental stage of an SHO's life impacts the choices made during the rest of their crime committal stages.

### **Sexual Homicide Pre-Crime Behaviors**

Examination of the crime commission process is a significant part of understanding how rational choice theory applies to sexual homicide. This process involves specific steps and actions an offender adopts to complete their crime successfully (Douglas et al., 2013). The theory of rational choice (Cornish & Clarke, 1987) posits a framework centered on an offender's self-interest and rationality as the core of their decision-making process (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Clark & Cornish, 1985; Piquero & Tibbetts, 2001). Crucially, offenders use a cost-benefit analysis to determine if the reward of the crime outweighs the inherent risks (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b). There are two levels within rational choice theory: the macro level, which consists of the offender conducting the risk versus reward analysis and their decision on whether they will commit the crime, and the micro level, which consists of every decision that the offender makes to gain the rewards of committing the crime (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). Scholars have found a balance within rational choice between the sexually deviant gratification that is the offender's goal and the significant risk they take of leaving forensic evidence of the crime that could lead to their capture (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b). Chopin et al. (2020a) delineated that there is a greater risk of identification and apprehension that comes with more rewarding and sexually deviant acts of the SHOs (committing multiple sexual acts, sexually sadistic acts, invasive sexual acts, etc.), which can result in SHOs employing more forensic awareness strategies after the crime has been committed (destruction of evidence, moving victim's body).

The pre-crime stage is when the SHO's rational choice begins to manifest. Premeditation is an essential factor in the decision-making process of SHOs, with 19% to 77% of SHOs engaging in premeditation. The pre-crime phase consists of an SHO's predisposition (such as partaking in aberrant sexual fantasies and experiencing social loneliness) and pre-crime determinants (such as consumption of pornography, alcohol, or drugs) (Chan, 2019). Some factors that can influence the decision-making process in the pre-crime stage of sexual homicide are the consumption of alcohol and drugs (Clarke & Cornish, 2001), as well as the SHO experiencing personal or relationship issues, unemployment, contact with the victim, or escalating sexual issues directly preceding the sexual homicide. Victims being under the influence of drugs and alcohol are also known to affect the pre-crime phase of SHOs (Chan, 2015).

Primary to the pre-crime phase is the victim selection process conducted by the SHO using rational choice cost-benefit analysis (Beauregard et al., 2008; Chan, 2015; Hough, 1987). However, once the crime begins, the rationality of decisions made by the SHO is constrained by the availability of time, environment, victim, and other factors (Chan, 2019). Through their studies, researchers have found that victims of SHOs are more often known to the offenders rather than being strangers (Chan & Beauregard, 2016b; Martineau & Beauregard, 2016), though Chan et al. (2015) determined that serial SHOs tended to target strangers for their victims.

The precipitating factors that manifest within the 48 hours before a sexual homicide occurs have been found by researchers to play an instrumental role in the motivation for a sexual homicide to actually take place (Beauregard et al., 2008; Chan,

2015; Mieczkowski & Beauregard, 2010). Precipitating motivators for SHOs can also vary and can include anger, situational factors, sadism, sexual pleasure, etc. (Chan et al., 2019c; Kerr & Beech, 2016). In many instances, social isolation and loneliness play a key role in offenders' sexually deviant fantasies that can eventually escalate into the perpetration of sexual homicide (Chan, 2017b; Chan & Heide, 2016). Chan (2019) described deviant sexual fantasies as a series of thoughts or feelings comprised of "themes that involve either pain or harm during sexual intercourse or activities, illegitimate or socially unacceptable sexual behavior, or otherwise inappropriate or nonconsensual sexual activity (p. 96)." For example, a sexual fantasy that involves torturing another human being for sexual release is a sadistic sexual fantasy. Over time, as the individual's sadistic sexual fantasy escalates, they will begin to seek out ways to enact these fantasies in real life, leading to the commission of sexual homicide (Chan, 2019; Jones & Chan, 2019). These aberrant sexual fantasies are the driving motivational force behind the actions of many SHOs (Chan, 2015) and are a crucial part of an SHO's premeditation and victim selection (Chan, 2019). Therefore, the pre-crime behavioral patterns discerned from the cases analyzed in this study provided previously unknown and crucial insights into the motivational drivers experienced by FSHOs.

### **Sexual Homicide Crime Scene Behaviors**

SHOs' behaviors at their crime scenes are critical evidence to the investigative process. The crime phase of a sexual homicide occurs when an offender has decided to commit a sexual murder, hunts for a victim, sexually assaults, and kills the victim (Chan, 2019). If no sexual assault has occurred during the course of the homicide, then the

sexual aspect of the crime phase would be the sexual way the victim was killed (naked body, pre-crime consensual sex, sexual photos taken of the victim, etc.). Once a victim has been chosen, SHOs will then use different methods to approach victims, with manipulation (such as using a ruse) being more common than a surprise attack (Martineau & Beauregard, 2016).

Studies on the methods employed by SHOs to approach victims were conducted on MSHOs, so it is unknown if these methods would be preferred or utilized by FSHOs. Out of all adult SHOs, most only have a single victim. For MSHOs, 92% are single-victim SHOs, while only 8% are multi-victim SHOs. For FSHOs, 89% are single-victim SHOs, and only 11% are multi-victim SHOs (Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Chan et al., 2019a). Additionally, at the time of their offense, the majority of SHOs were reported to be single (69%-87%) (Chan, 2015; Chan et al., 2015; Martineau & Beauregard, 2016). Given that the majority of SHOs target victims of the opposite sex (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan & Heide, 2013; Skott et al., 2019) and that 95% of SHOs are male, it is unsurprising that the majority of sexual homicide victims are females (79%) (Chan et al., 2019a) with 70%-80% of those female victims being 18 years or older (Chan, 2017b). Interestingly, the killing of a victim of the opposite sex is more pervasive for single-victim FSHOs (89%) than single-victim MSHOs (82%) (Chan et al., 2019a). However, Chan et al. (2013) found that, in the United States, more White FSHOs participate in killing female victims than Black FSHOs (32% versus 19%, respectively). White SHOs have been found to commit their crime predominantly intra-rationally (within

the same race) while Black SHOs kill both intra-racially and interracially (within and outside of the same race) (Chan et al., 2010).

In his study assessing sexual homicide crime scene behaviors across several countries, Beauregard (2019) argued that all homicides whose crime scenes presented observable sexual elements should be classified as sexual homicide regardless of motivation. This is due to SHOs being heterogeneous in nature (Beauregard & Proulx, 2002; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019a; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019b; Stefanska et al., 2020) and because, to exclude certain homicides due to the assumption that they do not appear to be sexually motivated, could forfeit the opportunity to identify subgroups of SHOs based upon certain cases characteristics (Beauregard, 2019). This is particularly important for this study of examining emergent patterns amongst FSHOs, as several of the cases included in my study, including Jodi Arias and Brooke Rottiers, met the FBI's criteria for a sexual homicide, but whose observable sexual evidence was not overt, like the sexual evidence usually associated with MSHOs. There are also FSHOs included in my study who displayed overt and/or unusual sexual acts during their crime commission process (Taylor Schabususiness, Patricia Jennings, and Gertrude Baniszewski). The unusual acts sometimes perpetrated by SHOs at the crime scene are rare and distinguish them from other offenders. These acts can include foreign object insertion, carving on the victim's body, evisceration, cannibalism, overkill, genital mutilation, necrophilia, and dismemberment, among others (Sun et al., 2023).

The strategy of the SHO becomes apparent in the behaviors displayed at the crime scene (Chan, 2019). The SHO's rational choices to achieve the intended goal of their

crime can be observed in the offender's modus operandi (Cornish & Clarke, 2002; Crabbé et al., 2008). Crime scene behaviors outside of the modus operandi, meaning not necessary to commit the offense, are recognized as signature and ritualistic behaviors and are psychologically necessary rather than functionally necessary, and therefore are unique to the offender. These ritualistic crime scene behaviors can include torture, mutilation, foreign object insertion, the victim being positioned in a sexually explicit way, and overkill. Signature crime scene behaviors are like a SHO's trademark and can include many of the same behaviors observed in rituals like dismemberment or mutilation, but can also include other behaviors such as leaving messages near or on the victim's body or arranging the victim's body to be found in a specific position (Chan, 2019).

### **Method of Murder**

Sexual homicide is an intimate and up-close method of murder where the offender has complete power and control over the victim. Central to the method of murder in a sexual homicide is the weapons used to commit the crime. The weapons employed by SHOs are either premeditated (i.e., weapons brought by the SHO) or weapons of opportunity (i.e., any objects found at the crime scene that can be used as a weapon) (Chan, 2018). A SHO's choice of weapon could be influenced by a myriad of factors, including availability, location of the murder, and vulnerability of the victim, as well as any sexual fantasy the killer may be trying to fulfill (Chan et al., 2019a).

While the nature of sexual homicide is consistent with both male and female SHOs, the methods of murder and crime scene behaviors are often not consistent across genders (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2019a). Recent studies have shown that approximately

54%-78% of cases of sexual homicide include the use of a murder weapon (Chan, 2017b; Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Chan & Heide, 2016; Martineau & Beauregard, 2016). MSHOs do not frequently use firearms as their weapon of choice and prefer to kill their victims in manners that require close contact and are known as personal weapons, such as strangulation, asphyxiation, beating, drowning, etc. (Chan, 2017b; Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2019a). Specifically, strangulation is known to be one of the most common and prolifically used manners of murder in sexual homicides committed by males (Kim et al., 2023). Sharp-edge weapons, such as knives or blunt object weapons, followed as the next most frequently employed methods of murder by MSHOs (Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Kim et al., 2023). Victim characteristics also play a role in weapon choice, and in the case of a male-on-male sexual homicide, an edged weapon is more likely to be implemented, especially in the case of an inter-racial killing where the victim and offender are from different races (Chan & Beauregard, 2016a).

In their study examining strangulation in sexual homicide, Kim et al. (2023) pointed out that most empirical research into the use of weapons in sexual homicides has been drawn from population samples of MSHOs whose victims were female, therefore it is unknown whether previous research findings on weapons used in sexual homicide would apply to FSHOs or in cases of male-on-male sexual homicide. The authors specifically referenced a study conducted by Chan and Frei (2013) that found that the percentage of FSHOs who opted for firearms (50%) and bladed weapons (26%) was higher than that of MSHOs. A hypothesis to account for this discrepancy is called the physical strength hypothesis (Heide, 1993), which posits that, against victims who are

larger and stronger, female offenders use weapons to counteract the physical disadvantage (Chan & Heide, 2008).

### **Sexual Sadism**

Sexual sadism is often a term that is closely associated with sexual homicide. The association between sexual sadism and sexual homicide has been present since the first studies on sexual homicide began to appear in the scholarly literature (Brittain, 1970; Hazelwood & Douglas, 1980; Krafft-Ebing & Chaddock, 1892; Mokros, 2018; Ressler et al., 1986; Ressler et al., 1988; Vronsky, 2018). Similar to sexual homicide, there is no one official definition for sexual sadism (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023a), but most scholars and clinicians are inclined to agree that sexual sadism can be distinguished by some aspect of violent or humiliating behavior committed by an offender (Abel, 1989; Groth & Birnbaum, 1978; Knight et al., 1994), the type of reaction from the victim, such as fear or pain, (Marshall & Kennedy, 2003), or the power and control that the offender feels from perpetrating the violence and humiliation upon the victim (Brittain, 1970; Dietz et al., 1990; Grubin, 1994; MacCulloch et al., 1983). Overkill, physical restraints, sexual humiliation, and mutilation of victims are all hallmarks of sexually sadistic killers, with personal weapons most often being their weapons of choice (Chan et al., 2019a). In essence, the perpetrator achieves sexual arousal by inflicting extreme and nonconsensual pain, suffering, control, and humiliation upon their victim (Kim et al., 2023).

In the past, there has been a wide percentage margin demonstrating the preponderance of sexual sadism found within the context of sexual homicide to be between 10% and 80%, with the wide margin attributed to the constitution of the samples

(Barbaree et al., 1994; Berger et al., 1999; Frances & Wollert, 2012; Groth & Birnbaum, 1978). Using the more recent design of the Sexual Homicide Crime Scene Rating Scale for Sexual Sadism (SADSEX-SH), researchers and clinicians can assess sexual sadism present in sexual homicide more accurately (Myers et al., 2019) with studies now determining a prevalence rate of sexual sadism found in sexual homicide to be between 30% and 40% (Reale et al., 2020). Chopin and Beauregard (2021a) were able to further confirm that the diagnosis of sexual sadism in SHOs was approximately 35%. Studies have previously viewed sexual sadism as a homogenous concept, only noting either the presence or absence of it (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023a). However, more recent empirical studies have presented the theory that sexual sadism is much more complex, with varying levels and degrees of manifestation and intensity (Longpré et al., 2020; Mokros et al., 2014). This is interesting when considering FSHOs, as it lends credence to the notion that sexual sadism may manifest differently in the actions and behaviors of FSHOs.

Usually, the target victims of sadistic SHOs are vulnerable strangers (Proulx & Beauregard, 2009). It is typically the context of the situation (deserted location, vulnerable victim, etc.) that is the most critical factor for sadistic SHOs, as they need to be able to have the space and time to enact their deviant sexual fantasies while also taking measures to avoid detection by law enforcement (Reale et al., 2020). Needing the proper situational context to carry out the sexual murder usually suggests some form of premeditation (Kim et al., 2023).

Given the lack of a formal definition of sexual sadism, many studies have proposed their own understanding of and criteria for identifying sexual sadism (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023a). To construct a more streamlined and in-depth definition of sexual sadism, Longpré et al. (2019) conducted an empirical study in which they analyzed 34 studies that had proposed definitions of sexual sadism and managed to extract what they considered to be the primary aspects that denote the presence of sexual sadism. These six aspects included the following: (a) excessive sexual urges, fantasies, or pleasures (see Krafft-Ebing & Chaddock, 1892; Proulx et al., 2007); (b) behaviors of cruelty or torture inflicted on the victim to create fear or suffering (see Dietz et al., 1990); (c) humiliation of the victim (see Longpré et al., 2019), (d) a show of domination over the victim to make them feel helpless by exerting control and bondage (see Dietz et al., 1990); (e) pre-planning of the offense and/or ritualizing it; (f) possible involvement of humans or animals in sadistic behaviors acting out fantasies (Longpré et al., 2019).

In Chopin and Beauregard's (2023a) study on the manifestation of sadism in sexual homicide, the authors' goal was to determine whether sexual sadism could present as heterogeneous within the context of sexual homicide. Delving even further, the authors explicitly analyzed whether underlying patterns of sexual sadism might emerge, whether sexual sadism is influenced by the specific offender, victim, or crime characteristics, and whether the situational context of a sexual homicide could affect the presence of sexual sadism. Through their study, the authors were able to confirm that sexual sadism is heterogeneous in nature, as multiple distinctive patterns emerged associated with offenders and crime profiles, and that situational constraints are not likely to influence the

manifestation of sexual sadism. These findings can be of great use to criminal investigators in understanding the profiles of sexually sadistic murderers and, therefore, enable investigators to prioritize suspects.

Despite the advances in understanding sexually sadistic murderers that Chopin and Beauregard's (2023a) study made, a distinct limitation was that there was no inclusion of the offenders' gender within the study. However, victims' gender and age were taken into account. There is the potential that, without the knowledge of the offenders' gender, the reader may form an unconscious bias and assume that only males could be capable of sexually sadistic murder, which, conversely, could negatively affect research conducted on FSHOs. However, the results of this study can still pave the way for scholars to further view sexual sadism as multidimensional and dependent on the gender of the offender. If distinctive patterns of sexual sadism exist among SHOs, then it can also be theorized that distinctive patterns of sexual homicide exist among the different genders.

### ***The Sexual Homicide Crime Scene Rating Scale for Sexual Sadism (SADSEX-SH)***

The Sexual Homicide Crime Scene Rating Scale for Sexual Sadism (SADSEX-SH) is a valuable and unique tool as investigators use it to assess for sadism based on crime scene behaviors, even when the perpetrator is unknown (Myers et al., 2019). This type of analysis differs from the typical measures for sexual sadism, which are determined from data gathered directly from the perpetrator after they have already been identified and captured (Kim et al., 2023).

In 2019, Myers et al. conducted a study to test the efficacy of the SADSEX-SH. The SADSEX-SH was originally a 10-item scale that was used in suspected sexual homicide cases to measure and rate the degree of sexual sadism found in the actions of the offender at the crime scene. In the updated SADSEX-SH, sadistic fantasy and sexual excitement were dropped from the SADSEX-SH criteria due to not being able to reliably confirm the presence of these two factors at the crime scenes. Therefore, the revised version of the SADSEX-SH used an 8-item scale instead of the original 10-item scale.

The SADSEX-SH scale was used on two groupings of SHOs: males with sexual sadism and males without sexual sadism. None of the offenders included in this study were female. The findings of the proposed 8-item SADSEX-SH scale in this article confirmed the reliability of the SADSEX-SH scale with an 88% success rate, which, in other terms, means the scale was able to successfully identify 9 out of 10 sexual sadists from their crime scenes and related information alone.

The SADSEX-SH scale is a particularly useful tool for law enforcement and forensic professionals as it allows for the detection of sexual sadism based on information found at a crime scene. The scale can also be effective for correctional institutions in helping to determine what type of specific treatment an offender might best benefit from. However, there are gaps in this research, as pointed out by Myers et al. (2019), as the authors stated that this study was only performed on cases of female victims of sexual homicide and that there needs to be more research done on other types of victims, such as males or children. Due to the issues with the definition and classification of sadism, the prevalence rate presents a wide margin, depending on the sample, of between five and

50% of sexual offenders presenting with sadism disorder (Chopin & Beauregard, 2022). Consequently, there is also a need for further research on the accuracy of the updated SADSEX-SH scale when applied to cases of FSHOs.

### **Foreign Object Insertion**

Foreign object insertion is the act of an offender violating a victim by the nonconsensual insertion of an item or object into any orifice of a victim. This act is incredibly violating and one of the FBI's criteria to constitute a sexual homicide. In 2022, Beauregard et al. conducted a study to investigate the relationship between the crime characteristics of foreign object insertion and the characteristics of offenders and victims. Their findings demonstrated that vulnerable victims, those who were elderly, under the influence of alcohol or substances, loners, or engaged in domestic tasks when the crime occurred, were the most likely to be subjected to foreign object insertion during the committal of sexual homicide.

Beauregard et al. (2022) further found that offender sexual dysfunction, evidence of other methods of brutality inflicted on victims (e.g., genital mutilation, vaginal/anal fisting, and physical beatings), necrophilia, sadism, and forensic avoidance strategies were all more likely to occur in concordance with cases of foreign object insertion during a sexual homicide. However, the authors did not include offenders' gender as one of the offender characteristic variables. Though this exclusion is not listed as a limitation of the study, it is conceivable that the offender characteristics used as variables were geared towards the assumption of a male offender, particularly sexual dysfunction, as the inability to obtain an erection or issues regarding ejaculation are central to males. The

exclusion of offender gender misses the opportunity to determine if FSHOs perpetrate foreign object insertion and, if so, to examine the potential motivations for this act and compare the acts of foreign object insertion between MSHOs and FSHOs. In the cases of FSHOs included in my study, there are several who inflicted foreign object insertion upon their victims. These cases include Gertrude Baniszewski, Patricia Jennings, Brooke Rottiers, and Taylor Schabusiness. This highlights why a gendered perspective of specific aspects of sexual homicide is necessary.

### **Mutilation**

Mutilation of victims' bodies after the commission of a homicide is rare. However, there is a higher correlation between mutilation and instances of sexual homicide, particularly when the victims are adult females or children (Chan, 2019; Karakasi et al., 2017). Mutilation is defined by Stone and Brucato (2019) as "the removal or irreparable disfigurement, by any means, of some smaller portion of one of those larger sections of a living or dead person" (p. 83). In cases where victim mutilation is present, the most common types of mutilation are known as offensive and defensive mutilation. Offensive mutilation occurs when the homicide offender's primary goal is the mutilation, which often occurs in cases of sexual homicide and murders that are necrosadistic. Defensive mutilation occurs when the homicide offender's main goal is to enact forensic countermeasures by disposing of the victim's body or making the victim's body unrecognizable in order to hinder identification of the victim (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2019c; Gupta & Arora, 2013; Konopka et al., 2007; Püschel & Koops, 1987a, b).

Mutilation can be tied to several motives, including sadism (Chan & Li, 2019), exploratory necrophilia (Chan, 2015), and the staging of a crime scene as a forensic awareness strategy (Douglas et al., 2013; Geberth, 2014). Though mutilation is a rare aspect of sexual homicide, several FSHOs included in this study enacted antemortem (pre-death) or postmortem (after-death) mutilation, including Gertrude Baniszewski, Carol Bundy, and Judith Neelley.

### **Overkill**

The level of violence demonstrated by SHOs that necessitates the label of overkill can generally be regarded as extreme. Similar to sexual homicide and sexual sadism, there is no official classification for overkill (Kopacz et al., 2023). However, the most common definition for overkill comes from Ressler et al. (1988), who stated that overkill is “the infliction of more injury than is necessary to kill a person” (p. 55). The percentage of SHOs that exhibit overkill ranges between 19% and 43%, depending on the country (Beauregard & Martineau, 2013; Sea et al., 2019). Traditionally, overkill has been associated with disorganized offenders whose actions were violent, impulsive, and chaotic (Douglas et al., 2013; Hazelwood & Douglas, 1980; Keppel & Walter, 1999; Miller, 2014; Ressler et al., 1988). However, more recent studies have indicated that overkill is more likely associated with organized offenders as a forensic awareness strategy or for sadistic, sexual purposes (Beauregard & Martineau, 2016; Chopin & Beauregard, 2020a; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Mjanes et al., 2017; Reale et al., 2020).

Chopin and Beauregard (2021a) conducted a study to examine whether overkill could indicate an organized or disorganized SHO. The authors found indicators that both

organized and disorganized characteristics of SHOs are associated with overkill. The characteristics of overkill associated with an organized SHO included the offender planning the attack, having an active social life, using a weapon, beating the victim, and employing forensic awareness strategies such as moving the victim's body to delay police detection. Characteristics associated with a disorganized SHO included the attack being unplanned, resulting from an escalated situation, the victim being an acquaintance who was coerced, not restraining the victim, and committing fewer sexual acts on the victim. Comprehensively, the authors determined that the identification of overkill within sexual homicide is contextual and situational, necessitating the SHO's behavior across the whole event (pre-crime, crime, and post-crime) to be analyzed.

In a similar study, Georgoulis et al. (2023) found that overkill was the only *modus operandi* behavior of SHOs that was linked to the likelihood of the victim's body being openly displayed. The authors posited that this indicated the potential use of overkill as a forensic awareness strategy by some SHOs, as specific acts associated with overkill can be used to destroy evidence or prevent identification of the victim. Overkill is also seen extensively in the actions of sadistic SHOs and can be utilized to fulfill sadistic fantasies, further humiliate the victim, as well as destroy evidence that could lead to the identification of the SHO (Chopin et al., 2020a; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Reale et al., 2020). FSHOs included in this study whose cases demonstrated overkill include Jodi Arias, Susan Wright, and Michelle Michaud.

## **Necrophilia**

Paraphilias and personality disorders are commonly found in SHOs, particularly antisocial personality disorder, which appears in roughly 25%-85% of SHOs (Chan & Beauregard, 2016b; Chan et al., 2015; Chan & Heide, 2009). Paraphilias are also particularly associated with sexual sadism in SHOs (Jones & Chan, 2019), and it is not uncommon for SHOs to be diagnosed with multiple paraphilias such as fetishism, voyeurism, pedophilia, and necrophilia (Chan & Beauregard, 2016b; Chan et al., 2015; Myers et al., 2008).

Necrophilia is a paraphilia in which offenders have sexual intercourse with dead bodies (Chan, 2019). Within the DSM-5-TR, the American Psychiatric Association (2022) classified necrophilia as an 'other specified paraphilic disorder'. The first mention of the phenomenon of paraphilia came in Krafft-Ebing's work *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892), which mentioned several cases involving necrophilia. In 1989, Rosman and Resnick published a research study on one of the largest sample populations of necrophiliacs. Within this study, the authors separated the sample population into two subpopulations: genuine necrophilia and pseudonecrophilia. There are three subgroupings within genuine necrophilia, which are necrophilic fantasy (when the act is masturbatory but no necrophilic acts take place), regular necrophilia (where the offender obtains an already deceased person to use for sexual gratification), and necrophilic homicide (where the purpose of the homicide is to obtain a corpse to use for the offender's own purposes). Pseudonecrophilia occurs when someone has a passing attraction to dead bodies, but the individual still prefers sex with partners who are living.

Necrophilia is closely associated with sexual homicide in the public's eye due to high-profile sexual homicide cases that involved necrophilia, such as Jeffrey Dahmer. However, necrophilia occurring during a sexual homicide is actually rare. SHOs who engage in necrophilia have been found to have sentiments of sexual inadequacy and have experienced erectile dysfunction (Chan, 2019). In the cases of MSHOs who are necrophiliacs, Brown et al. (2017) stated that these offenders may also experience extreme anger geared toward women in general. The act of necrophilia by SHOs is not due to psychosis but rather is an element of the offender's signature or ritualistic behavior (Hazelwood & Warren, 2004; Stein et al., 2010). The acts of cannibalism or anthropophagy (desire to devour human flesh) are a merging of necrophilia and sadism in sexual homicides. When SHOs commit cannibalism, they are consuming their victim to eliminate them entirely (Boon, 2017; Chan, 2017a). The consumption of the body gives the SHO absolute power and control over the victim. Although necrophilia is not exclusive to males, it is exceedingly rare in females and was only observed in one case included in this study, that of Taylor Schabusbusiness.

### **Sexual Homicide Post-Crime Behaviors**

The post-crime phase of sexual homicide consists of the offender taking forensic countermeasures to either impede the discovery of the victim's body or to escape police detection by employing forensic awareness or investigative awareness strategies. Forensic awareness is constricted to forensic evidence and may manifest in the offender not penetrating the victim to avoid leaving semen, not stealing anything from the victim, or taking steps to conceal or move the victim's body after the murder (Balemba et al.,

2014; Reale et al., 2020). The link between a SHO's forensic awareness strategies and their modus operandi is crucial, as it can reveal key offender characteristics, such as prior criminal experience and the evolution of modus operandi over time (Beauregard & Martineau, 2013; Chopin et al., 2020a). Investigative awareness encompasses forensic awareness strategies, but also describes measures that the SHO may employ pre-crime, during the crime, and post-crime, even within their modus operandi, to avoid detection by law enforcement (Beauregard & Martineau, 2014). Investigative awareness strategies are particularly utilized by sadistic SHOs (Reale et al., 2020).

Another crucial aspect to examine in a SHO's post-crime commission process is the body disposal site, as it provides police with a crime location that is the most objective and is most influenced by the SHO's environment (Beauregard, 2019). The method of how a SHO disposes of their victim's body could indicate behavioral traits specific to that offender. Therefore, discerning body disposal methods employed by SHOs could aid law enforcement in identifying the offender more quickly. In their study on sexual homicide crime scenes where the victim's body is openly displayed, Georgeoulis et al. (2023) pointed to the necessity of studying the body disposal behaviors of SHOs at the location where the victim's body was found. The surrounding crime scene is one of the few irrefutable pieces of evidence law enforcement officers have from the beginning of their investigation. For their analysis, the authors used the FBI's criteria for sexual homicide to gather a sample of 662 solved sexual homicide cases in France and Canada from 1948 to 2017. The authors examined how modus operandi behaviors,

forensic awareness strategies, and victim selection influenced whether the body at a sexual homicide crime scene was openly displayed.

Georgoulis et al. (2023) found that, regarding modus operandi behaviors, SHOs who used restraints on their victims, committed foreign object insertion, engaged in post-mortem sexual acts (necrophilia), mutilated victims, and took trophies from either the victim or the crime scene were more likely to conceal the body. In contrast, SHOs were more likely to openly dispose of their victim's body when the body showed indications of overkill. In regard to forensic awareness strategies, SHOs who employed these strategies, such as destroying or removing evidence, cleaning the scene, etc., were less likely to display the body openly. Finally, concerning victim selection, the authors found that SHOs were less likely to openly display victims who were targeted. However, SHOs were more likely to openly display the bodies of victims from vulnerable populations such as sex workers, victims who were intoxicated with drugs or alcohol, and victims who engaged in hitchhiking. Out of all the factors, the authors found that the strongest determining factor for body disposal was the SHO's modus operandi behavior.

The choice to transport or conceal a body provides vital evidence of the offender's relationship with their victim, level of criminal proficiency, and evidence indicating the specific nature of how the crime was committed (Beauregard & Field, 2008; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Morton et al., 2014; Sea & Beauregard, 2018). The post-crime behaviors of SHOs, including the chosen disposal method of the victim's body, have been found to help categorize offenders into the different typologies of SHOs (Chai et al., 2021). Approaching each sexual homicide crime scene from a situational perspective allows

investigators to explore the process of rational choices that led to how the body was disposed of and whether or not external conditions, such as time constraints or being interrupted, influenced the post-crime body disposal (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Chopin et al., 2020).

### **Sexual Homicide Internationally**

The rate of sexual homicide reported internationally ranges from 1% to 5% (Chan & Heide, 2016). It is necessary to study how geography, culture, and the criminal justice systems of different countries affect research on sexual homicide. Beauregard (2019) conducted a broad study to examine sexual homicide crime scene behaviors and overall trends across multiple Western countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium, among others, and found that SHOs are more likely to use the con approach over the blitz approach, vaginal intercourse during sexual homicide was noted in 40%-50% of cases across most of the countries with only Belgium having a significantly higher percentage at 75%, and anal intercourse appeared in 30% of the countries except for the United States where there was a substantially higher percentage of 73%. The most significant variation in percentages across the countries was in concealing the victim's body, with the range from the United Kingdom at 10% to the United States at 67%. The author postulated that differences in SHOs' crime scene behaviors across countries could be due to several factors, including cultural, environmental, and the nature of the samples.

