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SERIAL MURDER: MOTIVE AND MEANING

by

Candice Ann Skrapec

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Criminal Justice in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

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Abstract

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by

Candice Ann Skrapec

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The research was a phenomenological study of five incarcerated serial murderers. Departing from a traditional clinical approach in terms of diagnostic categorizations of serial killers, this study examined the thesis that serial murder is more fundamentally a pathology of self process and that such pathology is revealed in terms of the murderer's personal construction of meaning regarding himself and his experiences. Five incarcerated serial murderers were interviewed, in depth, in terms of the aspects of their lives, their world view, and their crimes *that they experienced as meaningful*. Themes which bear upon the motivation to kill repeatedly, and the meaning of the repeated acts of killing to the murderers themselves were examined as they emerged from semi-structured interviews. Pathologies of self process centering on personal boundaries and the search for authenticity, formative development, and integrity of the self suggest a theoretical framework by which the pathological elements of self process of serial murderers may be understood. Three dominant themes emerged from the data as they specifically related to the series of killings perpetrated by these subjects: (1) a pronounced and distorted sense of entitlement, whereby subjects tended not to perceive themselves as victimizers, but rather as victims; (2) empowerment deriving from total control and possession of victims; and (3) a perverse quest for vitality that related to their personal relationships with life and death (and their respective equivalents). Specifically, serial murder may represent a means of reconstituting the self to restore the experience of vitality

for these individuals. Data are discussed relative to what, in these subjects, appears to be a profound aberration regarding emotional meanings—in the sense of what may be described as “emotional homonyms.” Knowledge of the underlying motivations for and the meaning of the repeated acts of killing will inform our ways of thinking about serial murder. Although serial murder is both an extreme and rare phenomenon, learning about the serial killer is to learn about human potentialities. It brings into sharper relief the violent society in which it resides.

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I am a most fortunate student of human behavior in that I have been blessed with a dissertation committee, constituted and then reconstituted, with scholars who genuinely care about the process of learning. In the beginning, before his retirement from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Irving Guller played an active role as a committee member during the stages of developing the proposal for the research. Charles Bahn was also with us from the committee's inception and contributed much to the formulation of ideas around this project. I recall my enthusiasm when I learned that he had read some of Kazimierz Dabrowski's work—a psychologist whom I believe most of us have “missed” in our formal education in personality psychology. Dr. Bahn was in Israel as the “deadline” loomed for defending the dissertation, but his support for this research continued through our New York-California telephone discussions about the data.

In the end, my committee was reconstituted to add James Levine, Executive Officer of the Ph.D. Program in Criminal Justice of The City University of New York and Barbara Raffel Price, Dean of Graduate Studies of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Dr. Levine was always there with the supportive words and guidance I needed in order to persevere. As the eleventh hour approached, he helped me get back on the horse yet one more time, and rode alongside me to the finish line. Dr. Price, probably more than anyone, is responsible for my move to New York City to enter the Ph.D. Program in Criminal Justice in the Fall of 1984. How fitting it is that she would become a member of my final committee—and at a time when she herself was preparing for her retirement from John Jay College.

From Robert Jay Lifton, my mentor, I learned that how to think about a problem is as important as what to think about it. And that the best research is the product not only of scientific rigor, but of passionate commitment. He is a wonderful teacher and most important thinker in our time: himself the consummate protean student. It is perhaps his belief in our ability to overcome our own violent potential that is most inspiring. I am humbled by the unwavering belief he demonstrated in me through the extended process of completing this dissertation.

As a recipient of the 1989-1990 "Distinguished Scholar Dissertation Fellowship" I am grateful to The Graduate School of The City University of New York for the \$10,000 award which enabled me to conduct this research.

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I wish to also acknowledge my appreciation to the subjects of this study—the five men who permitted me probing access to their experience of the crimes they perpetrated, their personal histories and world views. In the summer of 1990, they became my teachers.

I am indebted to my dear friend and colleague, Bill Tillier. The hours and hours of thinking and talking together over the years contributed immeasurably to

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved Uncle Vic (McEachern) who passed away four months before its defense. He, with my dear Aunt Minnie, were unfailing in their support and encouragement of my many years of higher education—never questioning the long and varied path I chose ultimately leading to this point. I much regret that he is not here to share in the completion of this work. Yet I know that wherever he is now, he knows it is done, and is very proud.

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I. THE PROBLEM

"After a little while I just couldn't tell whether she was stabbed or I was ripping her coat. I wasn't going to rape her or take her money. I was only going to kill her. That's all."