Researchers who have conducted studies in different countries have also found that SHOs usually have a previous criminal history. In a study conducted on Canadian

SHOs, researchers found that the average number of prior convictions was 7.3 for property offenses, 1.7 for violent offenses, and 0.4 for sexual offenses (Beauregard & Martineau, 2013). In a similar study conducted on British SHOs, scholars found that 64% of their offenders had a criminal history (Greenall & Richardson, 2015). Finally, in a study on Finnish SHOs, authors Hakkanen-Nyholm et al. (2009) found that 89% of their sample had a prior criminal history. Only in a study conducted on Chinese SHOs, researchers found that 80% of their sample had no previous overall convictions, and 88% had no prior sexual convictions (Chan et al., 2019b). Understanding the similarities of SHOs across different countries can be just as significant as understanding the differences.

### **Male Victims of Sexual Homicide**

Sexual homicide is a rare phenomenon that is generally reported to make up less than 4% of all homicides (James & Proulx, 2014). Researchers have explored the heterogeneous nature of sexual offenders and sexual homicide in many previous studies (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Higgs et al., 2017; Oligny et al., 2023). However, despite the vast array of research on sexual homicide, there have been very few studies where researchers explore men as the victims of sexual homicide and how the gender of the victim can influence the decisions of the perpetrator and their crime-commission process (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b). Despite the lack of research on male victims of sexual homicide, scholars have noted that the differences between male and female victims of sexual homicide are significant (Beauregard & Proulx, 2007; Chopin & Beauregard, 2021c). In the few studies that have been conducted on male victims of sexual homicide,

researchers have tended to focus solely on homosexual sexual homicide, i.e., a male perpetrator and male victim (Bataille, 1992; Beauregard & Proulx, 2007; Benecke, 2002; Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Kidd, 1993; Martens & Palermo, 2005; Murty, 2009). To my knowledge, there have been no research studies conducted solely on the male victims of FSHOs, even though the vast majority of victims of FSHOs are male (Chan et al., 2019a; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019).

In 2023(b), Chopin and Beauregard conducted a study on sexual homicide against male victims in comparison to female victims. From the results of the study, the authors presented the first empirical typology of males who were victims of sexual homicide, whereas previously, there had only been theoretical classifications of cases regarding sexual homicide against males. Their findings validated the physical strength hypothesis that was first proposed by Heide in 1993 and which was further explored by Chan and Heide in 2008 and Kim et al. in 2023 in relation to SHOs. Within the physical strength hypothesis, the physical strength and size of the victim impact the manner of killing in sexual homicide, specifically concerning weapon choice.

Within this empirical typology, Chopin and Beauregard (2023b) found that male victims of sexual homicide are less likely to be attacked by a stranger and more likely to be explicitly targeted, that the offender more often uses restraints to control the victim but is less likely to use strangulation as a method of murder, that the offender was more likely to use a weapon against a male victim but would less often move the body of the victim, that intrusive sexual acts on male victims of sexual homicide were less likely, and that sexual sadistic acts were more likely to be perpetrated with a male victim. These

findings pointed out differences in an MSHO's process of selecting a male victim as opposed to a female victim, as well as the crime commission process against a male rather than a female victim. These findings provide further groundwork for this paper, highlighting how the gender of both the SHO and the victim affects the rational choice process of an SHO and, therefore, point out the need for in-depth studies on how the offender and victim genders affect victim selection and the crime-commission process for FSHOs.

### **Women as Sexual Homicide Offenders**

FSHOs are an under-researched yet unique subgroup of SHOs whose choices during the crime committal process, such as victim and weapon selection, set them apart from other subgroups of SHOs. Various typologies of sexual homicide have been suggested through researchers' assessments of SHOs' crime scenes (see Chopin & Beauregard, 2019a; Higgs et al., 2017; Oligny et al., 2023), which delineate that sexual homicide is a heterogeneous offense. Additionally, scholars have already demonstrated the presence of subgroups within the category of sexual homicide, such as SHOs who kill children (Chopin & Beauregard, 2019b; Proulx et al., 2018) and the elderly (Chopin & Beauregard, 2020b), providing the basis from which FSHOs should be examined as their own subgroup of SHOs.

Along with the possible ill-fitting identification parameters of SHOs formed from studies on MSHOs, the classification of FSHOs could also be inhibited by the reluctance of society to accept that women are capable of committing crimes that are entirely out of the traditional, gender-specified box that women are expected to function within (Skott et

al., 2019; Vronsky, 2018). Society, including law enforcement and the criminal justice system, has a long history of difficulty viewing women as capable of violence, particularly sexual violence (Hickey, 2015; Mallicoat, 2022; Pearson, 2021; Vronsky, 2007). Furthermore, Skott et al. (2019) questioned the validity of applying criteria cultivated from the studies of MSHOs as a method of identifying FSHOs, additionally questioning whether the sexual behavior, motivations, characteristics, and arousal usually associated with sexual homicide would present differently in cases of FSHOs.

Researchers' ability to study patterns, motives, and criminal behaviors of specific subgroups of SHOs can be severely limited when there is no standard classification and understanding from which to reference (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2019a; Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Skott et al., 2019). Kim et al. (2024) conducted a study to use SHO behaviors and victim characteristics found at the scene of the crime to predict the degree to which the SHO and the victim had a relationship. Their findings identified patterns and revealed that an integrated view of victim and crime scene characteristics is relevant in improving the ability to predict the relationship between offenders and victims in sexual homicides. Furthermore, the authors demonstrated the efficacy of pattern identification and contextual considerations in furthering the research on SHOs. This thereby justifies the exploratory nature of my paper and its application of contextual factors to identify behavioral patterns in White FSHOs.

### **The First Studies on Female Sexual Homicide Offenders**

In 2013, two studies were published on FSHOs, marking the first to focus specifically on FSHOs as a unique subgroup of SHOs. In the first study, Chan and Frei

examined the patterns of FSHOs, including weapon use, epidemiology, victimology, and the relationship between the victim and the offender. In the second study, Chan et al. further explored FSHOs by analyzing the racial profiles of the offenders. In both studies, the authors used the same data obtained from the FBI's SHR from the years of 1976 to 2007.

Within this SHR data, the authors found that the number of individuals arrested for homicide was 632,017, with only 0.6% (3,977) of those cases classified as sexual homicide. Within that low number of sexual homicides, only 5% (204) were cases of FSHOs. The results of these studies included the following findings: (a) FSHOs most often killed intra-racially (within their own race); (b) in most cases, the FSHO knew the victim but was not romantically involved with the victim; (c) victims of FSHOs tended to be of the opposite gender with 78% of the victims being males; (d) multiple offenders or multiple victims was less likely (28%) as most cases involved only one offender and one victim; and (e) supporting Heide's (1993) physical strength hypothesis, 54% of the FSHOs used firearms as the method of murder but, physical force without a weapon such as drowning, strangulation, and asphyxiation was used more often if the victim was female. It is interesting to note, however, that physical force was not the manner of death in any cases involving intimate partners. These findings were groundbreaking as the researchers were able to determine that FSHOs are active agents who are capable of committing sexual homicide and are more likely to commit said crime on their own without a partner.

Since the publication of Chan and Frei's (2013) and Chan et al.'s (2013) studies on FSHOs, there have been only four further studies published on FSHOs. Three of these studies were conducted in the United States (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024) and one in Scotland (Skott et al., 2019). Through these studies, the researchers provided critical statistical knowledge on the demographics of FSHOs, their victims, and the characteristics of their crimes.

### **Female Sexual Homicide Offender Demographics**

To further research on FSHOs, it is essential to examine the relationship between demographics and the emergence of patterns. One demographic variable that is often studied in relation to different types of crimes is race. There is a basis for studying FSHOs from a racial point of view, as previous studies on nonsexual FHOs have recognized race as a significant variable in the analysis of these crimes (Gacono et al., 2000; Ressler et al., 1988; Skott et al., 2019). Furthermore, in previous research on SHOs, scholars have found differences depending on race, with the majority of both SHOs (59%-95% ) and sexual homicide victims (63%-93% ) having been found to be White (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2010; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2015; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Karakasi et al., 2017; Stefanska et al., 2015). Fridel and Fox (2019) also found that White females constituted the highest percentage of all FHOs. Additionally, researchers have established that there is a pattern of both White MSHOs and White FSHOs killing intra-racially (Chan et al., 2010; Chan et al., 2024; Skott et al., 2019).

In the study by Chan et al. (2013), the authors specifically examined the racial profiles of FSHOs and how that demographic factor affected the crime commission process. The authors noted that this was specifically needed because previous findings by Chan and Frei (2013) pointed to significant racial differences between FSHOs and other female offender populations, such as FHOs and FSOs. The authors also cited previous research on MSHOs, which demonstrated considerable racial differences, including that Black MSHOs were overrepresented (41%), given that their overall representation in the United States population (13%), and that White MSHOs were more likely to kill intra-racially. At the same time, Black MSHOs were more likely to kill intra-racially and inter-racially (within their race and outside of their race, respectively) (Chan et al., 2010).

Data collected in the FBI's SHR contains very basic demographic details on offenders, victims, and offense circumstances. In the SHR data used by Chan et al. (2013) and Chan and Frei (2013), the authors noted that 98.1% of the cases of FSHOs were either White or Black and that only 1.9% were from other races, such as American Indians, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Alaskan Natives (terms used by the SHR). Therefore, both studies only analyzed cases of White and Black FSHOs. The authors also noted that, at the time of their studies, the SHR did not use multiracial or Hispanic racial coding. Chan and Frei took a step further, dividing the 204 cases of FSHOs into adult FSHOs (87%) and juvenile FSHOs (13%). Then, when considering just the cases of adult FSHOs, the authors found that 51% were White and 49% were Black. Unlike Chan and Frei's (2013) study, which differentiated the results of adult FSHOs from those of juvenile FSHOs, Chan et al. (2013) examined results based on all FSHOs in their sample

and found that 53% of the FSHOs in their sample were White and 47% were Black. In both studies, the authors found that the average age of FSHOs in their sample was 27 years old.

Chan et al. (2019a) conducted a study that examined, compared, and contrasted the behaviors of MSHOs and FSHOs. Within the study, the sample of offenders from the SHR included homicides that were coded as sexual and that took place in the United States from 1976 to 2012. The offenders were categorized racially in the SHR as either White or non-White (which included Black, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander). The authors' findings of more non-White FSHOs than White FSHOs contradicted earlier studies by Chan et al. (2013) and Chan and Frei (2013). However, this discrepancy in offender race could be due to the 2019 study categorizing all people of color as non-White, whereas the 2013 studies only included White and Black FSHOs and did not include the other 1.9% that consisted of Asians, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Pacific Islanders.

Within the total population of SHOs in the Chan et al. (2019a) study, 92% were adults, with 82% of the adults being young adults. This held true for both sexes, as 82% of the MSHOs and 76% of the FSHOs were young adults. The first significant difference between the sexes came regarding the race of the SHOs. Of the MSHOs, 57% identified as White, while 43% identified as non-White. However, concerning FSHOs, the majority were non-White (56%) versus White (44%). On the other hand, both male and female SHOs were similar in the fact that both most often killed victims of the opposite sex, as 82% of MSHOs' victims were female and 89% of FSHOs' victims were male.

In 2021, Chan conducted a study to analyze the difference between offenders who killed sex workers (54 female offenders and 189 male offenders) and SHOs (134 female offenders and 2474 male offenders) who committed their crimes in the United States between 1976 and 2012. Since the author utilized the same SHR data as the study by Chan et al. (2019a), in which all the previously discussed demographic information remains the same, and the comparative analysis falls outside the purview of this study, Chan's (2021) study will not be further explored.

In the most recently published study on FSHOs, Chan et al. (2024) examined single-victim FSHOs' characteristics, along with their offense characteristics and victim demographics, to establish subtypes of FSHOs. To be included in this study, the FSHOs had to be entered into the FBI's SHR database as a homicide offender with the additional code for the circumstances being "rape" or "other sexual offenses". The sample used for this study consisted of 158 single-victim FSHOs who committed their offenses in the United States between 1976 and 2022. Out of this sample of FSHOs, the offender's average age was 27.96, with 75% being young adults (18 to 39 years old). This is consistent with Chan and Frei (2013), Chan et al. (2013), and Chan's (2021) findings that 27 is the average age of FSHOs, as well as Chan et al. (2019a) and Chan's (2021) findings that 76% of FSHOs are young adults.

Furthermore, the study by Chan et al. (2024) reported that the offenders' racial groups consisted of Black (53%), White (44%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (2%), and Asian (0.6%). Using a latent class analysis, the authors identified two distinct subgroups of FSHOs: White intra-familial offenders and Black extra-familial offenders.

The White intra-familial offenders represented 40% of the total sample of FSHOs and were comprised mainly of White (95%) young adults (67%) who primarily killed intra-racially (within one's own race; 97%). The Black extra-familial offender group represented 60% of the total sample of FSHOs and, similar to the White intra-familial offenders, was comprised primarily of Black (88%) young adults (81%) who killed mainly intra-racially (97%).

### **Victim Demographics**

Victim demographics are significant in demonstrating the premeditation of SHOs. Analyzing the types of victims that FSHOs target can shed further light on the differences observed between MSHOs and FSHOs. In the first study on FSHOs, Chan and Frei (2013) examined four different age groups of victims: children (12 years old and under), adolescents (13-17 years old), adults (18-59 years old), and elderly (60 years old and above). The authors found that the victims of adult FSHOs were most often also adults (79%), with the average age of the victims being 35 years old, and the percentage of child (10%), adolescent (2%), and elderly (9%) victims was found to be much less frequent. The authors noted that their findings on FSHOs' victim age preference differed from previous research on FSOs that indicated FSOs were more likely to assault children and adolescents (Faller, 1989; Ogilvie & Daniluk, 1995), while FSHOs were found to mainly target adult victims. This difference between FSHOs and FSOs highlights that FSHOs are in a unique category of offenders.

Chan and Frei (2013) also found that FSHOs have more male (73%) than female (27%) victims, and while 51% of adult FSHOs were White and 49% were Black, only

48% of the victims were White, while 52% of the victims were Black. Furthermore, the authors found that while both White and Black FSHOs mainly killed intra-racially, 89% and 92%, respectively, White FSHOs had a higher percentage of Black victims (12%) than Black FSHOs had White victims (9%). Regarding the race of the FSHOs and the gender of their victims, Chan et al. (2013) found that Black FSHOs targeted male victims 81% of the time, and White FSHOs targeted male victims 68% of the time.

In Chan et al.'s (2019a) study, the authors also found that, regarding victims' ages, both MSHOs and FSHOs primarily targeted young adults (18-39 years old), 46% for MSHOs and 53% for FSHOs. However, the second most targeted age group for MSHOs was juveniles (under 18 years old) at 24%, whereas the second most targeted age group for FSHOs was middle-aged adults (40-50 years old) at 30%. Juveniles were only targeted by FSHOs 5% of the time, while middle-aged adults were only targeted 16% of the time by MSHOs. These findings differed slightly from those of Chan and Frei (2013), who found that a total of 10% of FSHOs targeted children (12 years old and under), and 2% targeted adolescents (13 to 17 years old). Chan et al. (2019a) further found that both MSHOs and FSHOs had a low percentage of older adult victims (60 and above) at 14% and 11%, respectively. Interestingly, the races of the victims of MSHOs and FSHOs differed significantly, as 71% of MSHOs' victims were White and only 29% were non-White, while 61% of FSHOs' victims were non-White and only 39% were White.

In their 2024 study, Chan et al. found that the victims of FSHOs were mainly men (89%), with 53% being young adults and 31% being middle-aged adults (40 to 59 years old). Out of these victims, 59% were Black, 40% were White, and 1.3% were American

Indian/Alaskan Native. Within the subgroup of White intra-familial offenders, the authors discovered that the victims were mainly male (89%), middle-aged adults (48%), and young adults (41%). Within the subgroup of Black extra-familial offenders, the authors found that while the victims were still largely male (88%), victim age consisted mostly of young adults (60%), with only 20% of victims being middle-aged. Although these findings fluctuate somewhat from the 2013 studies to the 2024 study, they remain mostly consistent, particularly in regard to the Chan et al. (2019a) and Chan et al. (2024) studies.

### **Offender-Victim Relationship**

Contrary to the statistics on FHOs, where the victim is most often an intimate partner, Chan and Frei (2013) found that for FSHOs, the victim-offender relationship was most often a friend or acquaintance (51%), followed by strangers (20%), intimate partners (16%), and a family member (13%). When examining the victim-offender relationship by race, Chan et al. (2013) found that approximately half of the FSHOs of both races killed friends, acquaintances, or someone who knew the offender in some manner, 44% for White FSHOs and 57% for Black FSHOs. However, White and Black FSHOs differed in their second most frequent victim-offender relationship. The second most frequent relationship for White FSHOs was family members (24%), while the second most frequent relationship for Black FSHOs was strangers (22%). Intimate partners were found to be the least reported victims of White FSHOs (15%) and the second least reported victims of Black FSHOs (13%), with family members being the least reported victims of Black FSHOs (9%). These findings are contrary to findings of victim-offender relationships for FSOs and FHOs. Furthermore, the victims of FSHOs in

a study by Skott et al. (2019) were also commonly someone the offender knew, an acquaintance or friend (42.9%), or a family member (14.3%). However, none of the victims were found to be in a relationship with the offender, nor were they strangers.

The study by Chan et al. (2019a) did not examine the victim-offender relationship for FSHOs; however, the study conducted by Chan et al. (2024) did look at these relationships. The authors found that the relationships between the FSHOs and their victims consisted mainly of acquaintances (42%) and strangers (34%), followed by friend/neighbor/colleague (12%), intimate partner (5%), immediate family member (3%), and other family members (3%). However, within the subgroup of White intra-familial offenders, the authors discovered a high combination of intra-familial (within one's own family) victims (52%). These intra-familial victims consisted of intimate partners (25%) and immediate family members (22%). However, there was still a high percentage of acquaintance victims (33%) within this subgroup. These percentages differ from those in 2013, where the most likely victims of White FSHOs were acquaintances (44%), though the percentage of family member victims from 2013 (24%) remained consistent.

Amongst the subgroup of Black extra-familial offenders, the authors found that the nature of the offender-victim relationship was mainly extra-familial (outside of one's own family). The relationship was mainly that of acquaintances (47%) and strangers (24%), with intimate partners comprising only 15% of victims and immediate family members only 6%. These findings are consistent with those of Chan et al. (2013).

### **Heide's Physical Strength Hypothesis**

An important work to consider when examining the concept of FSHOs is Heide's (1993) physical strength hypothesis. The difference between the physical strength of the offender and the victim is a consequential aspect of homicide, specifically when differentiating between MHOs and FHOs. The physical strength hypothesis was first proposed by Heide (1993) in their study exploring parricide (the killing of one's parents) and the differing choices of weapons between juvenile offenders who commit parricide and adult offenders who commit parricide. Heide's hypothesis posited that juvenile and female offenders are usually physically weaker than adult and male offenders. Therefore, the weaker offenders are more likely to use less physically demanding weapons, such as knives or firearms. In contrast, offenders with greater physical strength are more likely to exert that physical strength to overpower and kill their victim using methods such as personal weapons (i.e., strangulation, asphyxiation, or beating) or contact weapons (i.e., blunt objects).

A similar study by Chan and Heide (2008) examined the physical strength hypothesis in relation to sexual homicides and the determinate nature of physical strength differences between the offender and victim in highlighting the differences between homicides committed by male and female offenders. In the first study on FSHOs, Chan and Frei (2013) found that the weapons used by FSHOs confirmed Heide's (1993) physical strength hypothesis, as the male victims of FSHOs were most often killed by a firearm (62%), but female victims of FSHOs were most likely to be killed by personal weapons (48%). The authors also found that within the small number of adult FSHOs

who murdered their intimate partner, 81% were killed using a firearm, and none were murdered using personal weapons. This could be due to the majority of FSHOs killing victims of the opposite sex, and therefore, a firearm would be more useful against a male intimate partner who is likely to be stronger than the FSHOs. Furthermore, the authors found that children, who are the smallest and weakest population of victims, were most often killed by FSHOs using personal weapons (88%). On the other hand, adolescent victims, whose size and strength may vary based on age or gender, were equally likely to be killed by firearms (43%) and personal weapons (43%). The authors' summation of these results was that FSHOs choose their weapons to have the least amount of physical resistance from their victims.

Chan et al. (2019a) were able to further support the physical strength hypothesis in their study examining the differences in the choice of weapons used by male and female single-victim SHOs, finding that FSHOs most often chose weapons that required less physical strength, such as sharp objects or firearms. A study conducted by Kim et al. (2023) focused on strangulation as a method of murder in sexual homicides. Though the authors only included cases in which the victims were female, their findings did support a distinct connection between strangulation and the build of the victim, with the authors asserting that this finding further validated Heide's (1993) physical strength theory, which was applied by Chan and Heide (2008) to sexual homicide. The authors postulated that more physical force can be utilized by larger and stronger offenders against weaker victims and that offenders who are smaller and weaker than their victims will likely use weapons that are less physically taxing.

Similarly, Chopin and Beauregard (2023b) found that the gender of the victim impacted the patterns of aggression used towards the victims of MSHOs. The authors also determined that most of the male victims in their study were both vulnerable individuals and loners, which was consistent with previous studies (Beauregard & Proulx, 2007; Geberth, 1996). Additionally, Chopin and Beauregard (2023b) pointed out that male and female physiological differences of the SHO could affect their decision-making processes.

The unequal strength between the perpetrator and victim can influence multiple aspects of sexual homicide. The modus operandi of an SHO will need to be adapted due to any differentials in physical strength (Chan et al., 2024; Chan et al., 2019a). Studies conducted on weaker victims of sexual homicide, such as children and the elderly, found that the SHOs adapted their modus operandi as needed to circumvent obstacles such as limited access and level of supervision (Beauregard & Martineau, 2015; Chopin & Beauregard, 2020b; Chopin et al., 2020b) which lends credence to the theory that FSHOs would need to adapt their modus operandi dependent on the physical strength of their victim. Chopin and Beauregard's (2023b) study on male victims of sexual homicide confirmed that the gender of the victim does affect victim selection and the crime-commission process and, therefore, provides a basis on which to infer that the gender of the SHO will also affect victim selection and the crime-commission process, as is explored in this paper.

## **Methods of Murder**

In prior research, scholars have found that the use of weapons in the crime committal process of sexual homicide varies greatly between MSHOs and FSHOs. Authors have emphasized that many of the studies on the type of weapons used by SHOs were conducted solely on MSHOs (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2019a) with findings indicating that personal weapons (such as asphyxiation, strangulation, beatings, drownings, etc.) were most often used by MSHOs followed by edged weapons (such as knives) and contact weapons (such as blunt instruments) (Chan, 2019; Chan & Beauregard, 2016a; Chan et al., 2019a; Kim et al., 2023). This presents a stark contrast to FSHOs, who scholars have found most often use firearms as their weapon of murder, with personal and edged weapons being less commonly used (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013). The differences in weapon choice between MSHOs and FSHOs suggest that other differences between MSHOs and FSHOs may exist at each stage of the crime committal process, potentially setting FSHOs apart as a distinct subgroup of SHOs that require their own understanding and classification.

Beginning with the first studies conducted on FSHOs (Chan et al., 2013; Chan & Frei, 2013), researchers found that this subgroup of SHOs exhibited different patterns in weapon choice compared to those of MSHOs. Chan and Frei (2013) found that firearms were the preferred murder weapon (50%) for FSHOs, with edged weapons being the next most frequent (26%), followed by personal weapons (17%) and contact weapons (7%). Further research by Chan et al. (2013) found that the type of murder weapon also differed

between White and Black FSHOs. Approximately 60% of White FSHOs used firearms as their murder weapon, while only 48% of Black FSHOs used firearms. The second most frequently used murder weapon by White FSHOs was personal weapons (17%), whereas edged weapons were the second most frequently used weapons by Black FSHOs (32%).

In Chan et al.'s (2019a) study, which compared the types of weapons used by MSHOs and FSHOs, the authors' findings supported those of previous studies, as well as Heide's (1993) physical strength hypothesis. The authors identified that the most common weapon of choice for FSHOs was firearms (63%), followed by edged weapons (26%), personal weapons (7%), and contact weapons (4%). The findings for MSHOs also supported previous literature, as personal weapons (44%) were found to be the most commonly used, followed by edged weapons (29%), firearms (14%), and contact weapons (13%). The authors further found that MSHOs were more likely to use more physically demanding weapons than FSHOs (57% vs. 11%), while FSHOs were more likely to use less physically demanding weapons than MSHOs (89% vs. 43%).

Chan et al. (2024) provided additional support for the physical strength hypothesis with their findings that 64% of FSHOs most often use a firearm as their method of murder. Furthermore, within the subgroup of White intra-familial offenders, the authors found that 75% utilized a firearm as the murder weapon, followed by edged weapons (16%), contact weapons (6%), and personal weapons (3%). For the subgroup of Black extra-familial offenders, the authors noted that these offenders used predominantly firearms (57%) or edged weapons (32%), followed by personal weapons (8%), and contact weapons (2%). The choice of murder weapons for FSHOs has remained largely

the same from the studies in 2013 to the most recent study in 2024. The only discrepancy is in White FSHOs' second choice of weapon, which moved from personal weapons (17%) in the study by Chan et al. (2013) to edged weapons (16%) in the study by Chan et al. (2024). Most importantly, the difference in weapon patterns found between MSHOs and FSHOs indicates differences between these two populations of SHOs, and therefore, they should be studied accordingly (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan & Frei, 2013).

It is apparent that Heide's (1993) physical strength hypothesis is an important aspect to consider when evaluating the methodology of FSHOs and the sexual impact of this methodology. For MSHOs, the intimate and up-close nature of how they commit the sexual homicide is how they obtain their psychological and sexual excitement and gratification (Chan, 2021; Chan & Beauregard, 2016b; Chan & Heide, 2008; Chan & Li, 2020). However, since the victims of FSHOs are most often males and FSHOs are more likely to choose firearms as their method of murder due to the differentials in physical strength (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013), it could be that FSHOs' psychological and sexual gratification are found in other aspects of their criminal process.

### **Crime Scene**

Many aspects are important when analyzing the crime scene of a SHO, such as geographical location, whether or not the victim's body has been transported post-mortem, the state of the victim's body (such as dismemberment or evidence of overkill), evidence of sexual activity (such as sexual intercourse, foreign object insertion, or

necrophilia), evidence of sadism, efforts to employ forensic countermeasures (evidence destruction), etc. These aspects of SHOs can often change depending on gender and race. While the researchers of prior studies on FSHOs have been able to obtain basic demographic information regarding FSHOs' crime scenes, such as geographical location (Chan et al., 2013) and efforts to employ forensic countermeasures (Skott et al., 2019), there are no studies to my knowledge that have analyzed any other aspects of FSHOs' crime scenes.

In a study conducted by Chan et al. (2013) on racial differences among FSHOs, the authors found significant differences in urbanness and geographical region for both White and Black FSHOs. The majority of White FSHOs (40%) committed their crimes in suburban areas, whereas the majority of Black FSHOs (69%) committed their crimes in large cities. Moreover, while the majority of both White and Black FSHOs were located in the Southern region of the United States, 58% of White FSHOs were located there, while Black FSHOs were almost equally split between the South (47%) and the Midwest (42%). The authors also found that in cases of FSHOs, 48% occurred in large cities, 11.3% in small cities, 27.5% in the suburbs, and 13.2% in rural areas. The authors took a step further and utilized the United States Census Bureau's regional categorization, finding that of the 204 cases of FSHOs, 52% occurred in the South, 26.5% in the Midwest, 15.2% in the Western region, and 6.4% in the Northeast.

Chan et al. (2024) found that, overall, FSHOs tend to kill in higher populated areas (77%) rather than lower populated areas (23%). The subgroup of Black extra-familial offenders adheres to this, as 91% of those FSHOs kill in higher populated areas,

with only 10% killing in lower populated areas. However, the authors discovered that the percentage of White intra-familial offenders who kill in higher populated areas is only slightly more than those who kill in lower populated areas (56% and 44%, respectively).

In a study by Skott et al. (2019) conducted on FSHOs in Scotland, the authors found that FSHOs are more likely to kill their victims in private, indoor settings. This could likely be due to the victims of FSHOs, most often being someone known to the offender, such as a friend or acquaintance. The authors also found that FSHOs were more likely to practice forensic countermeasures by destroying evidence than nonsexual female homicide offenders (28% vs. 0.9%). This finding could suggest that the sexual nature of an FSHO's crime could present a greater need and rationality for the offender to destroy evidence.

One of the goals of my study was to fill the gap in understanding FSHOs' crime scenes by examining emergent patterns of behavior that may appear across the sample of case studies included. Chan et al. (2019a) suggested that the sexual elements of the FSHO's crime scene may not be as overt as the usual sexual homicide crime scene of MSHOs. The fact that sexual elements are present is important and should not be overlooked, even if the FSHO's motive may appear to be different from cases of male-perpetrated sexual homicide.

### **Presence of an Accomplice**

Co-offending usually involves a small group of people (generally two or three individuals) who often have a prior criminal history and whose offenses are often more violent than those of single perpetrators (Chan, 2019; DeLisi & Scherer, 2006; McGloin

& Piquero, 2009). Chan (2019) posited that crimes perpetrated by co-offenders are embedded in rational choice as the offenders perceive the risks to be lower and the rewards to be higher, particularly in cases of sexual homicide. The power dynamics in co-offending are mitigated by the offenders' gender, age, and any prior criminal activity.

Many of the most well-known FSHOs are those who kill alongside their male counterpart. However, the presence of an accomplice is not always common in FSHOs. In the study conducted by Chan and Frei (2013), one interesting finding the authors made was that out of the total number of FSHOs, 72.5% committed sexual homicides of either single perpetrator-single victim or single perpetrator-multiple victims, and only 27.5% committed sexual homicides of either multiple perpetrators-single victim or multiple perpetrator-multiple victims.

Chan and Frei (2013) found that victims of solo acting FSHOs are almost always male, while victims of FSHOs acting with a male accomplice are almost always female. However, the 2019 study by Skott et al. found that, while their sample included more cases of FSHOs working with a male accomplice than FSHOs working alone, they also found that out of all the FSHOs cases, there were still more male victims than female victims, contradicting Chan and Frei's findings from 2013. Skott et al. stated that these findings indicated the need for further research on FSHOs acting with a male accomplice to better understand this dynamic. The small sample size of FSHOs ( $n = 7$ ) used by Skott et al. (2019) in their study may have also affected the reliability of their results on a broader, international scale. The inclusion of a male accomplice is also more likely for

non-sexual FHOs, which Skott et al. (2019) noted could be more indicative of a pattern for female murderers that is gender-based rather than sexually based.

### **Female Sexual Homicide Offenders Internationally**

Geography can also be essential in understanding findings on different types of offenders, especially FSHOs. In the study by Skott et al. (2019) on FSHOs in Scotland, the victims of FSHOs were most often killed by employing physical force (57.1%), with blunt and sharp objects being equal as the most common methods of murder (42.9% for both). Interestingly, none of these cases involved a firearm as the manner of murder, contrasting with findings by Chan and Frei (2013), Chan et al. (2013), and Chan et al. (2019a), who drew their data from cases in the United States where gun control laws are lax. The number of privately owned firearms in the United States is the highest in the world (Jehan et al., 2018), whereas the data from Skott et al. originated from Scotland, where the regulation of firearms has been strictly controlled since the enactment of the Firearms Act of 1968 (Police Scotland, 2024). Given the generally minute number of known and reported sexual homicides committed by females, it is important to differentiate them by country in order to detect the most accurate patterns. Therefore, the case studies included in my paper focused exclusively on White FSHOs from the United States.

### **Gender Bias Within Sexual Homicide Categorization**

As there is no legal definition for sexual homicide, most SHOs are convicted solely of some form of murder charge (be it capital murder, manslaughter, culpable homicide, etc.) without any accompanying sexual charges (Chan, 2019; Skott et al.,

2019). While this does not usually affect the perception of M SHOs, it does affect the perception of FSHOs. Studies on Dennis Rader (known as BTK for bind, torture, kill) (Chan, 2019; Hsu & Bailey, 2022; Knoll & Hazelwood, 2009), Jeffrey Dahmer (Jentzen, 2017; Menon & Nishad, 2024; Petreca et al., 2021), and Ted Bundy (Fatima, 2021; Fox, 2021; Petreca et al., 2021) do not hesitate to label these MSHOs as such. Researchers, and arguably the general public, see these male offenders as SHOs, and yet none were charged or convicted of any sex crimes in relation to the murders they committed (see Chan, 2019). These MSHOs are considered as such because they meet the FBI's criteria for sexual homicide. However, while a lack of sexual charges does not negate males of the label of SHO, the same cannot necessarily be said of females who lack sexual charges but whose crimes do meet the FBI's criteria for sexual homicide. It may be difficult for the public or scholars to view the FSHOs analyzed in my study as such; however, each case meets the FBI's criteria for sexual homicide and therefore, can reasonably be considered FSHOs.

Adding to this complexity is the fact that the coding of homicide as sexual for statistical reports is often left up to the discretion of the law enforcement officer entering the report, given the lack of specific criteria (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Skott et al., 2019). This lack of criteria can easily skew the research conducted on FSHOs, as researchers are forced to rely on quantitative data with few details that are entered upon police determination of cases, who likely do not have a truly codified understanding of the characteristics and behaviors of FSHOs (Chan et al., 2013; Chan & Frei, 2013). When societal prejudice, gender stereotypes, and bias are layered on top of

the general lack of understanding and underestimation of FSHOs, the result is the likelihood that a lack of accurate reporting of FSHOs will occur (Chan et al., 2013; Karakasi et al., 2017). Therefore, any patterns of behavior or characteristics of FSHOs that my paper may uncover could aid in better understanding and reporting of behaviors specific to FSHOs.

### **Female Offenders and Racial Bias in the Criminal Justice System**

The significance of racial differences within the population of FSHOs has been discussed at length in the sections prior. However, it is still worth noting the racial bias female offenders experience within the United States' justice system, particularly in capital cases. In their study examining women of color who received the death sentence in the United States, Farr (2024) not only pointed out the issue of racial bias in the criminal justice system but, more specifically, found substantial differences between White, Black, and Latina women sentenced to death between 1977 and 2023. By the end of 2023, out of all the women who had been executed or remained on death row, the percentage of Black women sentenced to death for killing one or more White victims was substantially higher than that of White women sentenced for the murder of one or more victims of another race, 53% vs. 21% respectively. Additionally, the prevalence of intellectual disabilities, history of abuse, and history of drug use in women currently on death row or who had been executed by the end of 2023 was all higher in Black and Latina females than in White females. Farr (2024) detailed that, within the population of prosecutors and defense attorneys, there is an overrepresentation of white males who may not truly understand or consider the extent to which systemic racism, trauma, and

domestic abuse (physical, sexual, etc.) affect Black female offenders' mitigating circumstances. Understanding the racial experiences that other violent female offenders face within the criminal justice system can aid in further informing the understanding of FSHOs from a racial standpoint.

### **Gender Bias in the Criminal Justice System**

Throughout history, violent female offenders have often been underestimated by the criminal justice system. This is, in part, due to the fact that most violent crimes are perpetrated by men (Fridel & Fox, 2019). Many studies have emphasized that female offenders are frequently given lighter and more lenient sentences, even in cases of homicide (Maher, 2021) and sexual assaults (Anderson et al., 2020; Beeby et al., 2020). However, it has also been argued that women who violate their socially acceptable gender roles and commit violent offenses are viewed with more contempt by the criminal justice system (Beeby et al., 2020; Fridel, 2019) and by society in general (Forney & Lacy, 2022). Either way, the actions of violent female offenders are usually met with bias in one form or another. In their study examining leniency and bias towards female offenders in relation to the crimes of solicitation, theft, child sexual abuse, and homicide, Macken and O'Connell (2023) found a majority leniency effect towards female offenders, particularly regarding homicides, where male offenders were given substantially longer sentences. The one crime that did not show a leniency effect towards female offenders was that of child sexual abuse, which echoes the sentiment that women who violate their societal role (as a mother, protector, nurturer, etc.) are met with scorn and more punitive consequences.

## Summary and Conclusions

A great magnitude of research on FSHOs still needs to be conducted. From the results of their study, Skott et al. (2019) concluded that FSHOs are indeed a subgroup of SHOs who possess characteristics uniquely their own and advised that future studies on this unique population are needed to explore this group in greater detail and to analyze the motivation, psychopathology, sexual aspects of the crime, and crime scene behaviors that are specific to FSHOs. Similarly, Chan et al. (2019a) asserted that more in-depth studies of FSHOs could potentially reveal whether the crime was premeditated, whether the offender brought a weapon or used one found at the scene, potential connections between the use of a firearm and consensual sex before the homicide, and whether or not FSHOs are motivated by sadism. Furthermore, in-depth studies on FSHOs could illuminate differences from MSHOs in terms of triggers, motivations, and emotional states. This call for more in-depth research on FSHOs validated the need for pattern identification and analysis of these offenders, which I discovered in the case studies conducted in this paper. By studying the literature on FSHOs, a foundation began to emerge that distinguished many characteristics and choices of FSHOs from those of MSHOs.

To address these gaps in the literature that call for more in-depth analysis of FSHOs, I conducted 12 case studies of White FSHOs, analyzing emergent patterns. By examining the pre-crime, crime, and post-crime stages of these unique offenders, I observed emergent patterns that spoke to motivation, pre-meditation, method of homicide, sexual elements, indications of sadism, crime scene behaviors, mutilation of

victim's body, and forensic awareness strategies, all of which constitute a gap in the understanding of FSHOs that previous scholars have stated should be explored (Chan, 2021; Chan & Beauregard, 2019; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Understanding the unique behaviors and crime-committal process of FSHOs could aid law enforcement in apprehending these offenders.

Additionally, my use of a case study approach allowed for an examination beyond just numbers. It involved focusing on descriptors of individual stories to allow for a deeper analysis and evaluation of particular behavioral aspects of the crime (Patnaik & Pandey, 2019). The methodologies I used in conducting these case studies are detailed further in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore emergent patterns of behavior discovered in the examination of the crime committal process of White FSHOs. The crime committal process refers to the consideration of a crime as an entire event, including pre-crime, crime, and post-crime stages (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c). This method of analysis has been utilized in more recent research on sexual homicide as it provides a contextual and situational understanding of SHOs' actions during each stage of their crime (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Schlesinger, 2021). Discerning behavioral patterns from the crime committal process of White FSHOs could provide new knowledge of these offenders' actions and behaviors, including premeditation, method of homicide, sexual elements, indications of sadism, crime scene behaviors, mutilation of the victim's body, and forensic awareness strategies. Previous scholars have pointed out the need to explore FSHOs on a more in-depth basis, constituting a gap in the literature that will be addressed in this research study (Chan, 2021; Chan & Beauregard, 2019; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). Additionally, any new knowledge of White FSHOs that may be gained from this study could further aid law enforcement agencies in the apprehension of these offenders.

In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for conducting this study, outline the research questions posed, and clarify my role and responsibilities as the researcher. Furthermore, I outline the proposed methodology for this study, including population

sampling, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. I also explored issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns as they relate to potential limitations in the methodology utilized and to the role of the researcher.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I designed this research study to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

Research Question 2: How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

In this study, I focused on cases of White FSHOs. For the qualitative research design, I employed a descriptive case study. The use of case studies began in the early 1900s, with scholars primarily conducting these studies in the social sciences and anthropology (Harrison et al., 2017). Using a descriptive case study design enables researchers to narrate and examine real-world situations, allowing them to observe and evaluate patterns that may be present (Schoch, 2020; Shanahan et al., 2018). A descriptive case study approach was particularly appropriate for this study, as it is best suited for use in the early stages of research (Benbasat et al., 1987).

I placed specific focus on examining the behaviors of White FSHOs exhibited during the crime committal process, using a rational choice approach. Rational choice theory is a framework used to identify patterns by examining the decision-making processes of criminals and how they employ a cost-benefit analysis of their crimes.

Scholars utilize this theory to understand the lived experiences of offenders and how these experiences influence their choices (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Chopin et al., 2023b; Cornish & Clarke, 1987).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher in this study involved collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Unlike most qualitative designs, which focus on interviewing and observing active participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I did not include interviews or interactions with live participants. The cases included in this study were bracketed into a period of the last 100 years, and thus, the ability to interview FSHOs in person was not likely, as some are incarcerated, some have already passed, and some have been released from prison and have changed their names. Therefore, the data collected were from archival sources, including court documents, police reports, documentaries, news articles, peer-reviewed articles, and scholarly books.

There was no personal connection or relationship to the subject matter that could negatively affect the nature of this study, as I have no personal affiliation with any FSHOs and do not know anyone else who has such connections. As I analyzed data solely through archival sources, there was no concern about an abusive power dynamic, since the study did not involve active participants. However, the gender of the offenders and the nature of the criminal and sexual behaviors that were studied had the potential to introduce bias. Secondary data could also be a source of potential bias from the individuals who originally collected the data. Therefore, I employed triangulation—the collection of data from multiple sources—to further verify the data and mitigate any bias

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patnaik & Pandey, 2019; Yin, 2009).

### **Methodology**

I chose the sample population of case studies pursuant to the subject matter.

Patnaik and Pandey (2019) noted that the goal of case study research guides the selection of cases, with most researchers choosing to practice purposive case sampling. In studies involving multiple cases, there is no requirement for an exact number of cases; however, according to Patnaik and Pandey (2019) and Yin (2013), it is generally recommended to select between six and ten cases. Hence, I employed purposeful case sampling and selected a population of six solo cases of White FSHOs and six cases of White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

All participants in this study were White females from within the United States whose crimes occurred in the last 100 years and fit the FBI criteria for sexual homicide. I excluded MSHOs from this study as 95% of SHOs are males, while only 5% or less are females, and due to scholars conducting the majority of prior research on MSHOs (Chan, 2019). This constituted a gap in the literature as only a handful of studies have been published on FSHOs (Chan, 2017b; Chan, 2021; Chan & Beauregard, 2019; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019), all of which were quantitative studies. Additionally, I excluded FSHOs of color as the highest percentage of all FHOs, SHOs, and SHOs' victims are White (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2015; Fridel & Fox, 2019; Karakasi et al., 2017; Stefanska et al., 2015). As nearly all previous research

on FSHOs has been conducted using sample populations from the United States (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013), I only used a sample population from within the United States in order to compare my findings with previous research on FSHOs.

For the initial identification of cases, I used Murderpedia. Murderpedia is a database that categorizes and lists murderers by gender, country, and state (Murderpedia, n.d.). Furthermore, Murderpedia provided webpages for each murderer, which list the basic characteristics of the crime, including offender demographics, victim demographics, dates of murder and arrest, method of murder, location of murder, and the murderer's current status in the criminal justice system. I verified all information through the triangulation of data. Importantly, Murderpedia often included court documents, police documents, photographs, news articles, and scholarly resources, which I found to be useful in the data collection stage.

While Murderpedia was not an exhaustive database that included every murderer, past and present, in the United States, it did supply a substantial sample. Within the United States alone, Murderpedia has cataloged 789 female murderers. To begin to narrow down this large sample population, I assessed each of the 789 female murderers using a broad, initial criteria I designed that consists of the following characteristics: White murderer, mentions of rape/sexual abuse, torture, dismemberment, or overkill, as well as victim(s) found nude or in a sexually explicit manner. Once the initial sample population was narrowed down to under 100 cases, further criteria were applied. Specifically, the offender had to be 18 years or older at the time of the crime, as 88% of

SHOs are adults (Chan & Heide, 2009; Chan, 2017b), and the victim(s) had to be 13 years or older at the time of the crime due to scholars finding significant disparities between sexual homicides of children (12 and under) and those of adults in prior research (Chan & Frei, 2013). Additionally, the federal statute on aggravated sexual abuse of a child also described a child as being under 12 years of age (18 U.S.C. § 2241(c)). Next, I applied the FBI criteria for sexual homicide, which consists of one of the following elements being present at the crime scene or throughout the investigation:

(a) victim lacks attire (totally or partially), (b) exposure of the sexual parts of the victim's body, (c) the body is found in a sexually explicit position, (d) an object has been inserted into a body cavity (anus, vagina, or mouth), (e) there is evidence of sexual intercourse, (f) there is evidence of substitutive sexual activity (e.g., masturbation and ejaculation at the crime scene), or of sadistic sexual fantasies (e.g., genital mutilation) (Ressler et al., 1988, p. xiii).

To avoid potential false positives for sexual homicide, I implemented the provision suggested by Chopin and Beauregard (2019c), wherein, if the victim was found naked, there must be at least one other sexual element present at the crime scene. Finally, I implemented a provision of my own accord, that the FSHO had to meet the criteria for sexual homicide through her own actions and behaviors that could be verified through primary sources or through secondary sources that I meticulously triangulated. As an example, in the case of Judith Neelley, while semen was present in the vagina of one of Neelley's victims, meeting the criteria for 'evidence of sexual intercourse', since the sperm came from her partner Alvin and not from Judith Neelley, she was instead

included for meeting the criteria of genital mutilation for the chemical torture she inflicted upon the victim's genital area. Out of the sample population remaining, I selected six solo White FSHOs and six White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners as the cases used in this research study.

### **Instrumentation**

In qualitative research studies, particularly case studies, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, as the researcher for this study, I served as the principal instrument. Biases in this study were mitigated by maintaining a homogeneous analysis and coding of data, as well as consistent self-examination for any potential biases.

Another instrument I utilized was a self-formulated offender fact sheet to guide the organization and categorize offenders' behavior into developmental, pre-crime, crime, post-crime, and trial categories, with additional sections for partner demographic information for White FSHOs with one or more partners. As case studies seek to understand the who, what, and how of a phenomenon (Dubé & Paré, 2003; Yin, 2009), I devised the fact sheets to specifically examine the who, what, when, where, and how for each stage of the crime committal process, as well as account for phenomena that emerged within those guidelines across participants.

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

Case study research consists of the analysis of multiple sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Darke et al., 1998; Patnaik & Pandey, 2019). The sources of data that I

collected for this research study were archival and both primary and secondary in nature. Interviews with the female offenders in this study were not conducted, as some FSHOs are incarcerated, some have already passed, and some have been released from prison and have changed their names. Therefore, I collected data for this study from primary sources, including publicly available court documents, police records, state inmate information, video recordings of trials, and documentaries featuring interviews with investigators, forensic analysts, and pathologists who worked on the case. Secondary sources of data consisted of newspaper articles from the time period of the murders, in which journalists detailed trial testimony, more recently published online articles, books written by subject matter experts, and peer-reviewed articles from journals such as EBSCOHost, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycBooks, ProQuest Ebook Central, and SAGE Journals. The importance of multiple sources of data lies in the ability to triangulate and verify data as well as present various points of view, context, and overall, more detailed findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Analyzing qualitative data can be an arduous task, and it is therefore best to incorporate an analytical strategy (Patnaik & Pandey, 2019). Three general strategies for qualitative analysis proposed by Yin (2014) consist of (a) analysis of data predicated on theoretical premises, (b) analysis to provide explanatory and contrasting viewpoints of the data, and (c) descriptive analysis of data based upon sequential processes of events and actions. For this study, I employed the third general analytical strategy suggested by Yin. Patnaik and Pandey (2019) further define this method of analysis as “rely[ing] on

time series analysis analogous to experiments conducted in quantitative research tradition. Focus in this case is to capture details in the sequence of processes, events, actions, and agents” (p. 171).

To follow this data analysis strategy, I collected data regarding six solo White FSHOs and six White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners from various sources, including court documents, police records, peer-reviewed sources, news articles, and scholarly books. I then applied this data to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

RQ2. How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

Given the manual selection of solo and partnered cases of White FSHOs who committed premeditated murder, issues of data alignment with research questions were minimal. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended developing a codebook containing predetermined codes when evaluating data within a qualitative case study. Therefore, I collected and coded the data for this study manually using a self-developed, predetermined codebook for developmental, pre-crime, crime, post-crime, and trial stages. Considering the small number of cases in this research study, manual coding was preferable. Software coding for qualitative research, while immensely useful in studies with large sample populations, could miss the nuances of patterns that emerge in smaller populations (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The use of coding software can also reveal

researcher bias, as specific patterns are searched for rather than allowing patterns to emerge naturally (Lauer et al., 2018).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In quantitative research, the quality of a study is determined by checks on validity, reliability, generalizability, and objectivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In short, quantitative findings must withstand statistical scrutiny. In contrast, the findings of qualitative studies must be trustworthy. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of trustworthiness is the most well-known and requires the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the subsequent sections, I will discuss each of these criteria in further detail.

#### **Credibility**

In qualitative research, credibility is established through various methods, including triangulation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, consistent observation, and detailed description (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). For this study, triangulation and rich, detailed descriptions served to establish credibility. Triangulation enhances the credibility of a qualitative study by employing multiple theories, data sources, or investigators (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I employed triangulation by utilizing multiple data sources. I ensured that cases were thoroughly analyzed using data from court documents, police documents, peer-reviewed journals, and scholarly books. Managing researcher bias was also an important factor in establishing credibility. I managed bias through self-examination of potential biases, as well as maintaining consistent analysis and coding of data.

**Transferability**

Transferability is achieved when the processes and methodologies applied during the course of a study, as well as the findings, can be utilized in contexts outside of the present study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Scholars have noted that the comparison of statistical generalizations in quantitative studies to the analytical generalizations of qualitative studies often unfairly disparages qualitative case studies (Hyett et al., 2014; Patnaik & Pandey, 2019). The goal of case study research, as noted by Yin (2018), is to expand knowledge of a phenomenon (analytic generalization) rather than project possibilities (statistical generalization). This conflict between quantitative and qualitative research led to the conceptualization of transferability (Carminati, 2018). Much like credibility, I established transferability of this study through the triangulation of data and consistent analysis and coding. However, given the subjective nature of case studies, it is most often the reader rather than the author who determines the transferability of a qualitative study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

**Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research is predicated on determining the stability and consistency of the findings over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Korstjens and Moser (2018) emphasized that transparency throughout the data analysis process is crucial for ensuring the consistency of results and posited that the best strategy to maintain dependability is the creation of an audit trail. An audit trail is comprised of notes on decisions made throughout the study's process, including the sample population, research materials, pattern emergence, coding, and the analysis of

findings. Therefore, to establish dependability for this study, I utilized the strategy of an audit trail.

### **Confirmability**

In a qualitative study, confirmability is found in the presence of neutrality such that other researchers would be able to confirm a study's findings. To ensure confirmability, researchers must ensure that their findings are grounded in the data and are not influenced by personal bias (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout this study, my goal, with regard to confirmability, was to adhere to the facts of the data without projecting assumptions about the motivations behind an offender's actions and behaviors. Similar to dependability, an audit trail is suggested as the best strategy to ensure confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

### **Intracoder Reliability**

Throughout the research study, I manually gathered and coded the data in compliance with intracoder reliability. I began data analysis with predetermined codes, with the potential for additional codes to emerge during analysis. To ensure reliability in case studies, Yin (2009) emphasized the importance of meticulous documentation of every step in the data analysis process, which I adhered to. Additionally, in any qualitative study in which data is hand-coded, there is concern for human errors. However, I countered this through repeated analysis of the data to ensure reliability.

### **Ethical Procedures**

In qualitative studies, ethical procedures are an important part of every step in the research process. Ethical considerations must be addressed at the outset of a study,

throughout its initial stages, during data collection, during data analysis, and in the presentation of findings. Ethical procedures are implemented to ensure the protection and confidentiality of participants, prevent participant exploitation, and mitigate any conflicts of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

There are fewer ethical concerns for this qualitative study, as there were no live participants. All data that I collected and analyzed were archival in nature, and I had no direct contact with the sample population throughout this study. While analyzing and coding the data collected, researchers must also be cautious not to take sides or withhold any results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, I followed Yin's (2009) suggestion to keep detailed notes on every step throughout data analysis, including both descriptive notes on the cases I analyzed and reflexive notes on my own stream of consciousness that occurred while reading case information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). However, before any data was collected, I requested permission from Walden University's IRB.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology used in my qualitative research study. The purpose of this study and the research questions were restated, after which I discussed the rationale behind the chosen research design, my role as the researcher, and the methodology, including population sampling, instrumentation, data collection strategy, and the data analysis plan. I also addressed issues of trustworthiness that appear within qualitative studies, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and intracoder reliability. Finally, I concluded this chapter by considering and discussing any ethical concerns that arose throughout this research study and the

measures I took to mitigate them. In Chapter Four, I detail the methodology I used for data collection and analysis, as well as my findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

Sexual homicide is a rare phenomenon that is characterized by the key aspects of violation, violence, and the loss of life. While this form of murder is not a common occurrence, the depraved details of these crimes ignite fear and horror within the public and create the need for a more unified understanding of these offenders within the criminal justice system. Sexual homicide occurs in only 1% to 5% of all homicide cases (Beauregard & Martineau, 2016; Chan, 2019; Chan & Heide, 2016), with discrepancies in the rates of reported cases being due, in part, to the lack of unified criteria to distinguish sexual homicide (Chan, 2015). SHOs are most often adult (88%) males (95%) between the ages of 25 and 34 years old, depending on the country (Beauregard & Martineau, 2013; Chan et al., 2010; Chan et al., 2019b; Greenall & Richardson, 2015; Myers & Chan, 2012; Stefanska et al., 2015). FSHOs constitute only 5% or less of all reported SHOs (Chan, 2019). Most victims of SHOs are females (79%) (Chan et al., 2019a), with 70%-80% of those female victims being 18 years or older (Chan, 2017b). Furthermore, previous researchers who have studied SHOs have found that the results differ depending on race (Chan et al., 2010; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013), with researchers finding that the majority of SHOs (59%-95%) and sexual homicide victims (63%-93%) are White (Chan, 2019; Chan et al., 2015; Karakasi et al., 2017; Stefanska et al., 2015).

Within the United States, homicides are entered into the FBI's SHR. These reports are compiled from data submitted voluntarily by local law enforcement agencies

across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with a 90% participation rate, and contain demographic characteristics of homicide offenders, victims, and circumstances of the crime (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013; Skott et al., 2019). As there is no category specifically for sexual homicide, these crimes are identified as homicides with the additional coding of 'rape' or 'other sexual offenses' (Kaplan, 2023). The data are entered into the SHR solely at the discretion of law enforcement officers and based on their initial police investigation, which does not include information identified at a later stage of the investigation, such as during the autopsy (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; Chan, 2021).

Chan et al. (2024) reported that from 1976 to 2022, 791,358 offenders were arrested for homicide and entered into the SHR database. Out of this number, 6,201 offenders (0.78%) were coded with 'rape' or 'other sexual offenses.' The authors further determined that 3,362 of these cases were committed as single-victim-single-offender, while 2,839 cases had either unknown offenders, multiple offenders, or multiple victims. Of the single-victim-single-offender cases, 3,204 (95.3%) offenders were male and 158 (4.7%) were female. Though this is a relatively low number of female offenders, forming a better understanding of FSHOs can further the research on this unique subtype of the offender, as well as aid law enforcement in the understanding, identification, and apprehension of these offenders.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore emergent patterns of behavior discovered throughout the examination of the crime committal process of White FSHOs. The crime committal process refers to the consideration of a crime as an entire event,

including pre-crime, crime, and post-crime stages (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c). Discerning behavioral patterns from the crime committal process of White FSHOs could provide new knowledge of these offenders' actions and behaviors, including premeditation, method of homicide, sexual elements, indications of sadism, crime scene behaviors, mutilation of the victim's body, and forensic awareness strategies

The research questions posed for analysis were the following:

RQ1: What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

RQ2: How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

Within this chapter, I included case summaries with relevant information on the crime committal process for each of the 12 White FSHOs. The cases are organized first by solo White FSHOs and then by White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. Within each group, the offenders are listed alphabetically by last name. Subsequently, I will present information on the process of data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results central to the research questions.

### **Setting**

There were no personal or organizational conditions that affected this study, as I conducted it using primary data in the form of publicly available court documents, police records, state inmate information, video recordings from the trial of one case, and a documentary of another case, featuring interviews with investigators, forensic analysts,

and pathologists who had worked on the case. Secondary sources of data consisted of newspaper articles from the time period of the murders that detailed trial testimony, more recently published online articles, books written by subject matter experts, and peer-reviewed articles. This archival data, which had been published publicly, cannot be impacted by the setting and conditions of this current study.

### **Demographics**

The participants for this study included 12 White female murderers who met the FBI criteria for sexual homicide and, therefore, could be identified as FSHOs. These White FSHOs were then separated into two groups: solo White FSHOs and White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. Age delineation was based upon the FSHO's age at the time of the murder or murders. The ages of the solo White FSHOs included in this study ranged from 24 to 47 years, with a mean age of 32 years and a median age of 29 years. All the solo White FSHOs included in this study committed their murders in the United States. However, each case occurred in a different state, including Arizona, California, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Texas.

Within the group of White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners, the ages of the White FSHOs ranged from 18 to 39 years, with a mean age of 27.5 years and a median age of 25 years. While there was one partnered White FSHO whose murders occurred across 26 months, her age at the time of her first murder was the age included in the prior data analysis. All the partnered White FSHOs included in this study committed their murders in the United States. In the cases where there was only one murder or multiple murders that occurred in one state, the states were Indiana (one case) and

California (three cases). In the cases where there were murders that occurred in more than one state, the states were Alabama and Georgia for one case, and California, Nevada, and Oregon for the second case.

All the FSHOs I selected for this study were White females; therefore, racial representation was consistent between solo FSHOs and FSHOs with one or more partners. In the cases of the White FSHOs with partners, the partners were most often White, apart from one outlying case, Brooke Rottiers, who had two partners, a man and a woman, both of whom were Black. Additionally, most of the FSHOs' partners were adults, apart from Gertrude Baniszewski, who had the most number of partners at five, all of whom were minors with ages ranging from 12 to 17. These outlying cases were also the only cases with more than one partner.

### **Solo Case Study 1: Jodi Arias**

Jodi Arias was born on July 9, 1980, in Salinas, California (*State v. Arias*, 2008). Arias had a strained and volatile relationship with her parents. By the time she was in her junior year of high school, the conflict with her parents had escalated to the point that she moved in with her maternal grandparents, and she later dropped out of high school after her junior year (Martinez, 2016). Arias's family would later claim that even as an adult, Arias was often in conflict with her parents and would even verbally abuse and sometimes physically abuse her mother (Martinez, 2016). Arias struggled in romantic relationships as well, and as a young adult, she experienced being cheated on by every intimate partner. After each relationship ended, Arias had a history of repeatedly re-

initiating contact, establishing a pattern that would culminate in murder (*State v. Arias*, 2013).