—"Son of Sam" killer, David Berkowitz¹

This from the man who went on to kill six people and wound seven others with his .44 calibre Bulldog handgun.

"Your friend got smart with me. . . But I never hit her. I killed her but I didn't hit her."

—the "Co-Ed Killer," Edmund Emil Kemper III²

Kemper—intellectually brilliant, articulate, and lucid—shot his grandparents when he was 15 years old and then killed and mutilated eight women in California between May 7, 1972 and April 21, 1973. One of these victims was his mother. Some were cannibalized. With most he performed sex acts with various parts of the corpses.

What are we to make of this, if indeed, it can be understood at all? How might we understand the fact of one human being killing another not as an act of apparent necessity but as a crime? There are a variety of circumstances that tend to make murder an "understandable" act; its motive comprehensible. In contrast,

¹David Abrahamsen. (1985). Confessions of Son of Sam. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 89.

²Imre Horvath. (Producer/Director). (1984). Murder: No Apparent Motive. Rainbow Broadcasting Company.

in serial murder where a number of people are killed over time, the often vicious and mutilative despoiling of victims done before, during, and after the actual killing renders it “senseless.” This may be because such atrocities seem incomprehensible to those who do not engage in them. But are they?

There are, undoubtedly, would-be serial killers who become aroused at the thought of killing others in particular and perhaps elaborate ways. But for these individuals, there is a line, however thin, which they take care not to cross. They experience the urge but guard against releasing it. There are others for whom the margin of safety is more tenuous. Others who allow themselves to “test the waters” to varying degrees—to engage in the fantasy of murder and even act out selected scenes with unknowing partners. Their partners rarely hold the entire script but remain safe because of the self-imposed constraints of the actor. Perhaps most unsettling is the thought that many of us have harbored undisclosed or subconscious leanings towards murder. Is it essentially a matter of degree which separates us from those who murder? Is there something about the serial killer that makes him³ categorically different from us?

Immediately following his conviction for the series of eight murders Edmund Kemper granted an exclusive interview with a veteran crime-reporter. He challenged her for not asking the questions he had thought would be asked of him: “What is it like to have sex with a dead body? . . . What does it feel like to sit on your living room couch and look over and see two decapitated girls’ heads on the arms of the couch?” Not waiting for a response from her he answers his own

³The masculine pronoun “he” and its derivatives will be used throughout this study in place of “he/she.” This is not because all perpetrators of serial murder are male, for indeed they are not, but rather to facilitate the flow of the document.

question. “The first time, it makes you sick to your stomach.”⁴ Kemper is telling us that we are not asking the right questions. I think he is right, and this dissertation is my response.

“If the only tool we have is a hammer, all problems begin to look like nails.”

—Martin Luther King

A. THE NATURE AND RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

The conscience of humanity demands that the taking of one human life by another be understood. Human beings are essentially distinguished from other life forms in terms of their ability to develop culture. Implicit in this notion is our sociability. Human beings have, at once, the capacity to behave in prosocial and antisocial ways—two dimensions that are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it may be the result of protective or humanitarian motives that one individual kills another. The act of taking another's life may thus be “understandable”—and acceptable—in terms of its apparent utility. Killing does not always involve criminal, violent, aggressive, or intentional acts. Killing someone in self-defense or in the context of war are examples of comprehensible killing. There are, however, other kinds of killing for which no such understanding and acceptance can be ascribed. Serial murder stands as a notable example in this regard.

Are serial murderers—essentially, people who kill a number of people over time—ordinary people committing extraordinary deeds? Is there something intrinsically aberrant about them that leads them to kill repeatedly? In either case the series of murders they perpetrate are testimony of their ingenuity,

⁴Marj von Beroldingen. (1974, Mar.). *Front Page Detective*.

cruelty, and self indulgence, each a facet of the human condition. As I interviewed the men who had killed I was impressed by many things: the kind of intellect each of them possessed; their sense of humor; their apparent ordinariness. They eat breakfast like the rest of us.

How is it that some people become serial murderers? Is it a matter of transformation: essentially good people gone bad—from human being to human anathema? Or is it more a matter of progression, implying the serial murderer began as bad seed, germinating into destructive agent. The ideas of transformation and progression require that we examine the interaction of the individual with specific elements of his external world. As a matter of ontological development, we are required to become patient observers, remaining vigilant and open to incorporating all manner of personal variables into the serial murderer equation.