In September 2006, Arias met her victim, Travis Alexander, at a Prepaid Legal Services conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. By November 2006, Travis had baptized Arias into his church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and by February 2007, they began dating. Their relationship only lasted about five months before Travis and Arias officially broke up on June 29, 2007 (Martinez, 2016; *State v. Arias*, 2008). While they were dating, Arias lived in Palm Desert, California. However, in July of 2007, after she and Travis broke up, Arias moved to Mesa, Arizona, and began living only a few miles away from Travis (Flores, 2008; Martinez, 2016; *State v. Arias*, 2008). During the time Arias lived near Travis, the two would often have sex, even though they were not in a relationship and Travis was seeing other women (Flores, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2008). As time went on, Arias began to engage in increasingly inappropriate behavior towards Travis, particularly when he was dating someone else. One girlfriend Travis had during this time pointed at Arias as the reason she and Travis split up and described incidents of Arias coming into Travis' house without his consent by entering through the doggy door, sending the girlfriend harassing messages, and slashing Travis' tires two days in a row (Flores, 2008; Martinez, 2016). Eventually, Arias moved back to her grandparents' house in Yreka, California, in April of 2008; however, she and Travis were still in communication (Martinez, 2016). In May of 2008, the house that Arias lived in with her grandparents was burglarized, and one of the few items taken was her grandfather's .25 caliber handgun (*State v. Arias*, 2020). On June 2, 2008, 27-year-old

Jodi Arias traveled 100 miles to pick up a rental car before picking up two gas cans from her ex-boyfriend and another gas can at a Walmart the next day. While still in California, Arias stopped at a gas station to fill her rental car and the three five-gallon gas cans and then turned her phone off (*State v. Arias*, 2020).

Travis had been scheduled to leave for a business trip to Cancun, Mexico, on June 10, 2008, with a friend whom he was pursuing romantically (Flores, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2008). However, on June 9, 2008, 30-year-old Travis Alexander was found dead in his home by friends (Flores, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2008). Travis was naked and curled into a fetal position in the Master bathroom shower and had visible wounds to his chest and neck (*State v. Arias*, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2020). A medical examiner would later determine that Travis had been murdered on June 4, 2008, and that Travis had been stabbed over two dozen times, nine of those wounds being to his back and head with one blow shattering part of his skull, his throat had been slit, severing his windpipe and nearly decapitating him, and he had been shot in the temple (Horn, 2008, *State v. Arias*, 2020).

As investigators entered Travis's home, they noted a floor cleaner standing in the middle of the downstairs living room and found a trail of blood leading from the Master bedroom, down the hallway to the Master bathroom. In the bathroom, the sink was covered in blood, with further blood splatter on the mirror and throughout the bathroom. A clear 16-oz plastic cup was found in the shower next to Travis's body (Flores, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2020). Further evidence included a Winchester .25 caliber shell casing lying in a pool of dried blood near the sink, a latent palm print found in blood at the entrance to the bathroom hall, and hair fibers recovered from the floor and

baseboards close to the shower. The latent print and hair were later identified as a match to Jodi Arias, and DNA evidence also identified the blood from the palm print as a mixture from both Arias and Travis (Flores, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2020).

There were obvious signs that the perpetrator had tried to clean the crime scene. It was later determined that Arias placed Travis's body back in the shower and rinsed him off, as well as attempted to use the 16-ounce cup to wash blood from the bathroom sink and hallway (*State v. Arias*, 2008). Arias cleaned her feet to avoid tracking blood through the rest of the house, and officers found Travis's bedding in the dryer and his clothing, along with a digital camera, inside the washing machine. It was apparent that the camera had been washed with bleach in an attempt to destroy evidence; however, the memory card was found to be intact and could be forensically analyzed (Flores, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2008). From the memory card, police recovered a total of 29 photographs. The first six photos were taken a few hours before the murder and were sexually explicit images of a nude Arias and a nude Travis posing individually. The following 20 photographs were time-stamped just minutes before the murder and showed a nude Travis in the shower. In the last four of these photos, Travis had transitioned from standing to sitting on the floor of the shower (Flores, 2008). It was not until Travis was in this vulnerable position that Arias began her assault. Three photos were taken accidentally during the murder. The first was a blurry picture of the bathroom ceiling. The second was a picture of Travis on his back, lying in the hall between the bathroom and bedroom, with blood coming from the slash in his throat. Also in this picture is the leg of his attacker as they tried to lift

Travis's arm. Though the killer was not in the final photograph, the image depicted Travis's bloodied body being dragged back down the hall and to the bathroom by the killer (Flores, 2008; Martinez, 2016; *State v. Arias*, 2008; *State v. Arias*, 2020).

Though Arias disposed of the gun and cleaned the knife, these pictures verified that she was at Travis's house and had engaged in sexual activity with him just hours before the murder (*State v. Arias*, 2020). Additionally, while officers were still at the scene of the crime, Arias called Travis's roommate in an attempt to glean information and stated that she wanted to speak with the investigating officer (Flores, 2008). Arias again called the police department the day after Travis was found and demanded to speak to the detective in charge of the case, which resulted in her first phone interview (Flores, 2008; Martinez, 2016). Arias further attempted to integrate herself with the police by volunteering to drive 15 hours from Yreka, CA, to Mesa, AZ, on June 17, 2008, to provide fingerprint samples and a saliva sample for DNA testing (*State v. Arias*, 2008).

Despite attempting other forensic awareness strategies to avoid detection, including dyeing her hair blonde before picking up the rental car and then back to brown right after the murder, turning her phone off to avoid being tracked, and attempting to contact Travis multiple times after his murder to try to establish that she did not know he was dead, law enforcement quickly determined Arias was the primary suspect and she was arrested on July 15, 2008 (*State v. Arias*, 2020). Arias initially tried to claim that intruders had killed Travis, but she eventually confessed to killing him. However, she claimed she only killed Travis in self-defense (*State v. Arias*, 2008). During her trial, Arias used Battered Woman Syndrome as her defense and continuously denigrated

Travis's character by claiming that Travis was sexually abusive, sexually deviant, and a pedophile (*State v. Arias*, 2013). The jury did not believe Arias's version of events. On May 8, 2013, Jodi Arias was convicted of first-degree murder and was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole (*State v. Arias*, 2020). Arias is currently serving her sentence at the Arizona State Prison Complex in Perryville.

### **Solo Case Study 2: Carol Bundy**

Carol Bundy is included in this case study as a solo FSHO, despite also being involved with her partner and lover, Douglas Clark, in a series of killings known as the Sunset Strip murders. While the murders Bundy committed with Clark were sexual homicides, Bundy also perpetrated a sexual homicide of one victim without Clark. This is the sexual homicide that is the focus of this case study, to evaluate Bundy for the sexual aspects that were present when she committed sexual homicide of her own volition.

Carol Bundy, no relation to notorious sexual homicide offender Ted Bundy, was born on August 26, 1942 ("Sex slayings", 1980; Steel, n.d.). As a child, Bundy was physically and psychologically abused by both her mother and father. After Bundy's mother died when Bundy was 14 years old, Bundy's father began to sexually abuse Bundy and her younger sister (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.). In response to the molestation, Bundy began to act out sexually, running naked through the streets at night and having sex with her bus driver and boys at school (Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.). Bundy's father became even more physically and psychologically abusive after he remarried (Farr, 1992; Steel, n.d.). A few months after remarrying, Bundy's father tried to murder his wife, and Bundy and her sister then spent the following year in foster

homes, with their grandmother, who lived in Michigan, and then later with an uncle who lived in Indiana before their father regained custody (Farr, 1992; Steel, n.d.).

Bundy was married and divorced twice, with both marriages being marked by substantial abuse. Her second marriage was to a man named Grant Bundy, with whom she had her two children and whom she left due to the escalating physical abuse (Farr, 1992; Steel, n.d.). After leaving her second husband, Bundy and her children stayed in a battered women's shelter for two weeks before moving to the apartment complex where she would meet her victim, Jack Murray, in January of 1979 (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.).

Jack Murray, a married father of two, was the manager of the apartment complex where Bundy moved in with her children (*People v. Clark*, 1992). Bundy fell in love with Jack after he helped her be declared legally blind, allowing her to receive a disability check, and took her to an optometrist to get glasses. She eventually underwent several eye surgeries that restored her eyesight (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.). Bundy and Jack soon began to have sex, and Bundy began loaning Jack money, showering him with gifts, and eventually offering Jack's wife \$1,500 for her to leave him (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009). In response to this, Jack stopped seeing Bundy for a while as he had no desire to leave his family.

Carol Bundy met Douglas Clark in December of 1979 in the country western bar named the Little Nashville Club, where Bundy went to watch Jack Murray sing after he had dumped her (*People v. Clark*, 1992). They quickly began to indulge in both Clark's fantasies of a sex slave, murder, and necrophilia and Bundy's fantasies of domination and

bondage (*People v. Clark*, 1992). Even after Bundy met Douglas Clark in late December of 1979 and began a sexual relationship with him, she was still obsessed with Jack. Eventually, Jack told Bundy she had to move to a different apartment complex. Despite the move being instigated by Jack, he would still go over and have sex with Bundy weekly and would sometimes ask for money (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.). On July 29, 1980, Bundy's relationship with Clark was deteriorating, and she attempted suicide by both injecting herself with Librium and swallowing Librium pills; however, Bundy survived this attempt (Farr, 1992; Steel, n.d.).

One night at the country western bar, Bundy hinted to Jack about Clark's involvement in the recent Sunset Strip murders. When Jack said he may report Clark to the law enforcement, Bundy panicked and quickly said she was only joking (*People v. Clark*, 1992). On August 3, 1980, Bundy showed Jack her and Clark's kill bag that was in the back of her car outside the Little Nashville club, asked him what she should do, and arranged for them to meet up after the club closed (Farr, 1992; Steel, n.d.). Jack knew too much at this point, and Bundy was afraid that he would turn Clark into law enforcement (*People v. Clark*, 1992). After arranging for them to meet up later, Bundy also gave Jack a note offering him sex (Farr, 1992; Steel, n.d.). When 37-year-old Carol Bundy met with Jack in his van for sex in the early hours of August 4, 1980, Bundy brought rubber gloves, a cleaning rag, a .25 caliber chrome Raven automatic gun, and a boning knife with her (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992).

On August 9, 1980, Police found 45-year-old Jack Murray's body after residents in Van Nuys, California, began to complain about a foul odor coming from Jack's van

(*People v. Clark*, 1992). Despite Jack's body was in a severe state of decomposition due to the extreme summer heat, law enforcement could see that Jack's jeans and underwear were around his ankles, there were slashes to Jack's butt and slices around his anus, and that he was still wearing his cowboy boots (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.; "Sex slayings", 1980). In the van, investigators found four bloody pillows, one of which had a bullet hole, and a .25 shell casing (*People v. Clark*, 1992). In addition to the slashes to his buttocks and anus, Jack had been stabbed nine times in the back, and decapitated (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; *People v. Clark*, 1992; "Sex Slayings", 1980). Bundy would later admit that she took Jack's head for fear that the police would be able to identify the bullets from where she shot him twice in the head, yet missed the bullet casings left in the van (*People v. Clark*, 1992). Bundy claimed that she and Clark disposed of Jack's head in a trash can near Griffith Park. However, his head was never found (Hazlett, 1980; *People v. Clark*, 1992; Ramsland, 2009).

After Jack's body was found, Bundy made a large public show of sobbing and screaming in the Little Nashville club before telling Clark to dispose of the guns, which he did (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992; Steel, n.d.). Two days after Jack's body was found, Bundy broke down at work and told two other nurses about the murder, who immediately called the police (Farr, 1992; Hazlett, 1980; Ramsland, 2009). However, Bundy managed to slip away before officers got there, went back to her home, and was arrested there soon after (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.). When the police arrived to arrest her, Bundy gave a rambling, erratic confession, which included an

admission that she had killed Jack Murray. This was later confirmed in a complete and official confession that Bundy gave to investigators (Farr, 1992; *People v. Clark*, 1992).

Several forensic psychiatrists examined Bundy on the Judge's orders, and while she was found sane, she was also diagnosed with several personality disorders, and one psychiatrist believed she suffered from sexual deviancy and psycho-pathological need (Farr, 1992). Bundy initially pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity. However, on the day her trial was supposed to start, she decided to plead guilty to two charges of first-degree murder for the murders of Jack Murray and one of the unidentified female victims of her and Douglas Clark (Farr, 1992; "Bundy admits murders", 1983; "Defendant admits murders", 1983). On May 31, 1983, Carol Bundy was convicted of first-degree murder and received two consecutive sentences of 25 years to life, plus another two years for the illegal use of a gun in the murder of Jack Murray (Farr, 1992; Ramsland, 2009; Steel, n.d.). Though Bundy would have been eligible for parole in 2012, she died of heart failure on December 9, 2003, while still serving her sentence at the California Institute for Women at Frontera (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2023; Farr, 1992; Miller, 2024).

### **Solo Case Study 3: Patricia Jennings**

Patricia Jennings was born on August 24, 1942 (NC DAC Offender Public Information, n.d.). All that is known about Jennings's earlier years is that she was a registered nurse who had two children from a previous relationship (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). In June of 1983, Jennings was working as a nurse in a nursing home when she met her future husband and victim, William Jennings. William was a retired businessman who

came to the nursing home to consult on a patient in connection with his role as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. After meeting, Jennings and William began a relationship, and they married four years later, in February 1987, when Jennings was 44 years old, and William was 77 years old (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

Less than a year after their marriage, in September 1987, William transferred \$75,000 to Jennings, which was half of his total assets (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). However, by November 1987, William told a friend that Jennings had abandoned him at a hotel with no money, though they reconciled shortly after, and William gave Jennings power of attorney. William quickly rescinded the power of attorney two weeks later (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). Only a year after Jennings and William were married, Jennings had spent nearly all of William's money, and friends of William testified that he often complained of how she was physically and financially abusing him (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

In May 1989, William consulted a lawyer friend to draft a new will. He said that Jennings had physically assaulted him, dragged him, and stomped on him with her cowboy boots (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). Furthermore, William told this friend that Jennings had threatened to stomp him to death with her cowboy boots and had tried to have him committed to an institution. Despite having this will drawn up, William never returned to his friend's office to sign it (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). Additionally, not long before William's murder, his financial advisor at Merrill Lynch refused to transfer what little remained in William's account to Jennings (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

On September 19, 1989, 47-year-old Patricia Jennings and 80-year-old William Jennings were staying at a Hampton Inn in Wilson, North Carolina. The inn was across the street from a hospital where William had a meeting in concert with his role in Alcoholics Anonymous (*State v. Jennings*, 1993; Shaffer, 2013). At 9:30 pm, Jennings called the hotel front desk and said there was a ‘code blue’, a term meaning a patient needs immediate medical attention, which led to the hotel calling 911 for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). When EMS arrived, William was lying on the floor nude with his genitals exposed, and Jennings was giving him CPR. When asked how long William had been like that, Jennings stated five to ten minutes. One of the paramedics also noted that Jennings was wearing a black night gown and brown cowboy boots (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

William’s body was cool to the touch and already stiff when paramedics arrived, and a doctor at the hospital where he was taken said William had been dead for several hours. The medical examiner later testified that William had been dead six to eight hours when EMS took him to the hospital (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). A large quantity of blood stains were found in the hotel room, including on the carpet, sheets, a pillowcase, and an adult diaper, which was found under a pillowcase. Blood spatter was found on the furniture, floors, walls, ceiling, and on the back of a mirror in the hotel room, and bloody towels were found in the bathtub (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). A small piece of skin found on a pair of forceps in the room was later determined to be either from the head of the penis or the underside of an eyelid, and a hypodermic needle was found inside Jennings’ makeup bag in the hotel room (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

After conducting an autopsy, the forensic pathologist determined that William's cause of death was internal bleeding from blunt force trauma to the abdomen, consistent with being kicked or stomped on (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). The forensic pathologist also found evidence of mutilation of William's genitals with injuries to the head of the penis, a cut on the shaft of the penis, and abrasions and scratches at the base of the penis and scrotum as well as splits in the membranes around the anus caused by being stretched until cracking from the penetration of a foreign object (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). There were bruises and scrapes to William's head, face, scalp, neck, arms, hands, legs, and buttocks, and a drug called butalbital, known for inducing symptoms like those of dementia patients, was found in William's system (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). William's injuries occurred over the course of two days and led to his bleeding to death in a very slow and painful manner (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

When police arrived at the hotel, Jennings refused to allow them to search her hotel room or car, prompting law enforcement to obtain a warrant (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). The day after the murder, Jennings called a District Court Judge who had been a friend of William's for 30 years and asked if the forensic pathologist could determine how long someone had been dead during an autopsy (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). Despite Jennings's claim that William died as a result of a fall and that his injuries were self-inflicted, evidence indicated that Jennings had beaten, tortured, and kicked William to death with her cowboy boots, and she was subsequently arrested on September 22, 1989 (*State v. Jennings*, 1993; "Wife charged in man's death", 1989). Jennings did not confess

or cooperate with the investigation and instead exercised her right to remain silent after her arrest (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

At her trial, Jennings testified on her own behalf and claimed that when William would have severe depressive episodes, he would pick at his rectum and beat his testicles. Jennings also claimed during these episodes, William behaved like a canine and would “crawl around on the floor and make noises like a dog” (*State v. Jennings*, 1993, p. 593). Jennings testified that during these episodes, William would also walk around in a diaper or naked and that she took pictures of William when he was wearing only a diaper or a towel to show her husband how he behaved during these periods (Allegood, 1990; “3 women now on death row”, 1990). Jennings claimed that the day before he died, William received word that a friend had passed away and subsequently started to act like a canine, used a shoe to beat his testicles, and fell in the bathtub. On the day of the murder, Jennings stated that William fell in the bathtub again, was hitting himself with a large piece of cheese in a bag, and was picking at his rectum. She claimed she then woke up later and found him on the floor and called the front desk (*State v. Jennings*, 1993).

The murder was tried as a capital case with the aggravating circumstances including murder occurring during the penetration or attempted penetration of the victim’s anus with a foreign object, murder committed for financial gain, and murder that was especially cruel, heinous, and depraved (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). Throughout the trial, Jennings showed no remorse or compassion for William (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). Jennings was convicted of first-degree murder on November 1, 1990, and was sentenced to death (*State v. Jennings*, 1993). However, after 23 years on death row, Jennings was

resentenced to life with the possibility of parole in June of 2013 (Shaffer, 2013). Patricia Jennings died on October 21, 2023, while still incarcerated at the Women's Prison in Raleigh, North Carolina (NC DAC Offender Public Information, n.d.; Shaffer, 2013).

#### **Solo Case Study 4: Taylor Schabusiness**

Taylor Schabusiness was born on November 23, 1997 (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). At eleven years old, Schabusiness' mother passed away. While it is not known if Schabusiness was abused in childhood, her father was sentenced to 12 years in prison for raping a 13-year-old relative of his second wife, a week before Schabusiness's own sentencing (Spargo, Aug. 3, 2023). Schabusiness also had an extensive history of mental health issues manifesting in early childhood.

Schabusiness's defense attorney stated that she had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder well before the murder, and a forensic psychologist testifying for the defense reviewed Schabusiness's history with mental health issues and medication and testified that Schabusiness was involuntarily admitted to a mental facility in 2021 after non-compliance with psychiatric medication (Blanco, 2023; Kilander, 2023; WBAY News Staff, 2023). The psychologist also testified that Schabusiness began receiving psychiatric counseling at age 7 for depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). By the time she was 14 years old, Schabusiness was placed on antidepressants. That same year, she was sent to an inpatient psychiatric institution for three days after experiencing hallucinations, delusions, depression, and suicidal ideation (WBAY News Staff, 2023).

Schabusiness married in February 2020 and had a volatile relationship with her husband, who Schabusiness claimed was physically abusive, controlling, and had gotten Schabusiness involved in drugs (WBAY News Staff, 2023). In November of 2020, her husband was arrested on federal drug charges and has been in prison since that time (Spargo, July 14, 2023). In 2021, Schabusiness gave birth to a son who was taken from her custody by Child Protective Services and placed with Schabusiness's grandparents less than 24 hours after his birth (Reid, 2023; Spargo, Aug. 3, 2023).

Schabusiness also had a prior criminal record. In June of 2020, Schabusiness was charged with battery on a police officer and resisting arrest after attacking officers while high on methamphetamine. After pleading no contest to battery, she received three years of probation and was ordered to undergo a court-ordered mental evaluation (Spargo, Aug. 3, 2023; *State v. Schabusiness*, June 22, 2020). In August of 2020, Schabusiness was charged with fleeing a law enforcement officer, bail jumping for failing to comply with her probation guidelines, obstruction of an officer, and possession of drug paraphernalia. She pleaded no contest to obstructing and fleeing a law enforcement officer and initially received two years of probation and a three-month jail sentence. However, the time in jail was reduced to house arrest. Only a month later, Schabusiness murdered Shad Thyron (Spargo, Aug. 3, 2023; *State v. Schabusiness*, Aug. 10, 2020).

Taylor Schabusiness and Shad Thyron, both 24 years old at the time of the murder, were sometimes lovers and had been friends since middle school (Blanco, 2023; CourtTV, 2023; Spargo, Aug. 3, 2023). On February 21, 2022, Schabusiness and another friend picked Shad up from his mother's house around 9:30 pm. The three then went to

Schabusiness's apartment and smoked marijuana and methamphetamine. After their friend had left the apartment, Shad and Schabusiness injected themselves with Trazodone before going back to Shad's mother's house in the early hours of the morning on February 22, 2022 (State v. Schabusiness, 2022).

In the basement of Shad's mother's house, he and Schabusiness began having sex with collar-like chains (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). During sex, Schabusiness began to strangle Shad with one of the chains. She claimed they had used strangulation during sex in the past, but this time she did not stop, even when Shad's face turned purple and there was blood coming from his mouth (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). Schabusiness later told police that it took three to five minutes for Shad Thyrior to die and that she kept choking him because she wanted to see what would happen (State v. Schabusiness, 2022).

Schabusiness also told law enforcement that after she had killed Shad, she had fondled him, sucked his penis, and put a dildo in his mouth and anus. She stated she 'played' with his body for approximately two to three hours (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). Afterward, she used knives from the kitchen to dismember Shad's body (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). One of the detectives also testified at trial that Schabusiness confessed to filling a tote bag with Shad's blood and showering with it (Blanco, 2023).

On February 23, 2022, Shad Thyrior's mother found his severed head in a bucket in her basement (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). When law enforcement was called and began to investigate the crime scene, they found Shad's severed head, penis, and two knives in a plastic bucket, which was covered with a towel and located in the basement of the home (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). Also located in the basement were multiple bags

containing other body parts, including Shad's torso and several internal organs, as well as three knives (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). Dried blood was found in the basement on a mattress as well as on the concrete floor, and there was evidence that someone had attempted to clean up some of the blood (State v. Schabusiness 2022). The responding officer also reported seeing small chunks of human flesh and blood on the floor near the mattress, a glass pipe, and a bag of methamphetamine at the crime scene (CourtTV, 2023; State v. Schabusiness, 2022).

When she was arrested that same day, Schabusiness was found with dried blood on the front and back of her sweatshirt, on her sweatpants, and on her hands, as well as scratches on her arms and hands, and a cut on her left thumb. When her van was searched, investigators found a crockpot containing more of Shad's body parts, including his legs (State v. Schabusiness, 2022). Despite the graphic nature of her crime, Schabusiness's attitude toward law enforcement was flippant, and she even told investigators that it would take them a lot of luck to locate all the organs and that killing was 'fun' (State v. Schabusiness, 2022).

After being assessed by multiple experts, Schabusiness was found competent to stand trial in July of 2023 (Kilander, 2023; Schneider, 2023). A forensic psychologist who testified for the defense met with Schabusiness several times after she was arrested and stated that Schabusiness was psychotic and experiencing auditory and visual hallucinations (WBAY News Staff, 2023). However, a state expert examined Schabusiness and determined that she did not meet the requirements for Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity (WBAY News Staff, 2023).

During the trial, Schabusiness attacked her lawyer (Kilander, 2023) and was later made to wear a spit hood, which prevents defendants from spitting at or biting others (Matesic, 2023; Spargo, Sept. 26, 2023). Though Schabusiness pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity, she was found guilty of first-degree intentional homicide, third-degree sexual assault, and mutilation of a corpse on July 26, 2023 (Blanco, 2023; Schneider, 2023; Spargo, Oct. 23, 2023). As Wisconsin does not have the death penalty, Schabusiness was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole as well as a consecutive sentence of three years for the sexual assault conviction and 90 months for the mutilation of Shad's corpse (Schneider, 2023; Spargo, Sept. 28, 2023; Spargo, Oct. 23, 2023). Taylor Schabusiness is currently serving her sentence at Taycheedah Correctional Institution in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin (Spargo, Oct. 23, 2023).

#### **Solo Case Study 5: Lisa Shuler**

Lisa Shuler was born on October 27, 1981 (Powell, 2013). Although little is known about her early years, by 2013, 31-year-old Shuler had been married for ten years, had no children, and was living a quiet life in Jefferson County, Indiana, where she was recognized as a pillar of the Christian community. Despite the pleasant appearance of her life from the outside, Shuler had grown restless and unsatisfied, eventually separating from her husband and moving to New Albany, Indiana (Kang, 2013; Maravich, 2021). After her separation, Shuler began to explore her interest in the type of sex known as bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism (BDSM), and not long after, Shuler met her victim, 49-year-old Charles Pierce, a man who shared her sexual interests (Carlström, 2018; Maravich, 2021).

Shuler's ultimate fantasy was a rape scene role play, and Charles enjoyed bondage. They quickly began a whirlwind sexual relationship that included hundreds of pornographic photographs of themselves (Maravich, 2021). However, after a few weeks, Shuler began to experience guilt over her sexual actions with Charles and realized that her relationship with her husband and much of her community would be ruined if the pornographic photos of her and Charles got out (Maravich, 2021; Powell, 2013; Walsher, 2013). In the days before the murder, Shuler made an anonymous Facebook account, the profile picture being the Grim Reaper holding a machine gun, and expressed her feelings of guilt over her sexual relationship with Charles. One of the posts on this Facebook page included a picture of a .40-caliber handgun, and hours before the murder, Shuler posted a picture of a man praying along with a bible verse about salvation from Isaiah 12:2 (Maravich, 2021; Walsher, 2013).

On May 6, 2013, Lisa Shuler texted Charles Pierce and lured him to her house with the promise of a rape fantasy sexual encounter (Popp, 2014; Powell, 2013; Turner, 2014). Prior to Charles' arrival, Shuler deleted over 200 texts between herself and him (Powell, 2013; Maravich, 2021; Walsher, 2013). While Shuler was washing dishes that evening, Charles arrived at her house and entered through the front door that had been left unlocked for him (Powell, 2013). Shuler met Charles in her living room and began to perform oral sex on him. Immediately after performing oral sex, Shuler pulled a .40 caliber handgun from a holster on her belt and fired two shots from a kneeling position into Charles. When she noticed that he was still moving, she stood up and emptied the rest of the bullets into his body (Powell, 2013). Lisa Shuler then called 911 herself and

stated that she had killed an intruder who broke into her house. Before police arrived, she attempted to delete messages and pornographic pictures from Charles' phone but could not unlock it, so she placed it back in his pocket (Kang, 2013; Maravich, 2021; Powell, 2013).

When the police arrived, they found the victim, Charles Pierce, lying in the living room of Lisa Shuler's apartment with his pants and underwear down to his knees and his genitals exposed. Charles was still alive, in critical condition, and was rushed to the hospital, where he was later pronounced dead (Powell, 2013). A large pool of blood and a .40 caliber firearm were lying on the living room floor, and blood spatter was on the living room walls (Powell, 2013). Shuler voluntarily accompanied investigators to the Floyd County Sheriff's Office for questioning (Powell, 2013). Although Shuler initially claimed self-defense against Charles, her story quickly fell apart, and she gave a confession to Detective Powell the night she was arrested, as well as a more detailed confession the following day (Kang, 2013; Popp, 2014; Powell, 2013; Walsher, 2013).

Though initially pleading not guilty, Shuler accepted a plea deal on January 29, 2014 (*State v. Shuler*, n.d.; Turner, 2014) and was convicted of felony murder (*State v. Shuler*, Jan. 15, 2014). She was sentenced to 45 years, with her earliest release date being noted as June 28, 2034 (Indiana Department of Corrections, 2025; *State v. Shuler*, Jan. 15, 2014; Turner, 2014). Lisa Shuler is currently incarcerated at the Indiana Women's Prison in Indianapolis (Indiana Department of Corrections, 2025).

**Solo Case Study 6: Susan Wright**

Susan Wright was born in Houston, Texas, on April 24, 1976 (Court TV, 2005; Offender Information Details, n.d.). Wright would later accuse her father of being physically abusive to her mother; however, her parents denied this accusation to news outlets, as well as her mother denying it in her court testimony (“Right or Wrong?”, 2004). In 1997, a 21-year-old Susan Wright met her future husband, Jeffrey Wright, at the beach in Galveston, Texas. They married in 1998, and Wright had their son a month later. The birth of their son was followed quickly by the birth of a daughter (Marlowe, 2020). During the years of their marriage, Wright was a homemaker, and Jeffrey sold tile and carpet products (*Wright v. State*, 2012). Though they seemed like a happy married couple, Wright claimed her relationship with Jeffrey was very volatile and abusive (*Wright v. State*, 2012).

Wright testified that on January 13, 2003, a 34-year-old Jeffrey came home high on drugs after a boxing lesson, and that later that night, their four-year-old son told her that his father had hit him (Marlowe, 2020). Wright asserted that she then put their two children to bed and confronted Jeffrey with an ultimatum that he had to get help for his drug use and anger issues, or she would leave him and take their children with her (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). Wright claimed that her husband then beat her, raped her, and threatened her with a knife before she managed to wrest the knife from his hands and stab him repeatedly in self-defense (*Wright v. State*, 2005). Wright also stated that at one point during the murder, their four-year-old son knocked on his

parents' door and that she got him back to bed before she returned to stabbing her husband (*Wright v. State*, 2005).

After she killed Jeffrey, Wright dragged his body through their house and to a shallow hole in their garden that Jeffrey had previously dug for a fountain (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). Immediately after the murder, Wright called Jeffrey's mother and told her that Jeffrey had come home under the influence of drugs and had hit their four-year-old son, that they had subsequently argued, she kicked Jeffrey out of the house, and he left on foot (*Wright v. State*, 2012). She also informed her mother-in-law that Jeff was rarely going to work and was behind on paying their bills ("Texas v. Wright", 2005). The day after the murder, Wright went to a doctor to have cuts on her hands treated and filed a police report claiming that Jeffrey had assaulted her and their son, which resulted in a warrant being issued for Jeffrey's arrest (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012).

The 26-year-old Wright told many people about the 'assault' by Jeffrey, and the explanation for the cuts on her hands ranged from being scratched by Jeffrey with his fingernails to being cut by his keys. Wright also expressed fear that Jeffrey would come back to the house and hurt her and claimed he had already come back once and ransacked the house, poured bleach on her clothes, and left a note for her before leaving the house without his vehicle (*Wright v. State*, 2012). Additionally, Wright removed Jeffrey's name from the family's voicemail message (*Wright v. State*, 2012) and emptied the couple's joint checking account ("Texas v. Wright", 2005). Throughout the next five days, she continued to deposit potting soil on top of where she had buried Jeffrey in the backyard

(*Wright v. State*, 2005). Wright eventually confessed what she had done to her parents, who contacted a law firm and had Wright check herself into a psychiatric facility (*Wright v. State*, 2012).

Jeffrey's body was found on January 18, 2003, by law enforcement officers after the lawyer that Wright's parents hired went to the DA and told them the location of a dead body, without telling them how he knew about the dead body or who his client was (*Wright v. State*, 2005). Jeffrey was discovered naked and partially buried in a shallow grave in the backyard of the family home (*Wright v. State*, 2005). The family dog had dug up some of the body and had chewed off the left hand ("Texas v. Wright", 2005). A necktie was found around each wrist, and the sash from a bathroom robe was tied around one of his ankles (Marlowe, 2020; *Wright v. State*, 2005). Red candle wax was found on Jeffrey's genital area, buttocks, and thigh (*Wright v. State*, 2005). This candle wax matched candles found in the couple's bedroom ("Texas v. Wright", 2005).

A mattress drenched in blood was located in the backyard along with a headboard, box springs, and comforter (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). Empty bottles of bleach, along with bleach-stained clothes and a receipt for two gallons of bleach, were located within the home. A knife covered in blood was located in a flowerpot outside of the home on the patio; the missing tip of the knife was later located in Jeffrey's skull (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). In the couple's bedroom, the investigators discovered blood splatter on the ceiling, walls, curtains, décor, and furniture. Although the bed frame still had the footboard and rails, fresh paint had been applied to the wall where the headboard would have been located. Also located in the room were a paint

brush, a can of paint, a box cutter, and scissors. The carpet had been cut, and a portion was missing along with some carpet padding (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012).

Contrary to Wright's claims that she killed Jeffrey in self-defense, the wounds on Jeffrey's body were more indicative of torture and were almost exclusively on the front of his body. The restraints found on his wrists and an ankle indicated that Jeffrey's extremities were likely tied to each corner of the bed, and that he was stabbed while tied down and lying on his back (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). According to the prosecution, Wright seduced her husband and bound his arms and legs to the bed under the guise of a sex game involving the candle wax that was found on his genitals, buttocks, and thigh (*Wright v. State*, 2005). During the autopsy, the medical examiner found over 193 stab wounds (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). These wounds included, "41 stab wounds to his face, 23 to his neck, 46 to his chest, 22 to his abdomen, 7 to his pubic region, including a superficial cut on his penis, 19 to his legs, 23 to his arms and hand, and one to his back (*Wright v. State*, 2005, para. 7)." Most of the wounds were superficial and would have caused substantial pain, particularly the cuts and slices to the victim's penis (*Wright v. State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). Additionally, alcohol, cocaine, and GHB were found to be present in Jeffrey's blood at the time he was killed. GHB is commonly referred to as a date-rape drug (*Wright v. State*, 2012).

Susan Wright was arrested on January 24, 2003. At her trial, she used Battered Woman Syndrome as her defense, claiming that Jeffrey was physically, sexually, and verbally abusive towards her, unfaithful in their marriage, and often used drugs (*Wright v.*

*State*, 2005; *Wright v. State*, 2012). Pivotal to this trial was Wright's looks, which quickly became a primary focus of both the media and the prosecution. The media nicknamed her the 'Blue-Eyed Butcher' (Miller, 2023), and the prosecution brought up Wright's appearance frequently, as well as the irrelevant fact that Wright worked as a topless dancer for a couple of months when she was 18 years old ("Right or Wrong?", 2004). In the end, the jury did not believe Wright's claims, and she was convicted of first-degree murder in March of 2004 (*Wright v. State*, 2005). Wright was only sentenced to 25 years in prison, which was further reduced to 20 years in November of 2010, and Susan Wright was released from prison in December of 2020 after serving 16 years for the murder of her husband ("Texas v. Wright", 2005; Willey, 2020; *Wright v. State*, 2005).

### **Partnered Case Study 1: Gertrude Baniszewski**

Gertrude Baniszewski was born on September 19, 1928, in Indiana (Fortney, 2007; Hornberger, 2002). At 11 years old, Baniszewski watched her father, whom she was very close to, die of a heart attack, and subsequently experienced a volatile relationship with her mother (Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002). At 16 years old, Baniszewski dropped out of high school to marry her first husband, whom she would later claim was abusive (Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002). Baniszewski married and divorced three times, twice to the same man, and had a total of seven children (Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002)

As a single mother living in Indianapolis, the 37-year-old Baniszewski worked various odd jobs, including babysitting, laundry services for others, and concessions at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002). In July 1965,

Baniszewski agreed to take in 16-year-old Sylvia Liken and her 15-year-old sister, Jenny, as boarders for \$20 a week while their parents worked and traveled with a carnival (Brooks, May 5, 1966; Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002; West, 2024). Jenny Likens testified that at first, the girls were treated well (Myers, May 19, 1966), however when Baniszewski received the first \$20 payment late, she was enraged and after screaming at them, forced them to pull down their skirts and underwear and lie across a bed for her to beat their bare buttocks (Brooks, May 5, 1966; Dean, 2008; Williams, 1985). This beating was the first of many that would eventually escalate into continuous and unspeakable acts of torture and sexual abuse, primarily targeted at Sylvia.

Baniszewski began to encourage and instruct her children and the neighbor children to abuse Sylvia by burning her with matches and cigarettes, throwing her down the stairs and into walls, using her to practice judo moves on, and beating her with paddles, wooden boards, belts, fists, etc. (Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002; Williams, 1985). Baniszewski's most willing and frequent accomplices were her 17-year-old daughter Paula, her 15-year-old daughter Stephanie, her 12-year-old son John Stephen, their 15-year-old neighbor Richard Hobbs, and Stephanie's 15-year-old boyfriend Coy Hubbard (*Baniszewski v. State, 1970*).

As the torture of Sylvia became more sadistic, Baniszewski began to accuse Sylvia of being a prostitute and pregnant before repeatedly kicking her in the crotch and genitals (Dean, 2008; Haines, 1979; Hornberger, 2002). This sexual abuse escalated to Baniszewski forcing Sylvia to masturbate with a Coca-Cola bottle in front of Baniszewski's sons and the neighborhood boys (Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002;

Haines, 1979; Williams, 1985). After the incident with the Coca-Cola bottle, Sylvia suffered from incontinence, and Baniszewski responded by forcing her to live in the basement without access to a toilet (Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002; Haines, 1979). When Sylvia would inevitably soil herself, Baniszewski accused her of being dirty and would 'clean' her by having her dunked into scalding water with her wrists and feet bound. Jenny testified that this was a frequent occurrence, often followed by Baniszewski's 17-year-old daughter, Paula, rubbing salt onto Sylvia's burned skin (Brooks, May 5, 1966; Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002). At other times, Sylvia was forced to clean the basement by consuming her own waste (Brooks, May 5, 1966; Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002). Sylvia was kept naked and starved with only the occasional allowance of crackers and water (Brooks, May 5, 1966; "Tortured Sylvia Likens", 1966). She was also used as an entertainment commodity where the Baniszewski children would charge other children a nickel to look at Sylvia's naked and battered body or to throw her down the stairs to the basement (Dean, 2008; Haines, 1979; Williams, 1985).

A culmination of events starting on October 21<sup>st</sup> directly led to Sylvia's death on October 26, 1965. On October 21<sup>st</sup>, Sylvia was brought up from the basement and tied to a bed by Stephanie, John Stephen, and Coy Hubbard at Baniszewski's instruction. Baniszewski told Sylvia that she would be allowed to sleep upstairs again if she could go through the night without wetting the bed, which, given her state, Sylvia was unable to do (Dean, 2008; Haines, 1979). The next morning, after discovering Sylvia had urinated on the bed, Baniszewski once again forced her to strip naked and masturbate with a Coca-Cola bottle in front of the neighborhood boys and Baniszewski's sons (Dean, 2008;

Haines, 1979). After this, Sylvia was gagged and bound so that Baniszewski could carve “I’m a prostitute and proud of it” on Sylvia’s abdomen with a needle that had been heated by matches (Brooks, May 14, 1966; Dean, 2008; Haines, 1979; “Likens Trial”, 1966). Richard Hobbs testified that Baniszewski became ill after only carving the ‘I’ and part of the ‘M’, so she instructed him to finish the brand, which he did (Brooks, May 14, 1966; Dean, 1966). After Baniszewski left the room, Paula, Richard, and Baniszewski’s 10-year-old daughter, Shirley, decided to carve an ‘S’ into Sylvia’s chest, though they messed up and ended up carving a ‘3’ instead (Brooks, May 14, 1966; Dean, 1966).

Over the next few days, Sylvia was beaten numerous times and forced to write notes falsely claiming that she had been beaten by a gang of boys on the way home after leaving for two weeks. These notes would later be given to the police by Baniszewski in a poor attempt to divert suspicion (*Baniszewski v. State*, 1970; Myers, Apr. 28, 1966). Richard Hobbs testified that on October 26, 1985, when he arrived at the Baniszewski house, Sylvia was non-responsive (*Baniszewski v. State*, 1970). Richard attempted to give Sylvia CPR, but when she was still not responding, John Stephen and Stephanie took Sylvia upstairs to give her a bath, fully clothed, to try to revive her. At the same time, Richard kept a frantic Baniszewski downstairs. Richard stated that Baniszewski was repeatedly yelling that Sylvia was ‘faking it’ (*Baniszewski v. State*, 1970). A little while later, both Stephanie and John Stephen said Sylvia was dead, and Richard called the police (Brooks, May 14, 1966; Dean, 1966).

When law enforcement officers arrived, they found Sylvia’s dead body lying on a soiled mattress in Baniszewski’s home (*Baniszewski v. State*, 1970). While conducting

the autopsy, the medical examiner found that Sylvia was suffering from extreme malnutrition, had second and third degree burns all over her body as well as over 100 cigarette burns, severe bruising, damage to her nerves and muscles, she had nearly bitten through her lips, and there was swelling of her vaginal cavity so acute that it was nearly swollen shut. Sylvia's cause of death was ruled as internal hemorrhaging of the brain, swelling of the brain, malnutrition, and shock from the excessive skin damage (*Baniszewski v. State*, 1970; Crull, 1971; Stall, 2015; Williams, 1985). The medical examiner testified that Sylvia had already been dead for 8 hours when he arrived at the scene (Crull, 1971).

Baniszewski was tried alongside Paula, John Stephen, Richard Hobbs, and Coy Hubbard, making history in Indiana for being the largest group of defendants ever tried together in the state up to that point (Hornberger, 2002). Stephanie was given a separate trial and later testified against her mother for the prosecution (*Baniszewski v. State*, 1970). Paula Baniszewski was initially convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to life, but after a new trial was granted, she pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and was released two years later, only serving a total of seven years ("Baniszewski girl", 1971; Dean, 2008; Schettler et al., 2012; Stall, 2015). John Stephen Baniszewski, Richard Hobbs, and Coy Hubbard were convicted of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced to 2-21 years, though each only served 18 months in a juvenile correctional facility before being released (Dean, 2008; Myers, May 19, 1966; West, 2024).

During her trial, Gertrude Baniszewski showed no remorse, attempted to shift blame entirely onto the children, and claimed all the witnesses who testified were lying.

Baniszewski stated that she had been ill, she was taking phenobarbital pills, rarely left her bed, and had no idea what had happened to Sylvia (Brooke, May 11, 1966; Dean, 2008; Williams, 1985). The jury rejected Baniszewski's plea of not guilty by reason of insanity and convicted her of first-degree murder on May 19, 1966 (*Baniszewski v. State*, 1970). Though the murder was tried as a capital case with the possibility of a death sentence, Baniszewski was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. However, she was later granted a retrial, where she was sentenced to 18 years to life and was released from the Indiana Women's Prison on December 4, 1985, after serving only 20 years for the murder of Sylvia Likens ("Baniszewski Given Parole", 1985; Dean, 2008; Hornberger, 2002). Five years after her release, Gertrude Baniszewski died at the age of 61 from lung cancer (Dean, 2008; Fortney, 2007).

### **Partnered Case Study 2: Cynthia Coffman**

Cynthia Coffman was born on January 19, 1962, in St. Louis, Missouri (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; Streib, 2012). When Coffman was six years old, her father abandoned the family, and Coffman was subsequently raised by her mother and stepfather (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; Wride, 1992). Coffman began using drugs in high school, and by the time of the murders, Coffman was using methamphetamines nearly every day (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; Wride, 1992). When she was 17 years old, Coffman became pregnant, and at 18 years old, she married the father of her child, though they later separated in 1982 (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). In 1984, Coffman left St. Louis and moved to Arizona, leaving her son with her ex-husband (*People v. Coffman*, 2004).

In April of 1986, Coffman was arrested with her boyfriend after they were stopped for erratic driving. While they were being detained, the officers linked the couple to a report from earlier that night when Coffman had pulled a gun at a gas station and threatened several men who she claimed were planning to attack her boyfriend (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). When she was arrested, the police found methamphetamine and a loaded gun in her purse. Coffman was later released after spending five days in jail (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). In April of 1986, Coffman met James Marlow when her boyfriend asked Marlow, whom he had been in jail with, to check on her. After her boyfriend was arrested again in June of 1986, Coffman left him and began a relationship with Marlow (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). They spent much of 1986 living a transient lifestyle, doing drugs (mostly methamphetamine), and committing petty crimes for cash (Hunter, 2021; Wride, 1992). In June of 1986, the 24-year-old Coffman and 30-year-old Marlow had a ‘biker wedding’ and she subsequently got two tattoos, one on her buttocks that said, ‘Property of Folsom Wolf’, referencing Marlow’s time incarcerated in Folsom Prison, and W-O-L-F with lightning bolts on her ring finger (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). However, it does not appear that this marriage was legal.

Five months later, on November 7, 1986, Coffman and Marlow dressed nicely to appear less threatening and went to the Redlands mall to look for a victim to kidnap and rob (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Soon, the couple spotted twenty-year-old Corinna Novis, who had just cashed a check at a bank near the mall. Marlow pointed Corinna out as the girl he wanted and instructed Coffman to get her (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). Coffman approached Corinna and asked if she could give the couple a

ride, which Corinna agreed to do. Once on the road, Marlow brandished a gun and ordered Corinna to pull over, allowing Coffman to get in the driver's seat and drive them to the home of a friend named Richard Drinkhouse (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Though Drinkhouse did not want them there, Marlow refused to leave, and Coffman took Corinna to the back bedroom (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Coffman and Marlow forced Corinna into the shower with them, where she was sodomized by Marlow (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). At some point during this time, Corinna relented and gave them her bank information (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). When Coffman, Marlow, and Corinna emerged from the back of the home, Corinna was handcuffed, her hair was wet, and there was duct tape over her mouth (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). Coffman drove them to a vineyard in Fontana, California, where Corinna was strangled and buried.

Corinna's body was found on November 15, 1986, eight days after she had been abducted when Coffman led law enforcement to where her body was buried (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). Corinna was discovered lying fully clothed and face down in a shallow grave (Lundahl, 1986; *People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024). She was missing a fingernail, shoes, and one earring (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). The forensic pathologist who conducted the autopsy of Corinna determined that her cause of death was ligature strangulation and that she had marks on her wrists from being restrained by handcuffs and sperm in her rectum (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004).

Coffman and Marlow also burglarized Corinna's home and attempted to obtain cash from an ATM using her bank card, although they found that there was not enough money in Corinna's account to access it via an ATM (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Whether they burglarized Corinna's home before or after her death was a point of dispute between Coffman's testimony and the prosecution's timeline of events (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). During the burglary of Corinna's home, Coffman and Marlow stole a typewriter, which Coffman pawned using Corinna's ID, and the answering machine, which was traded to a friend of Marlow's sister for half a gram of methamphetamine (*People v. Coffman*, 2004).

After Corinna's murder, Coffman and Marlow abducted 19-year-old Lynel Murray on November 12, 1986 (Ofgang, 2004). The spelling of Lynel's name is aligned with the spelling found on her tombstone (Skolfield, 2013). Coffman and Marlow abducted Lynel at gunpoint and robbed the dry cleaners where she worked, taking some money and clothes (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). They then went to the Huntington Beach Inn, where Coffman used Lynel's name and credit card to check in (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024; *People v. Marlow*, 2004).

About an hour after checking in at the Huntington Beach Inn with Lynel, two withdrawals, one for \$80 and one for \$60, were made from Lynel's bank account using an ATM (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). Coffman and Marlow then went to the City of Ontario, California, and checked into another hotel using Lynel's credit card. That night, they were seen at a Denny's restaurant near the hotel, being very affectionate and eating steak and shrimp that were

paid for with Lynel's credit card (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024; *People v. Marlow*, 2004).

Lynel's body was found in the bathroom of the Huntington Beach Inn by a hotel employee on November 13, 1986, the day after she was abducted (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). She was found sprawled across the hotel bathroom, her bound head lay in the bathtub in six inches of water, one of her legs was spread across the toilet, and the other was in front of the toilet. Lynel's body displayed evidence of a severe beating before her death, including two black eyes, trauma to her head, injuries to her abdomen, and bruises on her legs (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). She had been gagged, and her face and head were wrapped and bound with strips of a towel. A towel bound her right arm to her waist, and there was duct tape residue on her ankles, indicating they had been bound as well (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Stains on Lynel's clothing suggested that she had been urinated on (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024). During the autopsy, semen was found inside Lynel's vagina, indicating that she had also been raped (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Investigators found that Lynel was missing a single earring, her bra, and pantyhose (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004).

On November 11<sup>th</sup>, a bag containing both Corinna's and Coffman's driver's licenses, identification paperwork for Marlow, and Corinna's bank card and checks had been found near a dumpster behind a Taco Bell restaurant (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). Coffman and Marlow had also abandoned Corinna's car along a dirt road near Santa's Village in California after seeing a newspaper article with a

picture of Corinna's car on November 12<sup>th</sup> (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Fingerprints from both Coffman and Marlow were found in Corinna's car, and a pillowcase containing several items, including Lynel's bra and receipts from the dry cleaners where Lynel worked, was found in a trash can in Santa's Village (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024). Coffman and Marlow later discarded the rest of Corinna's belongings in Lytle Creek (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). It was Coffman and Marlow's purchase of clothing at a sporting goods store using Lynel's credit card that alerted law enforcement to their location and ultimately led to their arrest on November 14, 1986 (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Marlow*, 2004).

In Coffman's purse, law enforcement found the single earrings that were missing from Corinna and Lynel, which Coffman had taken as trophies. Investigators also found Lynel's wallet and ID, receipts of purchases made with Lynel's credit card and bearing her forged signature, a brown paper bag that matched those used for coins at the dry cleaners where Lynel worked, and a loaded .22 caliber revolver with ammunition in Coffman's purse (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024; *People v. Marlow*, 2004). When police searched the hotel room where Coffman and Marlow were staying, they found "various single earrings" (*People v. Coffman*, 2004, p. 27), suggesting there were potentially more victims, and that Coffman had taken a single earring from each of them. After her arrest, Coffman was questioned all night until she eventually confessed and led police to Corinna Novis's body in the early hours of November 15, 1986 (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024)

Coffman and Marlow had a joint trial in San Bernardino County for the murder of Corinna Novis (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). In the trial for Corinna's murder, Marlow was convicted of murder, kidnapping, robbery, kidnapping for robbery, residential burglary, and forcible sodomy and was sentenced to death (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). Marlow avoided a trial for the murder of Lynel Murray by pleading guilty and received another sentence of death (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). James Marlow is currently still on California's death row ("Condemned Inmate List", 2025).

In the trial for Corinna's murder, defense experts for Coffman diagnosed her with Battered Woman Syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression with dysthymia, a depressed mood, and impaired bonding in Coffman's early life (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). However, experts for the prosecution diagnosed Coffman as malingering and with potential antisocial personality disorder (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). As her defense, Coffman claimed she had suffered extreme verbal, physical, and sexual abuse from Marlow (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024). She also stated that she was afraid Marlow would hurt her six-year-old son if she did not go along with the murders (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024). Coffman's claims were refuted by the prosecution, who entered seven letters into evidence that Coffman had sent to Marlow while they were in jail awaiting trial, detailing her love for him and even providing detailed directions to where her son was living (*People v. Coffman*, 2004).

Neither the jury for Corinna's murder nor the one for Lynel's believed Coffman's defense. For the murder of Corinna Novis, Coffman was convicted of murder, kidnapping, robbery, kidnapping for robbery, residential burglary, and forcible sodomy

and sentenced to death (*People v. Coffman*, 2004). For the murder of Lynel Murray, Coffman was convicted of first-degree murder, kidnapping, burglary, and robbery, but was found not guilty of rape by force. Coffman was sentenced to life without parole for Lynel's murder (*People v. Coffman*, 2004; *People v. Coffman*, 2024). Coffman's conviction made her the only woman on California's death row at the time (Gordon, Jun. 30, 1989). As of 2025, Coffman is the longest-serving, still living, female on death row in America, having been on death row for 36 years at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla (California Incarcerated Records and Information Search, n.d.; Hunter, 2021).

### **Partnered Case Study 3: Michelle Michaud**

Michelle Michaud was born in 1959 and, at the time of the murder, was living in Sacramento, California (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012; Streib, 2012). Michaud would later claim at trial that she had been sexually molested and pimped out by her father at age 11 (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018). However, in a memoir titled "My Escapades in a Massage Parlor" that Michaud wrote in 1977, 20 years before the murder occurred, she admits to starting to engage in prostitution at age 17 due to personal intrigue and excitement and claimed that she did not tell her father about her prostitution because she believed he would disapprove (Chapman, 2002; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). In the introduction of the memoir, Michaud asserted that she would educate people about masochism, sadism, and domination, and also expressed her desire to tie up and whip her clients (Chapman, 2002). In 1991, Michaud was arrested for prostitution (Jacobus, 1997)

Michelle Michaud met James Daveggio in 1996 when he was working as a bartender (Jacobus, 1997). Daveggio moved in with Michaud just a few months later. However, Michaud was soon evicted, and they began to live in her green Dodge minivan (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Michaud and Daveggio's relationship was often volatile, exacerbated by heavy methamphetamine use (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018). One argument that occurred at Michaud's sister's house in early November 1997 resulted in Daveggio holding a gun to Michaud's head and then throwing all her belongings out of the van. However, when he returned the next day, Michaud was reportedly ecstatic to see him (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

When Michaud met Daveggio, he was already a convicted sexual offender, and Michaud also had her own history of sexually deviant behavior (Lee, Feb. 5, 2002). Court documents referenced Michaud sexually abusing her son, including him telling his psychiatrist that Michaud had sex with her clients in front of him as a child. Daveggio also claimed in the court documents that both Michaud and her son told him that Michaud had forced her son to sodomize her (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). To satisfy their deviant sexual desires, Michaud and Daveggio began to sexually assault females prior to committing murder. In total, they assaulted six girls and young women including Michaud's 13 year old daughter and her daughter's friend, also 13, Daveggio's 16 year old daughter, a 17 year old girl who was friends with Daveggio's daughters, a young woman who was an acquaintance of Michaud's, and a 20 year old college student that Michaud and Daveggio kidnapped off the street in November of 1997 (*Michaud v. State*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Testimony from all the victims

asserted that Michaud was not only an active participant but also directed Daveggio during the sexual assaults (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

Prior to committing murder, Michaud and Daveggio turned Michaud's green minivan into a mobile sex torture chamber (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018). Specifically, they removed the middle and made slits in a piece of carpet that could be put over the anchor bolts to allow for a victim to be tied down with rope, threaded through the anchor bolts, while sexually assaulting the victim (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). On November 30, 1997, Michaud and Daveggio purchased two curling irons, removed the electrical cords, and taped over the middle of the curling irons where the clamp had been removed with duct tape (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). A ball gag and pornographic audiotape titled "Submissive Young Girls" were subsequently bought by Michaud and Daveggio on December 1, 1997, from an adult entertainment store (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

On December 2, 1997, 39-year-old Michaud and 37-year-old Daveggio began hunting for a victim. Around 7:30 that morning, 22-year-old Vanessa Lei Samson was walking to work in Pleasanton, CA, when Michaud and Daveggio drove up beside her in their van and forced her into the vehicle before driving off. Witnesses reported hearing a scream and then saw a green van being slowly driven away by a white woman (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *Michaud v. State*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Vanessa was restrained with ropes and hooks in the minivan and

forced to wear a rubber ball gag to stifle her screams while Daveggio repeatedly raped her with the curling irons as Michaud drove them to South Lake Tahoe in California (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018). They first stopped in Sacramento so that Michaud could pick up a welfare check, which she then cashed nearby (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). The clerk at the check-cashing place knew Michaud and testified that she was calm, well-dressed, and acted normally (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

They next stopped at a campsite between Sacramento and Lake Tahoe, located on the border of California and Nevada, where both Daveggio and Michaud were observed by a campsite attendant (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). After leaving the campsite, Michaud and Daveggio took Vanessa to the Tahoe Sundowner Motel at Lake Tahoe, where they stayed overnight before leaving the next morning (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). The motel owner stated that when he entered the room the next morning, it was relatively clean, with the trash having been emptied. The only thing that caught his attention was a brown stain on the bedspread (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

On the morning of December 3, 1997, Michaud and Daveggio went to a different hotel, the Lakeside Inn and Casino, in Stateline, Nevada. The hotel was located across the street from a Douglas County, Nevada, courthouse, where Michaud attended a court date at approximately 11 am on December 3, 1997, for an incident in November of 1997, where she was accused of passing bad checks (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *United States v. Michaud*, 2001). An attorney assisting Michaud later testified that she was perfectly

calm and cooperative that morning and did not show any signs of distress (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Later that same day, Michaud and Daveggio were arrested for the kidnapping and rape of the 20-year-old college student in November of 1997 (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *United States v. Michaud*, 2001). After her arrest, a news report on the murder of Vanessa Samsom came on the television in the jail, and Michaud contacted law enforcement officers to give a full confession (*United States v. Michaud*, 2001).

On December 4, 1997, Vanessa's body was found by a trucker 185 miles from where she was abducted ("Police Describe Grisly Kidnap Spree", 1997). Vanessa's body was down a snowy embankment off the side of Highway 88 in a remote area of Alpine County, California (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). She was found lying face down, nearly frozen, and had ligature marks on her neck. Under Vanessa's body was a red nylon lunch bag, and near her body was a black rope, six feet long, with human hair clinging to it, along with a backpack containing her driver's license and napkins (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

The damage to Vanessa's body was extensive. While conducting the autopsy, the forensic pathologist found fecal matter in Vanessa's underwear and coming out of her rectum (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Though there was no injury found to the rectum or vagina, court documents expressed that this does not mean that an assault did not occur and explicitly stated, "in approximately 60 percent of cases in which forcible sodomy occurred, there would not be any findings of physical trauma (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012, p. 36)." Additionally, a study conducted in 2025 found

that in the 40 reported cases of women who had experienced nonconsensual, complete anal penetration by a digit, penis, or object, injury to the anus was observed in only 20% of the cases (Kane et al., 2025). Bruising was found underneath Vanessa's scalp, attributed to low-impact blunt force trauma, such as from a hard object striking her head or her head being banged against a solid surface (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). On Vanessa's throat was a ligature furrow with a pattern consistent with strangulation by a rope. There was extreme damage, including petechial hemorrhaging (blood vessels that have burst) and extensive bleeding of the larynx, the trachea, the esophagus, and the muscles underneath these structures. The damage was so extensive that the pathologist testified that Vanessa was likely strangled both manually and with a ligature, as he had never seen such deep bleeding in the muscles and structures in the neck from just a ligature strangulation (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). There was also bruising on Vanessa's buttocks, which was severe and profound as to extend into the muscles, with the pathologist opining that the bruises were due to blunt force trauma from an object (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

When Michaud was arrested, law enforcement found a yellow nylon rope in her pocket as well as a metal cash box containing a .25 caliber loaded pistol and small bags of white powder in the hotel room (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). In Michaud's van, police found the pornographic audiotape they had bought on December 1<sup>st</sup>, a crossbow, ammunition, a .38 caliber gun, more yellow nylon rope, orange rope, red rope, several napkins with brown stains that seemed to have been used to wipe off the curling irons, an AM/PM cup, a roll of duct tape, a three inch strip of

cloth, a braided black leather belt, a green ball gag attached to a leather harness, and the piece of carpet that had been cut to go over the hooks where the van's middle seats would be (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Investigators also found the two altered curling irons, one measuring 12 inches and the other 13 inches in length. Both curling irons had brown material on them, brown pellets lodged in their tips, and tested positive for blood (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Vanessa's DNA was found on both curling irons and the brown material and pellets were believed to be fecal matter by an expert criminalist (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *Michaud v. State*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Vanessa's DNA was also found on the ball gag, the brown stained napkins, and the AM/PM cup (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Michaud's fingerprints were found on the two curling irons as well as on the duct tape around one of the curling irons (*Michaud v. State*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Daveggio's fingerprints were found on the cash box and several bottles and soda cans (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Michaud, Daveggio, and Vanessa's fingerprints were all found on the AM/PM cup in the van (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

Michaud and Daveggio were tried jointly for the murder of Vanessa Samson (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018). Daveggio was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). He is still awaiting execution on California's death row ("Condemned Inmate List", 2025). Michaud used Battered

Woman Syndrome as her defense and an expert for the defense diagnosed her with Complex PTSD and a vulnerability to be controlled by the other person in a relationship, even though five out of the six sexual assault victims testified at the trial and claimed that Michaud initiated the sexual assault and directed Daveggio in most of his actions during the assaults (*People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). The jury rejected Michaud's defense, and Michaud was convicted of first-degree murder with the aggravating circumstances of murder occurring during the commission of rape by an instrument and kidnapping (*Michaud v. State*, 2001; *Michaud v. State*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). Michelle Michaud was sentenced to death and has been on California's death row at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla for 23 years ("Condemned Inmate List", 2025; *Michaud v. State*, 2018; *People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012).

#### **Partnered Case Study 4: Judith Neelley**

In this summary, 'Neelley' refers to the FSHO Judith Neelley, whereas her partner and husband will be referred to simply as 'Alvin'. As a further note, the primary and secondary sources for this case sometimes spell one of the victim's last names as 'Chapman' and at other times as 'Chatman'. In this summary, the last name used will be Chapman, as this is the spelling found in the most significant primary source document for this summary (*Neelley v. State*, 1985), as well as on the victim's tombstone (Roha, 2011).

Judith Neelley was born on June 7, 1964, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee (Cook, 1990; "Inmate Search Results", 2012; White, 1987). When Neelley was nine years old,

her father died driving his motorcycle while drunk (Cook, 1990; White, 1987). Court documents referenced a deprived childhood and noted that her mother and sister were promiscuous (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Several sources added that her mother spent her time talking to men on her CB radio and that those men would eventually come to their trailer and have sex with her mother in a room separated from Neelley by only a sheet (Cook, 1990; Dunnivant, 1983; White, 1987).

Neelley met Alvin in 1979 when he came to her house with a friend who had been communicating with Neelley's mother over CB radio (Cook, 1990; White, 1987). The 26-year-old Alvin and 15-year-old Neelley hit it off immediately despite the age difference and the fact that Alvin was already married and had three children (Cook, 1990; Dunnivant, 1983; White, 1987). Neelley subsequently dropped out of tenth grade and ran away with Alvin in the fall of 1979. Once Alvin had gotten a divorce, he and Neelley married on July 14, 1980 (Cook, 1990; White, 1987). Prior to meeting Alvin, Neelley did well in school, made the honor roll, and had dreams of being a nurse (Cook, 1990; Dunnivant, 1983).

After Neelley ran away with Alvin, they led a transient lifestyle, committing petty crimes and frequently moving (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). In November of 1980, a nine-month pregnant, 16-year-old Neelley robbed a woman at gunpoint while Alvin waited in the car. They were apprehended 10 days later, and Neelley gave birth to twins two days after that. She was then sent to the Georgia Youth Development Centers (YDC) in Rome and Macon (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Neelley and Alvin's youngest child would later be

born in 1983 while she awaited trial for murder (Cook, 1990; Griffith, 2023; White, 1987).

In late September of 1982, 18-year-old Neelley and 29-year-old Alvin drove around the streets of Rome, Georgia, in separate cars, hunting for potential victims (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). When Alvin saw a girl he wanted, he would let Neelley know via CB radio, and Neelley would then try to lure the girl by asking if she wanted to take a ride with her (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Neelley had tried to lure several girls but had been unsuccessful until she came across Lisa Millican. Lisa Millican was a 13-year-old girl who lived in a Methodist group home for neglected children in Cedartown, Georgia (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). On September 25, 1982, a house parent had taken Lisa and five other girls on an outing to the Riverbend Mall in Rome, Georgia, where Lisa would be abducted by Neelley and Alvin (*Neelley v. State*, 1985).

After abducting Lisa, Neelley and Alvin took her to a motel in Franklin, Georgia, where she was raped by Alvin and then handcuffed to the motel bed so that she could not escape (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). The next day, Neelley and Alvin left the motel with Lisa. They traveled to Cleveland, Tennessee, to pick up their two-year-old twins from Alvin's mother before traveling to a motel in Scottsboro, Alabama (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). While at the motel, Neelley attempted to knock Lisa unconscious by hitting her repeatedly in the head with a slapjack, a leather club/baton. However, this did not render Lisa unconscious (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Lisa was then raped again by Alvin, and Neelley testified that during this time, she watched television with her children in the same room where Lisa was being raped (Cook, 1990; *Neelley v. State*, 1985). Afterward, Lisa was left to sleep

naked on the floor overnight, handcuffed to the bed (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). The next day, Neelley was present when Lisa was raped twice more by Alvin (*Neelley v. State*, 1985).

On the morning of September 28, 1982, Neelley took Lisa to the rim of the Little River Canyon near Fort Payne, Alabama, and had Lisa lie on her stomach so Neelley could handcuff Lisa's hands around a tree (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Lisa was told that she would be free to go after Neelley administered a shot that would induce sleep for a short period (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Before abducting Lisa, Neelley and Alvin had gone to a drug store and specifically bought the drain cleaners Liquid Plumr and Liquid Drano as well as diabetic needles (Cobun, 1983; Cook, 1990). While Lisa lay on the ground, Neelley filled a syringe with drain cleaner and injected Lisa twice in the neck, twice in the arms, and twice in her buttocks. After each injection, Neelley waited five minutes for Lisa to die, and when she did not die, Neelley would inject her again, resulting in Lisa being injected with drain cleaner six times (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). During this chemical torture, Lisa asked and was allowed to use the restroom in the woods twice before she returned to Neelley and resumed lying face down with her hands handcuffed around a tree (*Neelley v. State*, 1985).

After the sixth injection, Neelley told Lisa to walk around to make the drain cleaner kill her faster (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). When Neelley finally realized that the drain cleaner was not going to kill Lisa, she forced Lisa to walk to the rim of the canyon, and despite Lisa pleading for her life, Judith Neelley shot her in the back and pushed her body into the canyon (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). During the torture and murder of Lisa

Millican, Neelley's twin toddlers were left asleep in her car (Cook, 1990). Later that day, Neelley made a call to the police departments in Rome, Georgia and DeKalb County, Alabama as well as a radio station in Rome, Georgia, specifically asking if they were looking for Lisa Millican and gave them detailed directions on how to find Lisa's body "where she left it" (*Neelley v. State*, 1985, p. 10).

After several days, authorities were able to locate the body of Lisa in Little River Canyon in DeKalb County, Alabama (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Along with Lisa's body, officers also found a pair of bloody jeans, later identified as belonging to Neelley, two plastic diabetic syringes still containing some cloudy residue wrapped in a white towel, and a third syringe found nearby (Cook, 1990). Semen was found in Lisa's vagina, and at each of the six injection sites, she had blisters from the acid in the cleaner burning the tissue under her skin (Cook, 1990; *Neelley v. State*, 1985). Hair that was deemed similar to Neelley on a microscopic level was found on Lisa's shirt and on a towel present at the scene (*Neelley v. State*, 1985)

On the evening of October 3, 1982, 23-year-old Janice Chapman and 26-year-old John Hancock were out taking a walk when a woman, Neelley, in a brown Dodge car approached them, asked for directions, and then asked if they wanted to ride around with her and talk because she was lonely (Board, 2018; Cook, 1990). Janice and John agreed, and after they got in the car with Neelley, she began to talk to a man on her CB radio. The man was Alvin, but he and Neelley acted as if they did not know each other. Eventually, Neelley, with Janice and John in her car, met up with Alvin, who had their twin toddlers with him. When they met up, Neelley transferred the children to her car,

and it was at that point that Janice and John were separated, with John being told to go with Alvin (Cook, 1990; Board, 2018). They eventually pulled over so that John could go to the restroom in the woods, but Neelley followed him and shot him in the back (Board, 2018; Cook, 1990). John, however, was only wounded, and he managed to drag himself to the road and stop a trucker who took him to a hospital for medical treatment (Board, 2018; Cook, 1990). Neelley testified that after she shot John and left him for dead, she and Alvin took Janice to a motel where she was raped by Alvin (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Neelley also testified that she attempted to terrorize Janice by showing her newspaper clippings about Lisa's murder (Cook, 1990). The next day, Neelley murdered Janice in rural Georgia, shooting her once in the back and twice in the chest (*Neelley v. State*, 1985).

Neelley was arrested on unrelated charges of forging checks and money orders in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on October 10, 1982, and Alvin was later arrested on October 13<sup>th</sup> (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). After her arrest, Neelley confessed to killing Lisa and Janice and attempting to kill John (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Both Neelley and Alvin gave law enforcement detailed instructions for where they could find Janice's body (Cook, 1990; White, 1987). Janice was found in a remote area of Chattooga County, Georgia, on October 15, 1982 (Cook, 1990; "Mrs. Neelley testifies", 1983; Schrader, 2023). Though both Alvin and Neelley informed investigators, and Neelley testified, that Alvin raped Janice, her body was too decomposed to verify whether or not she had been sexually assaulted (Cook, 1990; *Neelley v. State*, 1985). An investigator also testified that in his

interrogation of Alvin, he stated that Judith Neelley performed oral sex on both victims after Alvin had raped them (*Neelley v. State*, 1985).

To avoid Neelley's testimony and the death penalty, Alvin pled guilty in Georgia to kidnapping, murder, and aggravated assault for the crimes against Janice Chapman and John Hancock, but he was not tried for Lisa Millican's murder due to a lack of evidence that he was present during the murder (Griffith, 2023; *Neelley v. State*, 1985; Wren, 1991). Alvin was given two life sentences without the possibility of parole and died in prison in 2005 (Cook, 1990; Griffith, 2023; Hrynkiw, 2023).

Before Neelley's trial began, her defense requested a psychiatric examination, which was granted and administered over two days in January of 1983. She was found competent to stand trial and found to have superior intelligence (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Under cross-examination by the prosecution, Neelley admitted to having a higher level of intelligence than Alvin (Cato, 1991; Cook, 1990). However, for her defense, Neelley used Battered Woman Syndrome and claimed that she had been physically, mentally, and sexually abused by Alvin and pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Though Neelley testified that Alvin threatened to kill her and their children if she did not help with the murders and that her every move was controlled by Alvin, the prosecution refuted this with the evidence that she and Alvin were almost always in separate cars, sometimes miles apart and that after her arrest, Neelley made a statement to police that Alvin had not been present at the canyon when Lisa was murdered or when she had killed Janice (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). Judith Neelley was convicted on March 22, 1983, for the murder of Lisa Millican with the aggravating circumstances of murder

during a kidnapping and murder found to be “especially heinous, atrocious and cruel compared to other capital offenses” (*Neelley v. State*, 1985, p. 22). The jury recommended a sentence of life without parole, but a judge sentenced Neelley to death by the electric chair in 1983 (*Neelley v. State*, 1985). In Georgia, Neelley was sentenced to life for the murder of Janice Chapman in exchange for pleading guilty (Cook, 1990; Griffith, 2023; Schrader, 2023; White, 1987).

On January 15, 1999, after 16 years on death row, the Governor of Alabama, Fob James, commuted Neelley’s death sentence to life in prison, but did not specify if the life sentence was to be with or without the possibility of parole, resulting in Neelley becoming eligible for parole in January of 2014 (*Neelley v. Walker*, 2015). Neelley was granted a parole hearing in Alabama in April of 2018 and again in May of 2023 (Griffith, 2023). It only took the Parole Board 55 seconds to deny her parole in 2018 and three minutes in 2023 (Griffith, 2023; Hrynkiw, 2023; Ivey, 2023). Even if Neelley were granted parole in Alabama, she would immediately be transferred to Georgia to serve out her life sentence (Schrader, 2023). Judith Neelley will again be eligible for parole in Alabama in May of 2028 (Hrynkiw, 2023).

### **Partnered Case Study 5: Brooke Rottiers**

Brooke Rottiers was born in 1980, and little is known about her childhood or her relationship with her parents (Streib, 2012). However, during Rottiers sentencing hearing, her defense lawyer referenced sexual abuse that occurred in her childhood (Alvarez, 2010; CBS News Los Angeles, 2010; Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). At the time of the murders, Rottiers was working as a prostitute. It is unclear whether Rottiers’s four

children were living with her at the time of the murders, though court documents do mention Rottiers having twin daughters who were present at the scene of the murders (Alvarez, 2010; CBS News Los Angeles, 2010; *People v. Epps*, 2012; Treadwell, 2016). Rottiers also had a history of heavy methamphetamine use and a previous conviction for robbing a prostitution client, for which she was given probation (Alvarez, 2010; Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012).

Rottiers was a 26-year-old White woman, and her partners were a 22-year-old Black woman, Franchune Epps, and Rottiers' boyfriend and pimp, a 30-year-old black man named Omar Hutchinson ("Condemned Inmate List", 2025; Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012). At the time of the murders, these offenders had a known modus operandi of going to bars frequented by migrant workers, promising sex in exchange for money, and then robbing them. They chose migrant workers because they were usually in the country illegally and therefore would not report the crime to the police (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). Rottiers had even dyed her hair blonde to make herself stick out at the Hispanic bar where she met her victims, 22-year-old Marvin Gabriel and 28-year-old Milton Chavez, who were undocumented workers from Guatemala (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012).

Marvin and Milton accompanied Rottiers back to the National Inn, where she was living, with the understanding that they would be paying her for sex (Alvarez, 2010; Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). Once in the hotel room, Epps held a gun on Marvin and Milton while Rottiers and Hutchinson stripped them of their money, valuables, and clothing (Alvarez, 2010; Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). Rottiers beat the much smaller Milton before

binding both Milton and Marvin with bras, panties, electrical cords, vacuum cords, and phone cords (Alvarez, 2010; *People v. Epps*, 2012). At her sentencing hearing, the Judge stated that Rottiers stuffed panties and other fabrics into the victims' mouths before putting pink duct tape over their mouths and noses (Alvarez, 2010; CBS News Los Angeles, 2010). Marvin and Milton were then hog-tied with a multitude of cords (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012).

On August 29, 2006, Marvin and Milton's decomposing bodies were found in a remote area of Gavilan Hills in the trunk of a car, approximately 20-30 miles away from the motel where they were murdered (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012). Inside the trunk of the car, police found the bodies wrapped in a bed sheet and stacked on top of each other (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). Marvin was found on top. He was naked, lying face down, and hogtied with his hands and feet bound together behind his back (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). His face was wrapped with a belt, and plastic bags, women's panties, and a washcloth were shoved in his mouth, which was covered in pink duct tape (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012). Marvin's wrists were bound with a telephone cord and a black bra, and he had been hogtied with an electrical cord (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012). Milton was found underneath Marvin's body (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). He was also naked and hogtied but was found lying face up (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024). Milton was found with electrical cords around his ankles that connected to a leather belt wrapped around his neck, and on top of that was another leather belt, two pieces of telephone cord, and a pair of panties (*People v. Epps*, 2012). While court documents do not list the exact wounds found on Marvin and Milton's

bodies, both the court documents and the Judge during the sentencing hearing referenced the victims being beaten before their deaths, including the victims being punched, spat on, stomped, and violently hogtied (CBS News Los Angeles, 2010; *People v. Epps*, 2012; Treadwell, 2016)

Due to conflicting accounts and the forensic pathologist only being certain that the men were suffocated, it is not completely clear how exactly Marvin and Milton were murdered. One version stated that the way in which the victims were bound in concert with the materials in their mouths, which were also taped over, subsequently led to them suffocating while Rottiers, Hutchinson, and Epps were busy taking drugs (Alvarez, 2010; Treadwell, 2016). However, another version given by Epps was that Rottiers became enraged when Marvin and Milton fought back and used her feet to smother them to death after tying them up. This part of her account was one of the only aspects of Epps's version of events that never changed (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; Treadwell, 2016). Regardless, it was clear to investigators that Rottiers was the main perpetrator. It is also clear that Rottiers had other materials that she used to bind Marvin and Milton such as the electrical cords, phone cords, duct tape, etc. (Alvarez, 2010; *People v. Epps*, 2012; Gelman & Tarshis, 2024), therefore the use of bras and panties to bind and suffocate the victims was unnecessary and can be interpreted as employed to sexually humiliate the victims.

Rottiers, Hutchinson, and Epps were arrested on September 7, 2006, and had a joint trial but with three different juries, one for each defendant (*People v. Epps*, 2012; Shrestha, 2024). Both Hutchinson and Epps were convicted of two counts of first-degree

murder with the special circumstances of multiple murders committed and murders committed during the commission of a robbery, and both were sentenced to two consecutive terms of life without the possibility of parole (*People v. Epps*, 2012; *People v. Hutchinson*, 2012). Brooke Rottiers was convicted on June 23, 2010 (Alvarez, 2010) of two counts of first-degree murder with the special circumstances of multiple murders committed and murders committed during the commission of a robbery and was sentenced to death (*People v. Epps*, 2012). Rottiers has been on death row at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla, California, for 15 years ("Condemned Inmate List", 2025; Inmate search results, n.d.).

#### **Partnered Case Study 6: Charlene Williams (Gallego)**

Charlene Williams was born on October 19, 1956, in Stockton, California (Alters & Avery, 1981; California Birth Records, 1905 through 1995; "Wish come true", 1956). Although Williams had an IQ of 160, placing her on the genius level, and a photographic memory, she barely graduated from high school and dropped out of college after only one semester (Alters & Avery, 1981; Inscoc & Gauldfeldt, n.d.; Wilson, Feb. 17, 1984). Unlike many offenders in this case study, Williams grew up in an upper-middle-class family, with no known abuse, and was very close to her parents, especially her mother (Alters & Avery, 1981; Inscoc & Gauldfeldt, n.d.).

Williams was married and divorced twice before meeting Gerald Gallego and had a history of drinking alcohol excessively and using marijuana, LSD, and cocaine, as well as one reported suicide attempt while married to her second husband (Alters & Avery, 1981; Wilson, May 26, 1984). In 1977, 20-year-old Charlene Williams met 31-year-old

Gerald Gallego (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Despite Williams and Gallego having two wedding ceremonies, one in 1978 and one in 1980, and referring to each other as husband and wife, they were not legally married as Gallego had married a woman in Nevada in 1967 and had never legally gotten a divorce (*Gallego v. State*, 1985; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). Williams and Gallego had one child, a son who was born after their arrests (*People v. Gallego*, 1990).

Williams and Gallego's relationship was described as volatile, and Williams testified that Gallego struggled with impotence that he blamed on her and that he needed more than one woman to be sexually satisfied (Alters & Avery, 1981; "Teen Victims", 1984). Williams further testified that on the morning of September 11, 1978, Gallego woke her up and told her that she was going to kidnap a girl for him that day. So, Williams drove to a Sacramento, California, shopping mall so they could hunt for victims that would satisfy Gallego's violent sexual fantasies (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; "Teen victims", 1984). Once there, Gallego pointed out 16-year-old Kippi Vaught and 17-year-old Rhonda Scheffler, and Williams persuaded them to get into their van by inviting the girls to a party (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Once the girls were in the van, Gallego pulled a gun from Williams' purse, informed them that they were being kidnapped, and then bound their hands and feet with white adhesive tape (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Williams testified that after driving to the Sierra Mountain foothills, Gallego took the girls and a blanket out of the van and told Williams to go back to Sacramento, clean the van, make sure she was seen while in Sacramento, and come back to get him in their other car (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). When Williams returned around 10:30 pm, Gallego and the

two girls got into the car, and Gallego instructed Williams to drive to a different area south of Sacramento, where Kippi and Rhonda were both bludgeoned with a tire iron and shot in the head (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). The day after the murders, Gallego and Williams took the cash that was in Kippi and Rhonda's purses and then threw the purses, the tire iron, and the gun into the Sacramento River (*People v. Gallego*, 1990)

A farmer found Kippi and Rhonda's bodies in a rural area south of Sacramento on September 13, 1978 ("Bodies of Two Girls", 1978; *Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). They were found fully clothed with their hands bound behind their backs and the remains of some adhesive tape on their arms and ankles ("Bodies of Two Girls", 1978; *Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). Semen was found in Rhonda's vagina and panties. However, no semen was found in or on Kippi, aligning with Williams' testimony that Gallego told her he had not assaulted Kippi since she was the heavier of the two girls (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). However, lack of semen does not preclude sexual assault by oral copulation. Additionally, both girls had lacerations to their scalps consistent with a blunt force object, such as a tire iron, as well as fatal gunshot wounds to their heads, fired at point-blank range (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). Shell casings were found at the scene, as well as fibers found on Rhonda's clothes that were later matched to the carpet in Gallego's van (*People v. Gallego*, 1990).

Williams and Gallego's next two victims, 14-year-old Brenda Judd and 13-year-old Sandra Colley, were abducted from the Washoe County fairgrounds in Reno, Nevada, on June 24, 1979 (Avery, 1982; Enkoji, 1999; Smith, 1999). Williams lured the girls to

the van by offering to pay them some money for placing flyers on car windshields. However, the girls were held at gunpoint once they got into the van (Egan, 2000; Wilson, Feb. 17, 1984). Williams told investigators that they took the girls to the desert near Lovelock, Nevada, where Gallego sexually assaulted both girls and then bludgeoned them to death before burying them in shallow graves (Avery, 1982; Smith, 1999; Wilson, Feb. 17, 1984). Brenda and Sandra's bodies were found 20 years later on November 20, 1999, in Lassen County, California, more than 100 miles from where Williams had said they would be (Egan, 2000; Smith, 1999). DNA testing confirmed the bones found were Brenda and Sandra, and officers found shoes and tattered clothing matching what Brenda was wearing the day she was abducted, along with a sunflower keychain that she carried (Egan, 2000). The coroner who examined the girls' bones determined that they had died from blunt force trauma to their heads (Smith, 1999).

On April 24, 1980, Williams and Gallego abducted Stacy Redican and Karen Twiggs, both 17 years old, from a shopping mall in Sacramento, California (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *Gallego v. State*, 1985; *Gallego v. State*, 2001). Williams testified that during part of the trip from where the girls were abducted, she could see Gallego sexually assaulting Stacy in her rearview mirror (Wilson, Feb. 16, 1984). Williams also testified that Gallego purchased a hammer after the abduction that he used to bludgeon Stacy and Karen to death before burying their bodies (Avery, 1982; *Gallego v. State*, 1985). Picnickers found the bodies of Stacy and Karen in Limerick Canyon, Nevada, on July 27, 1980 (Alters & Avery, 1982; *Gallego v. State*, 1985; *Gallego v. State*, 2001). Both girls were found bound with an uncommon variety of macrame rope that was later

matched to rope found in the trunk of Gallego's car (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *Gallego v. State*, 1985). Despite Williams' testimony that Stacy and Karen had been sexually assaulted, their bodies were too decomposed for that to be verified (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997). The Pershing County District Attorney would later state that after the murders of Stacy and Karen, Williams and Gallego drove to the home of a client of the firm that Williams worked for at that time, and that Williams billed the costs accrued during the murders to her employers as business expenses (Avery, 1982). This demonstrated the cold, calculating, and intelligent nature of Charlene Williams, casting further doubt on her claims that her actions were driven by fear of Gallego.

Twenty-one-year-old Linda Aguilar was five months pregnant and hitchhiking on the coast highway near Port Oxford, Oregon, on June 7, 1980, when she accepted a ride from Williams and Gallego (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Linda, who was Hispanic, was both Williams and Gallego's only victim of opportunity and their only victim who was not White (Inscoc & Gauldfeldt, n.d.; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). As soon as Linda got in their van, Gallego pulled a gun on her and bound her hands behind her back (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Williams testified that they drove to a meadow where Gallego told Williams to walk away. When Williams returned fifteen to twenty minutes later, Linda was putting her clothes back on (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Gallego re-tied Linda's hands, and they drove to Gold Beach, where, after taking Linda from the van, Gallego struck her unconscious, strangled her, and buried her in a shallow grave he dug using a hubcap (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Linda was found on June 21, 1980, two weeks after she had been murdered (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Her hands and feet were bound with yellow

nylon rope, and when an autopsy was conducted, Linda was found to have blunt force trauma to the head and sand in her lungs, indicating a possibility she had been buried alive (Avery, 1982; Enkoji, 1999; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). However, her body was too decomposed to determine if she had been strangled or sexually assaulted (*People v. Gallego*, 1990).

The day before Gallego's 34<sup>th</sup> birthday, he and Williams went to the Sail Inn bar in West Sacramento after a day of fishing (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). While at the bar, Gallego told Williams that he wanted to rob the bar and take the bartender, 34-year-old Virginia Mochel (Avery, 1982; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). So, they waited outside and abducted Virginia when she was alone and closing the bar in the early morning hours of July 17, 1980 (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). After abducting Virginia, Williams and Gallego took her to Gallego's apartment, where he told Williams to go inside while he stayed in the van with Virginia (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). When Williams returned to the van, she drove them back to where she and Gallego had been fishing that day. During the drive, Gallego was in the back continuing to sexually assault Virginia before strangling her (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Fishermen found Virginia's body on October 2, 1980, two and a half months after she had been murdered. She was found with her hands bound with fishing line (Alters & Avery, 1981; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). Virginia's body was too decomposed to determine if she had been sexually assaulted (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Williams and Gallego were questioned by an investigator regarding Virginia's disappearance, as they were identified as having been at the bar that night. However, both

Williams and Gallego told the investigator that they had been drinking and did not remember much of the night (Alters & Avery, 1981; Esajian, 1980).

Four months later, Gallego and Williams were at a bar in Sacramento in the early morning of November 2, 1980, when Gallego told Williams (who was pregnant) that he wanted her to get him another girl (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). So, Williams drove herself and Gallego to the parking lot of a nearby mall to look for victims (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). They soon spotted engaged university students Craig Miller, 22, and Mary Beth Sowers, 21, who had arrived late to Craig's fraternity's dinner and dance (Avery, 1982; Brooks, 1982; Smith, 1999). Gallego forced the couple into his car at gunpoint (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). However, the abduction was done poorly and was witnessed by several of the victims' friends who were able to give law enforcement a description of both Gallego and Williams, their car, and their license plate number, which would later lead to the couple's arrest (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990).

Williams and Gallego drove Craig and Mary Beth to a rural area near Bass Lake outside of Sacramento, and there Gallego took Craig's wallet, made him remove his shoes, and directed him to get out of the car before shooting Craig in the head three times at point-blank range (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Craig's body was found a few hours after the abduction (Avery, 1982; *Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997). After Craig had been killed, Williams drove herself, Gallego, and Mary Beth back to Gallego's apartment, where Mary Beth was then sexually assaulted by Gallego (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). After the sexual assault, Mary Beth's hands were bound behind her back, and she, along with Williams and Gallego, got back in the car. Williams drove to a

pasture in a rural area outside of Sacramento, and Gallego shot Mary Beth three times, twice in her head and once in her neck (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). Mary Beth's body was found buried in a shallow grave on November 21, 1980, three weeks after her murder (Enkoji, 1999; *Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). She was found with her hands bound behind her back with ribbon from her dress, and while she did appear to be fully clothed, her body was too decomposed to determine if she had been raped (*People v. Gallego*, 1990; *Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; Wootten, 1983).

After the murders of Craig and Mary Beth, Williams cleaned the car, and then they drove to a park where Gallego threw some of Mary Beth's jewelry and his gun into the Sacramento River. Back at their apartment, Gallego told Williams to change the bedsheets, gather laundry, and throw the coat he had worn during the murders into a dumpster. They also threw Craig's shoes into a dumpster on the way to Williams's parents' house (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Due to the report from Craig's friends, the police had traced the license plate number for the car to Williams's parents and were already at their house when she and Gallego arrived (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Gallego was able to leave without being seen by the police. However, Williams stayed, spoke to the officers, gave them an alibi for the time of the murders (saying she and her 'boyfriend' were at a movie), and allowed the officers to search her car. The search of the car turned up nothing, so the police left (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). Gallego and Williams then attempted to move Craig's body but were unable to locate it (*People v. Gallego*, 1990). After Craig's body was found, law enforcement went to Gallego's apartment, but

he was not there, and when Gallego and Williams returned to the apartment and saw the officers, they fled (*People v. Gallego*, 1990).

While on the run, Williams asked her parents to send them money, dyed her hair, and tried to establish a new identity by stealing a purse (*People v. Gallego*, 1990).

Gallego and Williams first fled to Salt Lake City, Utah, then to Denver and Pueblo, Colorado (where they acquired false birth certificates to create new identities), and finally to Omaha, Nebraska where they were arrested on November 17, 1980, while trying to receive money that Williams's parents had sent them (Alters & Avery, 1981; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). The murders committed by Charlene Williams and Gerald Gallego spanned 26 months, beginning when Williams was 21 and Gallego was 32 and ending when Williams was 24 and Gallego was 34.

Almost immediately after being arrested, Williams offered to testify against Gallego in the murders of Craig and Mary Beth for leniency. The Sacramento County District Attorney initially declined her offer, as they had substantial evidence against both Williams and Gallego (Avery, 1982). However, when the Pershing County (Nevada) District Attorney's investigation into the murders of Brenda Judd, Sandra Colley, Stacy Redican, and Karen Twiggs started to lead to Williams and Gallego, negotiations began that eventually revealed the other murders committed by the couple (Alters & Avery, 1982). Williams gave detailed information on the murders, including the locations of victims' bodies, victims' clothing, how the victims died, and specific items used to bind the victims. Williams also took and passed polygraph tests on information regarding the

murderers of Kippi Vaught, Rhonda Scheffler, Brenda Judd, and Sandra Colley, and was therefore able to negotiate a plea deal (Alters & Avery, 1982).

Gerald Gallego was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and two counts of first-degree kidnapping with substantial bodily harm for the murders of Stacy Redican and Karen Twiggs in Nevada. He was sentenced to death for the murders and two consecutive life without the possibility of parole sentences for the kidnappings (*Gallego v. State*, 2001). In California, Gallego was convicted of two counts of murder with special circumstances and two counts of kidnapping for the murders of Craig Miller and Mary Beth Sowers and was sentenced to death (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *Gallego v. State*, 1985; Levitt, 1983; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). Gerald Gallego died on July 18, 2002, from rectal cancer that had spread to his lungs and liver (Christensen et al., 2005).

Charlene Williams used the Battered Woman Syndrome as her defense and testified that Gerald Gallego had threatened to kill her family to control her (CBS13, 2013). However, this claim seems dubious at best, considering that it was Williams's parents who often got friends to hire Gallego, even after he was repeatedly fired from those jobs, and who sent Gallego and Williams money frequently, including when the couple were fugitives (Alters & Avery, 1981; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). Williams also testified that Gallego expected her to be his servant and that he sexually abused her by performing acts in the bedroom that were painful for her (CBS13, 2013; Enkoji, 1999; "Teen victims", 1984; Wilson, May 26, 1984). The District Attorney of Pershing County, Nevada, described Williams as someone who had a dependent personality, first on her father and then on Gallego (Avery, 1982; Enkoji, 1999; Wilson, May 26, 1984).

However, it is interesting that Williams turned on Gallego immediately after being arrested and offered to testify against him for leniency (Avery, 1982), suggesting that Williams was not nearly as dependent on Gallego as she wanted authorities to believe.

Williams pleaded guilty to two counts of second-degree murder in the deaths of Stacy Redican and Karen Twiggs and was given immunity for the other eight murders in return for testifying against Gallego in the California and Nevada cases. For the two counts of second-degree murder, she was sentenced to 16 years and 8 months (*Gallego v. McDaniel*, 1997; *Gallego v. State*, 1985). Charlene Williams was released from prison in 1997 with no parole or probation and no requirements to further check in with law enforcement (CBS13, 2013; Enkoji, 1999; *Gallego v. State*, 2001; Wilson, 1997).

### **Data Collection**

I initially found participants for this study using Murderpedia, which provided basic offender, victim, and murder methodology demographics. The criteria for inclusion in this study was that the offender had to be female, White, 18 years or older, her victim or victims were 13 years or older, the crime had to be committed within the United States, her crime occurred in the last 100 years, and she met the criteria of a sexual homicide offender based upon the FBI criteria for sexual homicide created by Ressler et al. (1988). An additional stipulation was made that if the victim is found nude or partially nude, the crime must meet at least one more criterion to be considered a sexual homicide in alignment with the provision suggested by Chopin and Beauregard (2019c).

A crucial aspect of the FBI criteria for sexual homicide is the basis upon evidence. Due to the evidentiary basis, not predicated on motivation, I removed and

replaced several initially selected cases of female murderers, including Aileen Wuornos, Karla Tucker, and Gwendolyn Graham (with her partner Catherine Wood). I also implemented another provision of my own accord, that the FSHO had to meet the criteria for sexual homicide through her own actions and behaviors that could be verified through primary sources or through secondary sources that were meticulously triangulated. As an example, in the case of Judith Neelley, while semen was present in the vagina of one of Neelley's victims, meeting the criteria for 'evidence of sexual intercourse', since the sperm came from her partner Alvin and not from Judith Neelley, she was instead included for meeting the criteria of genital mutilation for the chemical torture she inflicted upon the victim's genital area.

Using the application of this criterion, I narrowed down the data to 12 cases, six solo White FSHOs, and six White FSHOs who acted with one or partners. Case-specific data were drawn from court documents that were publicly available, as well as requested from the county clerk for one case where no court documents were publicly available. These court documents, along with publicly available police records, publicly available state inmate information, publicly available video recordings from the trial of one case, and a documentary featuring interviews with investigators, forensic analysts, and pathologists who had worked on the case, served as primary sources. Secondary sources were drawn from newspaper articles from the time period of the murders that detailed trial testimony, as well as more recent online articles that included statements from the FSHOs or family members of the victims. Additionally, secondary sources included books written by subject matter experts who conducted extensive document reviews and

interviews, as well as peer-reviewed articles. I triangulated all secondary data meticulously to ensure accuracy. In cases with conflicting information, only data from primary sources or secondary sources that could be triangulated for verification were included. In cases of White FSHOs with one or more partners, I only included the partner's or partners' information as demographic data. The data collection process aligned closely with the intended method of collection outlined in Chapter 3.

Before coding the data manually, I read, analyzed, and reviewed all data three times. I focused the coding process on the main research questions, but also included additional developmental and trial demographics to search for patterns of behavior leading into or emerging after the crime committal process of White FSHOs.

### **Data Analysis**

The examination of data aligned with a descriptive analysis process. I developed initial codes after reviewing all available data sources for each case. From these codes, I formed a detailed fact sheet template that was used to organize a second review of each case's data into developmental, pre-crime, crime, post-crime, and trial sections, with additional sections for partner demographic information for White FSHOs with one or more partners. After the fact sheets were filled out, I conducted a third review of the data in conjunction with the fact sheets to ensure accuracy. The most prevalent codes gleaned from the fact sheets were then cross-examined, first within each cohort. I compared solo White FSHOs with other solo White FSHOs, and partnered White FSHOs with other partnered White FSHOs, forming cohort-specific themes and identifying potential overarching offender themes. These potential overarching themes were then cross-

examined to determine behavioral themes that emerged in the crime committal process of both solo White FSHOs and partnered White FSHOs. As I developed my fact sheet templates to cast a wide net for information, not all established codes were congruent with the crime committal process; therefore, they will be discussed for use in future research in Chapter 5.

The research questions I posed for analysis are the following:

RQ1: What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

RQ2: How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

For research question one involving behavioral patterns across all 12 White FSHOs, I found four to nine codes per offender culminating into one theme for pre-crime: intra-racial victim selection; one theme for crime: assertion of control with two subthemes: sexually sadistic acts and overkill/prolonged death; and two themes for post-crime: unsuccessfully employed forensic awareness strategies and FSHO's eventual confession/cooperation with investigation.

For research question two, involving behavioral differences between solo and partnered White FSHOs, both solo White FSHOs and partnered White FSHOs generated five to 12 cohort-specific codes across the crime committal process. These codes led to the formation of four themes for pre-crime: volatile intimate relationships, criminal behavior, victim selection, and assertion of control; two themes for crime: assertion of

control over the victim and assertion of control over the environment; and two themes for post-crime: exposure of the victim and contact with law enforcement. For each of these themes, two subthemes were generated, one for solo White FSHOs and one for partnered White FSHOs, to establish how the themes were presented differently in the two different cohorts.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

As previously stated in Chapter 3, I established trustworthiness through the utilization of several different strategies spanning the duration of this study. Primary sources were publicly available court documents, police records, state inmate information, video recordings from the trials, and documentaries featuring interviews with investigators, forensic analysts, and pathologists who had worked on the case. Secondary data included newspaper articles from the time period of the murders that detailed trial testimony, more recent online articles that included statements from the FSHOs or family members of victims, books written by subject matter experts, and peer-reviewed articles. Any inconsistent data, ranging from a FSHO's data of birth to salacious, unsubstantiated sexual details of the crime to conflicting spellings of a victim's first or last name, was meticulously triangulated to ensure that the most accurate data was found and verified. These methods of verification align with accepted methods to establish credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). Along with extensive data triangulation, I also examined myself as a researcher, particularly when establishing categorization to avoid confirmation bias.

The transferability of qualitative case studies is often evaluated and established by the reader rather than the author of a study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). However, throughout this study, I made continuous endeavors to ensure transferability. In Chapters 1, 3, and 4, I outlined the detailed procedures of methodology that established the study's design in corroboration with data collection and analysis. In line with case study research as outlined by Yin (2018), the goal of this study was to examine previously unknown patterns of behavior discovered through the analysis of the crime committal process of White FSHOs that can be transferable to the analysis of FSHOs of other races and nationalities.

Dependability in qualitative research is predicated on determining the stability and consistency of the findings over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Korstjens and Moser (2018) emphasize that dependability established through the use of an audit trail has been found to ensure the most consistent results and can be achieved through transparent notes regarding decisions made throughout the study's progress. For this study, I established an audit trail through the use of journals, categorization and enumeration of data, handwritten notes and codes, and the cross-referencing of data multiple times.

In qualitative studies, confirmability is based on establishing neutrality that is not influenced by personal bias (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within this study, I achieved confirmability by aligning the data with emergent codes rather than relying on personal opinions. In keeping with the goal of limiting researcher bias, I

strived to analyze personal bias throughout the study to ensure neutrality to the best of my ability so that the data presented is as accurate as possible.

## Results

The alignment of the 12 selected cases of White FSHOs with the FBI criteria, as well as my additional stipulations and those suggested by Chopin and Beauregard et al. (2019c), is demonstrated in the table below (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*FSHOs' Alignment with FBI Criteria for Sexual Homicide*

FBI Criteria for Sexual Homicide	<i>n</i>	%
1: Victim lacks attire (totally or partially)	7	58%
2: Exposure to the sexual parts of the victim's body	4	33%
3: The body is found in a sexually explicit position	3	25%
4: An object has been inserted into a body cavity (anus, vagina, or mouth)	5	42%
5: There is evidence of sexual intercourse	2	17%
6: There is evidence of substitutive sexual activity (e.g., masturbation and ejaculation at the crime scene) OR of sadistic sexual fantasies (e.g., genital mutilation)	11	92%

*Ressler et al., 1988, p. xiii*

### Research Question 1

What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

**Table 2***Research Question 1: Emergent Themes*

Themes	Subthemes
Pre-crime	
Intra-racial victim selection	
Crime	
Assertion of control	Sexually sadistic acts Overkill/prolonged death
Post-Crime	
Unsuccessfully employed forensic awareness strategies	
FSHO eventual confession/cooperation with investigation	

***Pre-Crime Theme 1: Intra-racial victim selection***

Out of the 12 White FSHOs, ten (83%) killed victims within their own race, i.e. White. Specifically, the White FSHOs who killed intra-racially were Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Patricia Jennings, Taylor Schabusbusiness, Lisa Shuler, Susan Wright, Gertrude Baniszewski, Cynthia Coffman, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams. This aligns with prior findings that most White FSHOs kill intra-racially (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2024; Skott et al., 2019).

Three (25%) out of 12 White FSHOs killed inter-racially. The percentages for intra- and inter-racial killings add up to more than 100% due to Charlene Williams being included in both categories, as she and her partner, Gerald Gallego, had nine White victims and one Hispanic victim, Linda Aguilar. Linda was both Williams's and Gallego's only victim of opportunity and their only non-White victim (Inscoc & Gauldfeldt, n.d.; *People v. Gallego*, 1990). The other two White FSHOs who killed inter-

racially were Michelle Michaud and Brooke Rottiers. All three of these White FSHOs had one or more partners.

Michelle Michaud and her partner, James Daveggio, only committed one sexual homicide before being apprehended; however, prior to the sexual homicide, they sexually assaulted six girls and women. Out of the prior sexual assaults, only one was committed against a stranger, a 20-year-old college student from El Salvador who was kidnapped while she was walking down the street (“Man Convicted of Rape”, 1999). Similarly, their only sexual homicide victim, Vanessa Lei Samson, was Filipino and Hawaiian (McNeill, Dec. 13, 1997) and was a stranger who was kidnapped while walking down the street (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012). It is worth noting, though, that Vanessa is listed as White (Caucasian) in court documents and death row information for Michaud (*People v. Daveggio and Michaud*, 2012; Streib, 2012). This could be due to a less uniform reporting of racial demographics in 1997. However, after viewing photographs of Vanessa, I did more research, specifically on her racial background, and found a memorial article about her funeral stating that Vanessa was Filipino and Hawaiian (McNeill, Dec. 13, 1997).

It is important to mention that all other female victims included in this study were White, the victims of partnered White FSHOs, and either knew the FSHO or were hunted and lured by the FSHO. The only two female victims of opportunity (Williams and Michaud’s victims) were both non-whites. Furthermore, the third White FSHO who killed inter-racially, Brooke Rottiers, was the only partnered White FSHO who killed men and the only partnered White FSHO whose partners were non-white. Both of

Rottiers's partners, Franchune Epps and Omar Hutchinson, were Black, and both of her victims, Marvin Gabriel and Milton Chavez, were Hispanic workers from Guatemala (Gelman & Tarshis, 2024; *People v. Epps*, 2012). These results indicate previously unknown racial preferences of White FSHOs and how rational choice influenced those preferences.

### ***Crime Theme 1: Assertion of Control***

Sexual homicide is an intimate and up-close method of murder where the offender has complete power and control over the victim. I found assertion of control to be an overarching theme in nearly every aspect of a White FSHO's crime committal process. Within this framework of control, two subthemes emerged for both solo and partnered White FSHOs (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Crime: Theme/Subtheme*

Crime: Theme/Subtheme	<i>n</i>	%
Theme 1: Assertion of Control	12	100%
Subtheme 1A: Sexually sadistic acts	11	92%
Subtheme 1B: Overkill/prolonged death	11	92%

**Crime Subtheme 1A: Sexually sadistic acts.** While there is no one definition for sexual sadism, most scholars and clinicians are inclined to agree that sexual sadism can be distinguished by some aspect of violent or humiliating behavior committed by an offender (Abel, 1989; Groth & Birnbaum, 1978; Knight et al., 1994), the type of reaction

from the victim, such as fear or pain, (Marshall & Kennedy, 2003), or the power and control that the offender feels from perpetrating the violence and humiliation upon the victim (Brittain, 1970; Dietz et al., 1990; Grubin, 1994; MacCulloch et al., 1983). Eleven (92%) out of 12 White FSHOs committed sexually sadistic acts. Jodi Arias was the only outlier.

I categorized the sexually sadistic acts of White FSHOs into oral sex, genital mutilation, foreign object insertion, and sadistic sexual fantasies. Within this study, two (17%), Carol Bundy and Lisa Shuler, out of 12 killed their victims, both male, immediately after performing oral sex on their victims. Mutilation of male genitalia was determined as cuts, stabs, slices, and other injuries to male sex organs or the anus/buttocks and was found in four (33%) out of the 12 cases, all of which were solo White FSHOs (Carol Bundy, Patricia Jennings, Taylor Schabusiness, and Susan Wright). Mutilation of female genitalia was found in two (17%) out of 12, both partnered White FSHOs, with one mutilating the victim's breast area (Gertrude Baniszewski) and one mutilating the victim's buttocks with injections of chemical acid (Judith Neelley). Foreign object insertion was demonstrated in five (42%) out of 12, including two solo White FSHOs (Patricia Jennings and Taylor Schabusiness) and three partnered White FSHOs (Gertrude Baniszewski, Michelle Michaud, and Brooke Rottiers).

Sadistic sexual fantasies/acts in this study included the White FSHOs' own sadistic fantasies and acts as well as their participation in the sexually sadistic fantasies of their partners. Seven (58%) out of 12 White FSHOs aligned with this category, including three solo White FSHOs (Taylor Schabusiness, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright) and four

partnered White FSHOs (Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Brooke Rottiers, and Charlene Williams). In the case of Taylor Schabusness, she killed her male victim by asphyxiation using a chain during BDSM sex. Whereas Michelle Michaud converted her van into a mobile sex torture chamber for her and her partner to sexually torture their female victim, including forcing her to wear a ball gag in her mouth while she was sodomized with curling irons.

**Crime Subtheme 1B: Overkill/prolonged death.** Overkill and/or prolonged death were prevalent in 11 (92%) out of 12 White FSHOs. Overkill is also seen extensively in the actions of sadistic SHOs and can be utilized to fulfill sadistic fantasies, further humiliate the victim, as well as destroy evidence that could lead to the identification of the SHO (Chopin et al., 2020a; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Reale et al., 2020). Overkill was found in nine (75%) out of 12 White FSHOs. Five cases were solo White FSHOs, including Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Patricia Jennings, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright. In the case of Jodi Arias, she stabbed her male victim over two dozen times as he attempted to run from her before slitting his throat, severing his windpipe, and dragging his body back to the bathroom, where she shot him in the head. Overkill was found in four out of six partnered White FSHOs, including Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Brooke Rottiers, whose male victims were beaten, suffocated with women's underwear, rags, and plastic bags shoved in their mouths and throats, their mouths and noses were taped over with pink duct tape, and each were bound and hogtied with a had a multitude of bindings including telephone cords, vacuum cords, belts, women's panties, and a bra.

Prolonged death was established when the victim did not die quickly and instead suffered in great pain for an amount of time, from several minutes to months. Nine (75%) out of 12 White FSHOs inflicted torturous and prolonged deaths on their victims, including five out of six solo White FSHOs (Jodi Arias, Patricia Jennings, Taylor Schabusiness, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright) and four out of six partnered White FSHOs (Gertrude Baniszewski, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Brooke Rottiers). Susan Wright stabbed her male victim 193 times, including over 40 in his face and chest, and 7 to his genital area, with most of the wounds being superficial, causing substantial and prolonged pain. Gertrude Baniszewski and her partners tortured their 16-year-old female victim for months until she died as a result of extreme malnutrition, internal bleeding of the brain, and shock from excessive skin damage from over a hundred burn wounds, along with trauma to her vagina so severe it was nearly swollen shut.

***Post-crime Theme 1: Unsuccessfully employed forensic awareness strategies***

Forensic awareness strategies are tactics employed by offenders to evade police detection, including destroying or removing evidence, cleaning the scene, and relocating the body (Chopin et al., 2020a; Georgoulis et al., 2023). In this study, though, I noted both a pattern of employing forensic awareness strategies and a pattern of these strategies being unsuccessful. Nine (75%) out of 12 White FSHOs in this study were unsuccessful in employing forensic awareness strategies. Of that number, four were from the group of solo White FSHOs (Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Taylor Schabusiness, and Susan Wright) and five were from the group of partnered White FSHOs (Gertrude Baniszewski, Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Brooke Rottiers). In the case of Carol

Bundy, she decapitated her male victim so that police could not identify the bullets she used; however, she left the bullets' shell casings. In the case of Cynthia Coffman, she and her partner attempted to dispose of evidence by throwing a bag containing driver's licenses for both Coffman and the female victim, as well as identification papers for Coffman's partner and checks stolen from the victim near a trash can.

***Post-crime Theme 2: FSHO eventual confession/cooperation with investigation***

The emergence of this theme was unexpected yet prevalent throughout the case studies, as nine (75%) out of the 12 White FSHOs confessed to the sexual homicide. Of that number, five were solo White FSHOs (Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Taylor Schabusiness, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright) and four were partnered White FSHOs (Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams). Out of the five solo White FSHOs, four claimed self-defense against their male victim (Arias, Bundy, Shuler, and Wright), with two of that number (Arias and Wright) eventually using the defense of Battered Woman Syndrome in their trials. Of the four partnered White FSHOs who confessed and cooperated with the investigation, all four claimed they were abused or coerced by their partners and would also go on to use Battered Woman Syndrome as their defense at their trials.

**Research Question 2**

How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

**Table 4***Research Question 2: Emergent Themes*

Themes	Subthemes
Pre-crime	
Volatile intimate relationships	Volatile relationship with victim Volatile relationship with partner
Criminal behavior	No criminal history/lack of drug use Criminal history/drug use
Victim selection	Prior or current sexual relationship with older male victim Unknown younger female victims
Assertion of control	Consensual sex or promise of sex to establish control Hunted/lured and kidnapped victims
Crime	
Assertion of control over victim	Controlled victim with seduction Bound and intimidated victims with weapons
Assertion of control over environment	Killed/left victims in private residence Killed/dumped victims in rural, remote locations
Post-Crime	
Exposure of victims	Victims found totally or partially nude Victims found fully clothed
Contact with law enforcement	Attempted to divert suspicion by initiating contact with law enforcement No contact with law enforcement prior to apprehension

***Pre-crime Themes***

I found the greatest deviation in the behaviors of White FSHOs in the pre-crime stage of the crime committal process. These deviations may likely be due to the influence or involvement of the partners within that cohort. The most frequent differences that I observed were in the White FSHOs' volatile intimate relationships, their criminal and

drug use histories, the gender and age of their victims, and the manner in which they controlled their victims, as seen in the table below (Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Pre-crime: Theme/Subtheme*

Pre-crime: Theme/Subtheme	<i>n</i>	%
Theme 1: Volatile intimate relationships	12	100%
Subtheme 1A: Volatile relationship with victim	4	33%
Subtheme 1B: Volatile relationship with partner <sup>a</sup>	4	33%
Theme 2: Criminal behavior	12	100%
Subtheme 2A: No criminal history/lack of drug use	5	42%
Subtheme 2B: Criminal history/drug use	7	58%
Theme 3: Victim selection	12	100%
Subtheme 3A: Prior or current sexual relationship with male victim	6	50%
Subtheme 3B: Unknown younger female victim	4	33%
Theme 4: Assertion of control	12	100%
Subtheme 4A: Consensual sex or promise of sex to establish control	6	50%
Subtheme 4B: Hunted/lured and kidnapped victims	4	33%

<sup>a</sup> Partner in committing sexual homicide

***Pre-crime Theme 1: Volatile intimate relationships***

Throughout the analysis of data, a consistent pattern of intimate relationship instability began to emerge across both groups of White FSHOs. Many of these White FSHOs had histories of unstable relationships (92%). However, at the time of the murders, the unstable relationships were usually either with the victim (solo White FSHOs) or criminal partner (partnered White FSHOs). I explore these differences further in the subsequent subsections.

**Pre-crime Subtheme 1A: Volatile relationship with victim.** In the cases of solo White FSHOs included in this case study, four (67%) out of six experienced a volatile relationship with their victim. These offenders included Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Patricia Jennings, and Susan Wright. In the cases of Arias and Wright, both accused their male victims of being physically, sexually, and verbally abusive. In the case of Jennings, her male victim had commented to multiple people that Jennings was physically, verbally, and financially abusive towards him. Carol Bundy's male victim was a sexual partner who often would have sex with her when it suited him and frequently wanted money from her.

**Pre-crime Subtheme 1B: Volatile relationship with partner.** Included in the cases of partnered White FSHOs were four (67%) cases perpetrated with an intimate partner (Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams). The remaining two cases were outliers as one of the White FSHO's, Gertrude Baniszewski, partners were all minors from the ages of 12 to 17, with three being her own children. The other outlying case is Brooke Rottiers, who perpetrated her case with two partners, a Black male, four years older than she, and a Black female, four years younger than her. Of the White FSHOs, whose partners were male and intimate partners, Coffman, Neelley, and William's partners were substantially older, with age differences ranging from 6 to 11 years. Michaud was the only offender whose male intimate partner was younger, as she was two years older than he was.

***Pre-crime Theme 2: Criminal Behavior***

During the analysis of these cases, differences in prior criminal histories and drug use began to emerge between solo White FSHOs and partnered White FSHOs.

**Pre-crime Subtheme 2A: No criminal history/lack of drug use.** In five (83%) out of the six cases of solo White FSHOs (Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Patricia Jennings, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright), the offenders had no prior criminal history or drug use, nor were they using any substances during the committal of the murder. This is similar to findings on FHOs who often do not have a criminal record before the commission of the homicide (Santos-Hermoso et al., 2023). This also aligns with Heide's physical strength hypothesis, as four out of the five cases included men who were larger and stronger than the FSHO, and being under the influence of substances could have impaired her ability to control the victim and environment. The outlier case in this subtheme is Taylor Schabusiness, who had been arrested multiple times prior to the murder, had a history of methamphetamine use, and both she and her male victim were high on marijuana, methamphetamine, and Trazodone when she strangled him to death.

**Pre-crime Subtheme 2B: Criminal history/drug use.** Out of the partnered White FSHOs, four (67%) out of six had criminal histories (Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Brooke Rottiers), and five (83%) had a history of drug use, including Gertrude Baniszewski, Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Brooke Rottiers, and Charlene Williams. Interestingly, there seemed to be a correlation with methamphetamine use and criminal history, as the offenders who did not use methamphetamine, Baniszewski, who took phenobarbital pills, and Williams, who was an

alcoholic, had no prior arrests. This correlation is also seen in the only solo White FSHO with a criminal history, Taylor Schabus, mentioned in the prior section above.

***Pre-crime Theme 3: Victim selection***

The difference in the genders of the victims selected between solo White FSHOs and White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners was as expected, as scholars have found in prior studies on FSHOs that victims of solo acting FSHOs are almost always male, while victims of FSHOs acting with a male accomplice are almost always female (Chan and Frei, 2013). In this study, in the cases of solo White FSHOs, 100% of the victims were male, and in cases of partnered White FSHOs, 83% of the victims were female.

**Pre-crime Subtheme 3A: Prior or current sexual relationship with male victim.** While the gender of the solo White FSHOs' victims was consistent with prior research, the relationship with their victims was quite different. The solo White FSHO cases that I included in this study all had intimate relationships with their victims. These findings were dissimilar to prior research drawn from data entered by law enforcement into the SHR, which indicated most FSHOs knew their victims but were not intimate partners (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013). In particular, Chan and Frei (2013) found that intimate partners were the least reported victims of White FSHOs (15%). Similarly, Chan et al. (2024) found an even smaller number of intimate relationships in FSHOs at just 5%. However, in my study, I found that 100% of the solo White FSHOs had either a current or prior intimate relationship with their victim.

This conflicting data could be due to a number of different factors, including inaccurate reporting of crimes in the SHR, gender bias, racial bias, etc. A multitude of social and environmental factors could influence how law enforcement officers record sexual homicides in the SHR, including a lack of knowledge on sexual homicide criteria, a belief in a different motivation (such as financial), a belief that women are not capable of sexual homicide, a belief that White women do not commit sexual homicides, etc. However, there could also be a simpler and more crucial factor. In the United States Department of Justice's explanation on the SHR, it is stated that "the information provided on the SHR form reflects what agencies know based on their initial police investigation" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014, p. 2). When considering the results that I found in this study, including that the most commonly occurring themes for solo White FSHOs during their crimes were overkill (83%), torture/prolonged death (83%), and genital mutilation (67%), it is possible that the sexual aspects of FSHOs are identified at a later time in the investigation such as during the conduction of the autopsy, which occurs after the initial police investigation would have been submitted to the SHR.

Another interesting finding was that five (83%) out of six solo White FSHOs' male victims were older than the FSHOs. Arias's victim was three years older, Bundy's victim was eight years older, Jennings's victim was 33 years older, Shuler's victim was 18 years older, and Wright's victim was 8 years older. The only solo White FSHO whose victim was not older than her was Taylor Schabusbusiness, as she and her victim were the same age.

**Pre-crime Subtheme 3B: Unknown younger female victim.** Four (67%) out of the six cases of White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners had younger female victims who were strangers. These cases included Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams. In the cases of Coffman and Williams, their male partner chose the victims. In the cases of Michaud and Neelley, the choice of victim was either mutual or made by the FSHO. In the case of Gertrude Baniszewski, the victim was female as well, but was known to the offender as she was a boarder in Baniszewski's home. The ages of the female victims ranged from 13 years old to 34 years old, with a median age of 17. The only partnered White FSHO whose victims were male was Brooke Rottiers.

***Pre-crime Theme 4: Assertion of control***

As previously stated, I found assertion of control to be a key aspect in the behaviors of all the White FSHOs included in this study. The manner in which control was exerted changed depending on the victim's gender, the presence of a partner, and the environment. However, the methods of control were mostly homogeneous within the separate cohorts. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand how situational aspects of the crime's environment affect offenders' decision-making processes, with the rationality of decisions made by the SHO constrained by factors such as the availability of time, environment, and victim (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Chan, 2019).

**Pre-crime Subtheme 4A: Consensual sex or promise of sex to establish control.** A main theme of control that developed throughout my examination of the rational choices of solo White FSHOs was the use of seduction in a manner tantamount to

a weapon. Out of the six solo White FSHOs, five (83%) established initial control over their male victims with consensual sex or the promise of consensual sex. These cases included Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Taylor Schabusiness, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright. In the cases of Arias and Schabusiness, the FSHOs had consensual sexual intercourse with their victim prior to the murder (Arias) or the murder occurred during sexual intercourse (Schabusiness). In the cases of Bundy and Shuler, both performed oral sex on their victim immediately before killing them. In the case of Wright, candle wax found on the victim's genitals indicated sexual activity prior to the murder. The only solo White FSHO who did not have sexual activity with her victim was Patricia Jennings, whose male victim was eighty years old.

**Pre-crime Subtheme 4B: Hunted/lured and kidnapped victims.** In the cases of White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners, four (67%) out of six hunted, lured, and kidnapped their victims. These cases included Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams. In the cases of Coffman, Neelley, and Williams, they used a ruse and the trust that is naturally given to women to lure their victims to the vehicle where their partner waited to kidnap the victims at gunpoint. Michaud and her partner did not use a ruse and simply abducted their victim off the street. The two outlying cases were Gertrude Baniszewski and Brooke Rottiers, neither of whom kidnapped their victims.

### ***Crime Themes***

The deviation in crime scene behaviors that occurred between solo White FSHOs and partnered White FSHOs typically fell within the realm of control over both the victim

and the environment. A myriad of factors influenced these decisions of control; however, it became clear that solo White FSHOs preferred seduction and indoor privacy as control strategies, while White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners preferred restraining and threatening their victims with weapons, as well as dumping their victims' bodies in rural and remote locations (Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Crime: Theme/Subtheme*

Crime: Theme/Subtheme	<i>n</i>	%
Theme 1: Assertion of control over victim	12	100%
Subtheme 1A: Controlled victim with seduction	5	42%
Subtheme 1B: Bound and intimidated victims with weapons	7	58%
Theme 2: Assertion of control over environment	12	100%
Subtheme 2A: Killed/left victim in private residence	5	42%
Subtheme 2B: Killed/dumped victims in rural, remote locations	5	42%

***Crime Theme 1: Assertion of control over victim***

I found the control strategies employed by solo White FSHOs and partnered White FSHOs to be somewhat different from what was expected. Heide's (1993) physical strength hypothesis suggested that a larger victim in comparison to a smaller perpetrator would require the use of a less physically demanding weapon, such as a firearm, to control or kill the victim. However, the results from this study suggested otherwise.

**Crime Subtheme 1A: Controlled victim with seduction.** In the cases of solo White FSHOs, control over the victim was rooted in seduction and blitz attacks rather

than the use of firearms. Out of the six solo White FSHO cases, only three (50%) utilized a firearm (Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, and Lisa Shuler). Out of those three cases, in only one case was the firearm the sole weapon (Shuler). In contrast, five (83%) out of the six solo White FSHOs seduced their victim into a vulnerable position before conducting a blitz attack in which the victim was not able to fight back. These cases included Jodi Arias, Carol Bundy, Taylor Schabusiness, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright. Additionally, out of these six offenders, only one used restraints on her victim (Susan Wright); however, these restraints were applied only after the victim was naked in their bed and sexual activities had already taken place, making it possible that the victim allowed himself to be tied up willingly before Wright attacked him.

None of the solo White FSHOs intimidated or controlled their victims with weapons. The only outlier in this cohort was Patricia Jennings, though she did not restrain or threaten her victim with a weapon, as he was elderly and impaired from drugs intended to mimic symptoms of dementia. Though this is a small sample and not representative of a large sample of FSHOs, these findings suggest that the differentials in strength between FSHOs and their stronger male victims are more likely to be countered by seduction rather than firearms.

**Crime Subtheme 1B: Bound and intimidated victims with weapons.** Unlike solo White FSHOs, six (100%) out of six White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners used restraints, and five (83%) out of six (Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, Brooke Rottiers, and Charlene Williams) used weapons to intimidate and control victims. The restraints were usually applied when moving the victim or during

overnight stays. Out of this cohort, two partnered White FSHOs (Coffman and Neelley) used handcuffs on their victims, and four used varying types of ropes and cords (Baniszewski, Michaud, Rottiers, and Williams).

***Crime Theme 2: Assertion of control over environment***

When analyzing White FSHOs, it is important to approach each sexual homicide crime scene from a situational perspective which allows investigators to explore the process of rational choices that led to how the body was disposed of and whether or not external conditions, such as time constraints or being interrupted, influenced the post-crime body disposal (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007; Chopin et al., 2020). This is particularly true in identifying differences in how a solo White FSHO controls the environment of the murder compared to how this control is exerted in cases of White FSHOs acting with one or partners.

**Crime Subtheme 2A: Killed/left victim in private residence.** The cases in this study resembled female-perpetrated homicide in that FHOs usually kill their victims within a home, in the afternoon, and with no witnesses present (Moen et al., 2016; Nagata et al., 2016; Santos-Hermoso, 2023; Sea et al., 2017; Trägårdh et al., 2016). Four (67%) out of six solo White FSHOs killed their victim in a home, including Jodi Arias, Taylor Schabusiness, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright, though only Arias killed her victim in the afternoon. Additionally, out of these four offenders, Arias and Schabusiness killed their victims in the victims' residence, while Shuler and Wright killed their victims in their own homes, though Wright and her victim both lived in the home. Out of the other two solo White FSHOs, both killed their victims in private locations, though not residences,

as Carol Bundy killed her victim in the victim's van, and Patricia Jennings killed her victim in a motel.

**Crime Subtheme 2B: Killed/dumped victims in rural, remote locations.** Out of the six partnered White FSHOs, five (83%), Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, Brooke Rottiers, and Charlene Williams, dumped their victims' bodies in rural, remote locations. The victims of three of these offenders (Coffman, Neelley, and Williams) were killed and left at the remote location, while Michaud and Rottiers's victims were killed at motels before being dumped in a remote location. The outlier was Gertrude Baniszewski, who killed her victim in her home. Interestingly, the three partnered White FSHOs who were the decision makers of their partnerships (Michaud, Rottiers, and Baniszewski) made choices in the murder location that were more aligned with the behaviors of the solo FSHOs, suggesting that killing victims in remote outdoor locations can be more attributed to the rational choices of the MSHO within the partnership than the FSHOs.

### ***Post-crime Themes***

A crucial aspect to examine in White FSHOs' post-crime commission process is the state in which the victim's body is left and the interaction with law enforcement afterward. I found these emergent patterns demonstrated key behavioral divergence between solo and partnered White FSHOs (Table 7).

**Table 7***Post-crime: Theme/Subtheme*

Post-crime: Theme/Subtheme	<i>n</i>	%
Theme 1: Exposure of victim	12	100%
Subtheme 1A: Victim found totally or partially nude	7	58%
Subtheme 1B: Victim found fully clothed	5	42%
Theme 2: Contact with law enforcement	12	100%
Subtheme 2A: Attempted to divert suspicion by initiating contact with law enforcement	5	42%
Subtheme 2B: No contact with law enforcement prior to apprehension	6	50%

***Post-crime Theme 1: Exposure of victim***

The manner in which a victim's body was left differed greatly between solo White FSHOs and White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. This divergence can most often be attributed to the male partner's influence in decisions made during the crime committal process, as well as the difference in how males and females perpetrate sexual attacks. In cases where the female victims were sexually assaulted by the male partners, the victims were found clothed because the sex act and the murder took place at different stages in the crime committal process. Whereas the FSHOs used sex as a control strategy, and it was therefore an integral part of the homicide, leading to their victims being found totally or partially nude.

**Post-crime Subtheme 1A: Victim found totally or partially nude.** Within the cohort of solo White FSHOs, six (100%) out of six of these offenders' victims were found totally nude or partially nude. Four (67%) out of six left their victims totally nude

(Jodi Arias, Patricia Jennings, Taylor Schabusiness, and Susan Wright). Despite this, in only one case (Jennings) was the victim openly displayed. In two of the six cases of solo White FSHOs, the victims were found partially nude. These cases were those of Carol Bundy and Lisa Shuler, who killed their victim immediately after performing oral sex on them. As stated above, this demonstrates the interconnectivity of sex, control, and murder.

**Post-crime Subtheme 1B: Victim found fully clothed.** The victims were found fully clothed in five (83%) out of the six cases of White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. These cases included Gertrude Baniszewski, Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams. It is noteworthy that the only victims from the cohort of partnered White FSHOs that were found nude were the two victims of Brooke Rottiers, both of whom were male, suggesting that the gender of the victims greatly influenced the way their body was disposed of.

***Post-crime Theme 2: Contact with law enforcement***

Contact with law enforcement was another emergent pattern that demonstrated differences between solo White FSHOs and partnered White FSHOs, again pointing to the influence of male partners within the second cohort of White FSHOs.

**Post-crime Subtheme 2A: Attempted to divert suspicion by initiating contact with law enforcement.** Within the cases of solo White FSHOs, four (67%) out of six initiated contact with law enforcement in an attempt to divert suspicion. These offenders were Jodi Arias, Patricia Jennings, Lisa Shuler, and Susan Wright. Specifically, in the cases of Shuler and Wright, they initiated contact with law enforcement by reporting that

their victim had assaulted them. In the case of Wright, a warrant was even issued for the arrest of her victim after he was already dead. The manner in which solo White FSHOs interact with law enforcement post-crime demonstrated that this behavior was, at times, employed as a forensic awareness strategy. The outliers were Carol Bundy and Taylor Schabusiness, who still cooperated with the investigation and gave full confessions.

**Post-crime Subtheme 2B: No contact with law enforcement prior to apprehension.** Within the cohort of partnered White FSHOs, four (67%) out of six had no contact with law enforcement prior to their apprehension. These offenders were Cynthia Coffman, Michelle Michaud, Brooke Rottiers, and Charlene Williams. Gertrude Baniszewski was an outlier, as she contacted law enforcement when her victim died; however, this was most likely only due to her victim's body being in her home, as she did not confess or cooperate with the investigation. Finally, while Judith Neelley did contact law enforcement prior to her apprehension, it was not to divert suspicion but rather to taunt investigators. Neelley was the only White FSHO out of the total 12 who sought power and control from taunting investigators. Neelley was also the youngest out of all the White FSHOs in this study at 18 years old.

### **Summary**

Within this study, I examined emergent patterns of behaviors across the crime committal process of 12 White FSHOs, six of whom were solo White FSHOs and six of whom were White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. After collecting publicly available primary and secondary data for each case, I analyzed the data to determine the

formation of codes that could be grouped into larger themes directly addressing the research questions.

RQ1: What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

Themes that I generated from the analysis of the patterns of behavior exhibited by White FSHOs during their crime committal process included one theme for pre-crime: intra-racial victim selection; one theme for crime: assertion of control with two subthemes: sexually sadistic acts and overkill/prolonged death; and two themes for post-crime: unsuccessfully employed forensic awareness strategies and FSHO's eventual confession/cooperation with investigation.

RQ2: How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

Themes that I generated from the analysis of the differing patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process between solo White FSHOs and White FSHOs who act with one or more partners included four themes for pre-crime: volatile intimate relationships, criminal behavior, victim selection, and assertion of control; two themes for crime: assertion of control over victim and assertion of control over environment; and two themes for post-crime: exposure of victim and contact with law enforcement. For each of these themes, I generated two subthemes, one for solo White FSHOs and one for White FSHOs with one or more partners, to establish how the themes were presented in the two different cohorts.

My findings on White FSHOs from this study were, at times, dissimilar to the understanding of FSHOs that has been established through quantitative data analysis. Though my study was conducted on only a small sample of White FSHOs from the United States, it has revealed that solo White FSHOs' victims may be intimate partners more often than originally known and that seduction was used as a weapon of control more frequently than firearms. Additionally, the most prevalent patterns across the 12 case studies were the presence of overkill and torture in direct correlation to the sexual aspects of the homicide. My analysis of the findings from this study revealed that control asserted throughout the crime committal process is a key component of the behaviors of White FSHOs.

I present the conclusion to this study in Chapter 5, where I will discuss the overall findings of this research and the potential and limitations for future research on these unique offenders. Additionally, I detail the potential benefits for positive social change from the findings of this study in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore emergent patterns of behavior discovered throughout the crime committal process of White FSHOs. The crime committal process refers to the consideration of a crime as an entire event, including pre-crime, crime, and post-crime stages (Chan, 2019; Chopin & Beauregard, 2019c). This method of analysis has been used in more recent research on sexual homicide as it provides a contextual and situational understanding of SHOs' actions during each stage of their crime (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023b; Georgoulis et al., 2023; Schlesinger, 2021). Discerning behavioral patterns from the crime committal process of White FSHOs could provide new knowledge of these offenders' actions and behaviors, including premeditation, method of homicide, sexual elements, indications of sadism, crime scene behaviors, mutilation of the victim's body, and forensic awareness strategies.

I used a qualitative, descriptive case study design to examine the crime committal process of White FSHOs. Using a descriptive case study design enables researchers to narrate and examine real-world situations, allowing them to observe and evaluate patterns that may be present (Schoch, 2020; Shanahan et al., 2018). A descriptive case study approach was particularly appropriate for this study as it is best utilized in the early stages of research (Benbasat et al., 1987). Unlike most qualitative designs that focus on interviewing and observing active participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I did not include interviews or interaction with live participants for several reasons. First, the cases included in this study were bracketed into a period of the last 100 years. Therefore, some

of the individuals analyzed in this study are no longer living and, consequently, cannot be interviewed. Secondly, access to the remaining incarcerated individuals was not likely and was not attempted. Therefore, the data I collected was from archival sources, including court documents, police reports, documentaries, news articles, peer-reviewed articles, and scholarly books. Triangulation, the collection of data from multiple sources, enables further data verification and the management of potential bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patnaik & Pandey, 2019; Yin, 2009). I manually collected and coded the data for this qualitative study to allow for the emergence of patterns throughout my analysis of the offenders' crime committal process.

To address the gap in the literature regarding patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process of FSHOs, I analyzed 12 cases of White FSHOs, six solo White FSHOs, and six White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. By analyzing the emergent patterns of behavior, across the crime committal process of all 12 White FSHOs, I was able to develop one theme for pre-crime: intra-racial victim selection; one theme for crime: assertion of control with two subthemes: sexually sadistic acts and overkill/prolonged death; and two themes for post-crime: unsuccessfully employed forensic awareness strategies and FSHO's eventual confession/cooperation with investigation. When examining behavioral differences between solo and partnered White FSHOs, I generated five to 12 cohort-specific codes across the crime committal process of both solo White FSHOs and partnered White FSHOs. These codes led to my formation of four themes for pre-crime: volatile intimate relationships, criminal behavior, victim selection, and assertion of control; two themes for crime: assertion of control over

victim and assertion of control over environment; and two themes for post-crime: exposure of victim and contact with law enforcement. For each of these themes, two subthemes were generated: one for solo White FSHOs and one for partnered White FSHOs, to examine how the themes were presented differently in the two cohorts.

The research questions in this study were:

RQ1: What patterns of behavior are exhibited by White female sexual homicide offenders during their crime committal process?

RQ2: How do the patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process differ between solo White female sexual homicide offenders and White female sexual homicide offenders who act with one or more partners?

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The development of the modern understanding of sexual homicide became most prominent in the 1970s and 1980s with the formation of the FBI Behavioral Science Unit (now known as the Behavioral Analysis Unit), whose members began to conduct interviews of incarcerated serial and solo SHOs. Since that time, knowledge and research on sexual homicides and SHOs have slowly begun to expand. In particular, scholars have discovered the presence of heterogeneous subgroups within the category of sexual homicide (Chopin & Beauregard, 2019b; Chopin & Beauregard, 2020b; Proulx et al., 2018).

In 2013, the first studies on FSHOs were published by Chan and Frei, and Chan et al. Since then, only four further studies have been published on these offenders. Out of all of these studies, five were conducted in the United States (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013;

Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013) and one in Scotland (Skott et al., 2019). Through these studies, the researchers provided critical statistical knowledge on the demographics of FSHOs, their victims, and the characteristics of their crimes. However, these studies have all been quantitative analyses of these offenders and, as such, scholars have not been able to examine FSHOs from a contextual perspective.

Due to the lack of knowledge of the behavioral and decision-making patterns of FSHOs, I employed a descriptive case study analysis based on rational choice theory to examine archival data on the crime committal processes of 12 White FSHOs separated into two cohorts: six solo White FSHOs and six White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners. For all 12 cases of White FSHOs, my analysis generated one theme for pre-crime: intra-racial victim selection; one theme for crime: assertion of control with two subthemes: sexually sadistic acts and overkill/prolonged death; and two themes for post-crime: unsuccessfully employed forensic awareness strategies and FSHO's eventual confession/cooperation with investigation. Cohort-specific analysis of the six solo White FSHOs and the six partnered White FSHOs generated four themes for pre-crime: volatile intimate relationships, criminal behavior, victim selection, and assertion of control; two themes for crime: assertion of control over victim and assertion of control over environment; and two themes for post-crime: exposure of victim and contact with law enforcement.

My findings of intra-racial victim selection aligned with prior findings that most White FSHOs kill intra-racially (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2024; Skott et al., 2019). However, my findings also revealed that the only two female victims of opportunity were

both non-whites. Furthermore, the third White FSHO who killed inter-racially was the only partnered White FSHO who killed men and the only partnered White FSHO whose partners were non-white. My results indicate previously unknown racial preferences of White FSHOs and how rational choice influences those preferences.

The differences in victim gender selection between solo White FSHOs and White FSHOs who acted with one or more partners were as expected, as researchers have found in prior studies on FSHOs that victims of solo acting FSHOs are almost always male, while victims of FSHOs acting with a male accomplice are almost always female (Chan & Frei, 2013). For my study, in the cases of solo White FSHOs, 100% of the victims were male, and in cases of partnered White FSHOs, 83% of the victims were female. Additionally, 83% of the solo White FSHOs had no prior criminal history or drug use, nor were they using any substances during the committal of the murder. This is similar to scholars' findings on FHOs who often do not have a criminal record before the commission of the homicide (Santos-Hermoso et al., 2023). This also aligns with Heide's physical strength hypothesis, as four out of the six solo cases included male victims who were larger and stronger than the FSHO and being under the influence of substances could have impaired the FSHO's ability to control the victim and environment.

I found the establishment of control to be a critical aspect of the crime committal process of White FSHOs. My findings regarding the manifestation of this control, however, were somewhat dissimilar to expectations based upon previous research. Heide's physical strength hypothesis asserts that female offenders will often use less physically demanding weapons to control male victims; however, I found that none of the

solo White FSHOs intimidated or controlled their victims with weapons. Instead, five (83%) out of six used seduction to control their male victims. Furthermore, only three (50%) out of the six solo White FSHOs used firearms, and out of these three, only one used a firearm as their only weapon, whereas knives were used in four (67%) of the six. My findings challenge previous quantitative analyses on FSHOs in which scholars found that these offenders are more likely to choose firearms as their method of murder (Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2019a; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013).

Additionally, while my findings on the gender of the solo White FSHOs' victims were consistent with prior research, the relationship with their victims was quite different. The solo White FSHOs who were included in this study all had intimate relationships with their victims. These findings were dissimilar to prior research that scholars drew from data entered by law enforcement into the SHR, which indicated most FSHOs knew their victims but were not intimate partners (Chan et al., 2013; Chan et al., 2024; Chan & Frei, 2013). In particular, Chan and Frei (2013) found that intimate partners were the least reported victims of White FSHOs (15%). Similarly, Chan et al. (2024) found an even smaller number of intimate relationships in FSHOs at just 5%. However, in my study, I found that 100% of my cases of solo White FSHOs had either a current or prior intimate relationship with their victim.

My findings also challenge the understanding of sexually sadistic acts and how these acts are usually emphasized in connection with sexual arousal based on prior studies of MSHOs. This understanding of sexual deviance does not consider how these behaviors manifest in the actions of FSHOs. In this study, I found a connection between

assertion of control, sexually sadistic acts, torture, and overkill that was present across all 12 cases of White FSHOs. Within the 12 cases, I found that assertion of control without a weapon was established by either seduction or luring the victim in 75% of the White FSHOs. Through the findings of my study, I also revealed that out of the 12 White FSHOs, 92% committed sexually sadistic acts, 75% tortured their victim, and 75% committed overkill. My findings reveal previously unknown behavioral patterns exhibited by White FSHOs throughout their crime-committal process.

Finally, in the post-crime behaviors of White FSHOs, I noted two patterns of behavior. The first pattern I identified was the use of unsuccessful forensic awareness strategies, which were present in 75% of the cases included in this study. Forensic awareness strategies are tactics employed by offenders to evade police detection, including destroying or removing evidence, cleaning the scene, and relocating the body (Chopin et al., 2020a; Georgoulis et al., 2023). Additionally, I found that 75% of White FSHOs included in my study confessed to the sexual homicide, with the most prevalent assertions being those of either self-defense against the victim or coercion by a partner. The findings from my study provide insight into how rational choice affects the behaviors of White FSHOs throughout their crime committal process.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Within my study, several limitations were present. One prevalent limitation of my study was the lack of live participants. My ability to interview FSHOs in person was not likely, as some are incarcerated, some have already passed, and some have been released from prison and have changed their names. Therefore, the data that I collected for my

study were from primary sources, including publicly available court documents, police records, state inmate information, video recordings of trials, and documentaries featuring interviews with investigators, forensic analysts, and pathologists who worked on the case. The secondary sources of data that I collected included newspaper articles from the time period of the murders, which detailed trial testimony; more recently published online articles; books written by subject matter experts; and peer-reviewed articles. Additional limitations included conflicting information found in some sources; however, I mitigated this issue through meticulous triangulation to ensure that I included the most accurate information in this study.

My role as researcher, data collector, analyzer, coder, and presenter was also a limitation specific to qualitative studies, as it increased the likelihood of human error (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I managed this by reviewing all data three times and continuously checking for accuracy in the emergence and reporting of themes.

An unexpected limitation was that some appellant court documents lacked a thorough background on case information, while others provided a detailed description of each aspect of the cases. I managed this limitation by rigorously searching for data from other primary sources or secondary sources, such as newspapers from the time period of the murders, which provided thorough reporting of trial testimony. I then triangulated this data to ensure accuracy.

There are also several limitations caused by the cases included in this study. My study consisted of a small sample size of FSHOs; therefore, the results I found may not be transferable to the larger population of FSHOs. Additionally, my study was limited to

White FSHOs, so the results may not be generalizable to populations of FSHOs of other races or ethnicities. Finally, the White FSHOs included in my study are limited to cases from the United States; therefore, my results may not be transferable to FSHOs from other countries.

### **Recommendations**

Throughout this study, I examined emergent patterns of behavior exhibited by White FSHOs during their crime committal process. When organizing my fact sheets, I included sections for the White FSHOs' development and trial stages. As I began to form my themes, I realized that not all patterns were congruent with behaviors directly linked to the crime committal process; therefore, they were not included in my analysis. Developmental patterns included a volatile relationship with their mother, a lack of higher education, having children who did not live with them, and prior divorces and separations. Patterns that emerged during solo FSHOs' trials included claiming self-defense against the victim and denigrating and humiliating the victim's character in court. A pattern that emerged during partnered FSHOs' trials included claiming to have been abused, threatened, and coerced by their partner into committing the sexual homicide despite overwhelming evidence of active participation. Finally, a pattern that emerged across both solo and partnered White FSHOs' trials was the use of Battered Women Syndrome as a defense. Future researchers may benefit from exploring emergent patterns in FSHOs' developmental and trial stages.

Particularly, future research could examine the psychology of women who use Battered Woman Syndrome as a defense when their victim is their alleged batterer versus

women who use this syndrome as a defense when their alleged batterer is their criminal partner. In three out of the six cases that used this defense (Jodi Arias, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams), the FSHOs were known to be highly intelligent. In five out of these six cases (Jodi Arias, Susan Wright, Cynthia Coffman, Judith Neelley, and Charlene Williams), the FSHOs were considered attractive by the media. This could indicate a link between the use of Battered Woman Syndrome as a defense, a high level of intelligence, and attractiveness that could be further explored, particularly in conjunction with the race of the offender.

Additionally, scholars might benefit from examining the sentences that White FSHOs receive in comparison to FSHOs of other races in future studies. As of spring 2025, there are 27 White women, ten Black women, five Latina women, two Asian women, and one Native American woman on death row in the United States (Legal Defense Fund, 2025). The higher number of White women could be attributed to the fact that out of the 34 states with inmates on death row, the highest percentage of offender/victim races in 33 of those states were White offender/White victim. In 19 of those states, the second-highest percentage of offender/victim races was Black offender/White victim (Legal Defense Fund, 2025). This could indicate a racial bias in favor of White victims in the criminal justice system, and, since FHOs usually kill intra-racially, could account for the higher number of White females on death row. Additionally, a racial bias in favor of White victims could potentially manifest in the inaccurate reporting of FSHOs of color in the SHR, as less attention might be paid to

their victims, who are likely also of color. Recommendations to address this potential bias are given below.

A limitation in accessing accurate and detailed information on FSHOs in the United States is the data collected in the FBI's SHR database. While this database is useful for general statistics, it cannot collect data on subgroups of SHOs, such as FSHOs, in a uniform manner. Of particular note is that data submitted to the SHR is solely at the discretion of individual law enforcement offices, based upon the initial police investigation, and does not include information identified at a later time in the investigation such as during the conduction of the autopsy (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; Chan, 2021; Chan et al., 2019a; Skott et al., 2019). This can be especially detrimental to the identification and collection of data regarding FSHOs as my study has found that the most commonly occurring themes for solo White FSHOs during their crimes were overkill (83%), torture/prolonged death (83%), and genital mutilation (67%), all of which may not be known until after an autopsy is conducted.

One recommendation that I have to address this lack of information is to form a database similar to the Sexual Homicide International Database (SHIELD) that collects data on SHOs in France and Canada. The data on these offenders and their crimes is entered into SHIELD by expert crime analysts specializing in the coding of violent crimes (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023; Kim et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2022). When entering data into SHIELD, analysts utilize 126 variables to collect information on offenders, victims, and the crime-commission process that is gathered from reports of the investigation, interviews with offenders, autopsy reports, reports by forensic psychologists, and reports

by forensic scientists (Chopin & Beauregard, 2023; Sun et al., 2022). The formation of a database with this magnitude of information on SHOs in the United States could significantly advance our knowledge of these unique and under-researched offenders.

Another recommendation I propose to address potentially unreliable data obtained from the SHR is to research how data is entered into the SHR at local levels. This could be accomplished by visiting multiple counties within each state, collecting data, and then providing education and training. An example of this type of project could involve the following: providing local law enforcement officers with sample cases comprised of just the initial police report, which is what SHR reports are based upon, that include both non-sexual and sexual homicide cases, comprised of offenders and victims of different genders and races, and asking the officers to fill out SHR forms for each case. This could provide knowledge on the accuracy of sexual homicide identification at a local level, as well as how gender and racial bias influence the identification of sexual homicides within the SHR. The officers could then be provided with additional case information, such as autopsy and forensic reports, and asked if this information would have changed any aspects of how they filled out the SHR form. This could assist researchers in determining whether the most prominent aspects of SHOs, particularly FSHOs, are revealed after the initial police report and if that affects the accuracy of the information reported in the SHR. Education and training could then be provided as the second half of this project to ensure that local law enforcement officers understand how to identify sexual homicides and report them in the SHR. Additionally, similar training could be administered on the federal level. Conducting research and providing education and training simultaneously

can promote positive social change while ensuring that law enforcement's valuable time and resources are not wasted.

### **Implications**

The impact of gender on the study and reporting of FSHOs is deeply rooted in societal expectations and understanding of gender roles as they relate to violent and sexual crimes. In their study on FSHOs using data obtained through the FBI's SHR database, Chan et al. (2013) noted that the social understanding of sexual homicide could impact law enforcement officers' coding of a female-perpetrated homicide as sexual in the SHR. The authors theorized that issues with the classification of sexual homicide, as well as society's reluctance to view women as either violent or sexual offenders, could all play a part in the reporting of FSHOs. Therefore, understanding FSHOs as their own subgroup of SHOs is important culturally, socially, and academically.

The most prevalent patterns that I found across the 12 cases of White FSHOs included in this study were the presence of control, overkill, and torture in direct correlation to the sexual aspects of the homicide. My analysis of the findings from this study has revealed that control asserted throughout the crime committal process is a key component of White FSHOs' behaviors; however, the manner in which control is asserted differs from that of prior research. This was especially prevalent in my findings on the use of seduction rather than weapons to control victims. Identifying less overt patterns of behavior that occur during the crime committal process of FSHOs could aid in a better understanding and more accurate reporting of these offenders. This could, in turn, expand the knowledge of these unique offenders for those in the forensic fields and law

enforcement, potentially aiding in investigative strategies such as prioritization of suspects using offender profiling (Chan et al., 2024).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine emergent patterns of behavior exhibited during the crime committal process of White FSHOs. After I conducted a descriptive case study analysis, I found that the data confirmed some of what was previously known about FSHOs, including racial and gender aspects of victim selection. However, data that I gleaned on the intimate relationships between solo White FSHOs and their male victims, as well as the lack of firearm prevalence, conflicted with prior quantitative findings. The core foundation of a sexual assault is power and control, and that was by far the most common theme that I found throughout the crime committal process of these White FSHOs.

Through the findings of my study, it became evident that most solo White FSHOs commit homicide within the context of sex, limiting the need to assert control through the use of physical force, restraints, or weapons. One difference between MSHOs and FSHOs is in how power and control are established. In the cases of partnered White FSHOs, the MSHO established that power and control physically, by abducting, threatening with a weapon, and binding the victim. In contrast, both solo and partnered FSHOs were able to get male and female victims to accompany them willingly. It was not until the FSHOs had their victims in a vulnerable position that they would attack. Finally, the White FSHOs exerted their control over their victims in exceptionally violent and sexually degrading manners. My study adds to scholars' prior understanding that sexual

homicide, analyzed from a contextual perspective, is essential for researchers and investigators. Therefore, the knowledge gained from my study can aid researchers and law enforcement in forming a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of FSHOs.

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