Serial murder has been examined and interpreted as an objective event; not as a subjective experience. On occasion we hear from serial murderers themselves through media “sound bites” that are attributed to them as they are processed through the criminal justice system. There are studies of individual serial killers that describe and seek to understand their behavior under the terms of an established paradigm. Psychologists and psychiatrists, for example, apply their clinical acumen and psychometric batteries to apprehended serial murderers as their primary means of inquiry. Sociogenic criminologists and anthropologists frame their examinations in terms of demographic variables, social processes, and other social constructions. Biogenic research is examining the biological underpinnings of the homicidally-aggressive behaviors of serial murderers.

What is learned from these studies furthers our knowledge about the phenomenon of serial homicide. But the conventional approaches neglect a critical aspect of the phenomenon. They take us no closer to the internal experience of the murders for the murderer himself. What has gone essentially unnoticed by researchers is the first-person, lived-meaning of killing a number of people over time. This dissertation is a phenomenological inquiry into serial murder in the sense that it seeks to learn how serial murderers experience their murders. It strives to elucidate what the repeated acts of killing mean to the killer and, in so doing, reveal the motive forces that drive the behavior.

The study is organized into nine parts. The first two chapters summarize what has been learned about the phenomenon of serial murder and outline the need for the present study. Chapter 3 develops a framework for understanding serial murder in terms of a pathology of self process. Chapter 4 presents the rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach to further our understanding of serial murder as well as the steps involved in conducting this research. In the chapter that follows subjects are introduced by way of individual case histories. Chapter 6 presents the data in the form of interview excerpts. Results are interpreted in terms of dominant themes that emerged from the data, each representing an axis of meaning that defines the killing experience for these subjects. The chapter closes with a personal comment on the experience of being immersed in the lives of five serial murderers. Chapter 7 discusses what was learned from the serial murderer subjects and the implications of results for future research, being mindful of the limitations. Chapter 8 provides, as two appendixes, a copy of the consent form that was signed by subjects and the semi-structured interview protocol. The final chapter presents the references used in developing and interpreting this research.

II. THE PHENOMENON OF SERIAL MURDER

A. DEFINING SERIAL MURDER

Robert Ressler, retired Supervisory Special Agent with the Behavioral Science Unit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, claims to have coined the term “serial killer” to denote the distinctly episodic nature of the individual who kills intermittently, often over the course of many years. The episodic behavior allegedly reminded him of the movie-house serials he saw as a boy (Michaud, 1986, p. 42). The use of the term serial to describe a series of murders appears instead, however, to have originated with Brophy’s (1967) work *The Meaning of Murder*. Brophy recognized the importance of distinguishing different kinds of multiple murder, reminding us, for example, of the term ‘massacre’ which denotes the killing of a number of people situated in one place at one time. Such “mass murders,” as they have now generally come to be known, differ from serial murder “whose essential character is repetition at intervals of time.” (p. 166)

To illustrate, James Oliver Huberty—a mass murderer—killed 21 patrons in a McDonald’s restaurant in San Ysidro, California, in a single rampage in 1984. In contrast, Christopher Wilder is believed to have killed nine young women during his 7000-mile travels across the United States in 1984. Historically, cases of serial murder were subsumed under the rubric of mass murder. More recently, however, psychiatric, legal, and law enforcement professionals have identified a need for distinguishing the serial killer. A number of alternate terms are currently used for serial murder including random, casual, recreational, compulsive, and multiple killing. Spree killing, like serial and mass murder also an example of multiple murder, refers to the killing of a number of people

within a relatively narrow window of time such as hours or days. For example, Myron Lance and Walter Kelbach together killed five people in Salt Lake City over a period of 5 days in 1966 in a crime spree that included homosexual rape, robbery, and murder.

Serial murder is defined in this work as the killing of a number of people over a period of time by the same person(s), where the killing is unrelated to political or military affiliation. There is, however, no consensus in the literature or among members of the law enforcement community regarding what is believed to constitute an adequate definition. Keeney and Heide (1995) reviewed the literature on serial murder and concluded that the 10 most frequently cited definitions failed to represent the totality of the phenomenon. Different definitions have—arbitrarily—emphasized different aspects of serial murder. Egger (1990), for example, stipulates a lack of prior relationship between perpetrator and victim. Hickey's (1997) research suggests that only 61% of his sample of serial murderers killed only strangers. Among the people they kill may be parents, lovers/spouses, or their own children. In fact, three of the five subjects in the present study were either somewhat or intimately acquainted with their victims. This illustrates the kind of problems associated with becoming too inclusive in defining the phenomenon. On the other hand, definitions that are too broad are similarly problematic. Including military functionaries or terrorists adds a political motive which suggests different dynamics than are generally observed among serial killers.

B. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Serial murder is not a new phenomenon—it is not the product of today's times. History tells of many (notorious) examples of individuals who would today be

classified as serial murderers. Serial killers are documented across nations and throughout history. The French confidante of Joan of Arc, Gilles de Rais, sexually tortured and murdered scores of children from 1431 to 1440. Nor is serial murder the exclusive province of males. Following the death of her husband in 1600, the Hungarian Countess Elisabeth Bathory killed hundreds of girls and young women in the deluded belief that their blood would enhance the youthfulness of her skin. Although she was convicted of “only” 80 murders, her personal ledger tallied the number killed at 610 over a 10-year period. Hickey (1997) reports in his study of 399 serial murderers from 1800 to 1995 that 16% were female. It is noteworthy that this figure is somewhat higher than the proportion of women who are perpetrators of homicide in general.⁵ Although the majority of serial killers commit their murders alone, Hickey found that 28% of his sample of serial murderers killed with at least one partner (and a woman was a member of the so-called team killing in 36% of those cases).

Hickey (1986) categorizes serial murderers according to their mobility. “Place-specific” offenders murder at a specific site such as in their home or place of employment (such Donald Harvey who killed scores of patients in the hospitals in which he worked in Ohio in the 1970s and 1980s). Another example is John Wayne Gacy, convicted of killing 33 adolescent males in his Chicago home from 1972 to 1978. “Local” serial killers restrict their killings to a particular geographical region such as a city or state. New York City’s “Son of Sam” killer David Berkowitz who shot 13 people in 1976 and 1977 is an example of this type. Hickey’s third category is the “traveling” serial murderer who does not restrict

⁵For example, Uniform Crime Report data show that of the arrestees for murder and nonnegligent homicide in 1993, approximately 10% were female. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1994, *Crime in the United States*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.)

his killing to any particular area or place and tends to be highly mobile, seeking victims across widespread jurisdictions. An example of this type is Theodore Robert Bundy, suspected of murdering approximately 30 females from 1974 to 1978 in five states.

Serial murderers have also been classified according to apparent motive. Hickey (1997) found that most serial murderers have motives of a sexual nature. Money was commonly reported as a motive for killing but not usually the sole reason. Other prevalent motives cited include killing for control and for enjoyment. The problems associated with categorizing serial murderers by motive are discussed in the next chapter.

C. THE STATISTICAL PICTURE

Serial murder is an aberration, not only in behavioral terms but also statistically. In the foreward of her revised book on serial killer Edmund Emil Kemper III, however, Margaret Cheney cites the Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) as estimating that "more than 500* such predators may be at large." (1992, p. x) The asterisk refers to a footnote: "Some data indicate as many as 3,000." Both figures are not only incredible, but defy logic. And what of the public perception, encouraged if not created by media, that serial murder is increasing? Highly publicized cases of gruesome serial killings have made the public aware of the phenomenon. Jenkins (1994) examines available historical data on the incidence of serial murder in and beyond the United States and provides thoughtful discourse on how public perceptions of the phenomenon have been shaped by special interests of law enforcement, media, and political currents. Little is known, however, about the actual incidence of serial murder, its rate of occurrence, and changes over time.

Jenkins determined that serial murders constitute less than 2 percent of American homicides. Moreover, despite portrayals of serial murder as an “unparalleled” threat to contemporary American society Jenkins reminds us that at least 100 serial murder cases were documented between about 1900 and 1940, at least two dozen of which involved large numbers of victims (each offender killing 10 or more people). That at least 60 such prolific serial killers were identified in the 1970s and 1980s should be taken as evidence of a continuing phenomenon rather than as an index of a “growing epidemic,” since there were many more people in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s than there were earlier in the century. Indeed, Jenkins shows the comparable incidences of serial murder between the first four and the last four decades of the twentieth century. For example, between 1911 and 1915, and then again between 1935 and 1941, there were comparable numbers of serial murderers (including murderers who killed 10 or more victims) when examined against figures for more recent times.

These observations notwithstanding, serial murder may be becoming more frequent as suggested by increasing numbers of killings from the late 1960s onward. While this increase is in part due to our increased awareness of—and therefore identification of—such cases, it is likely that, like other forms of violence in society, serial murder is increasing in frequency. As Jenkins’ research on the history of serial murder shows, however, serial murder is not the unique product of contemporary conditions in the United States.

The F.B.I. identified 120 serial killers active in the United States from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. This compares with less than 40 serial murderers

throughout the rest of the world during the same time period.⁶ As Jenkins points out, however, serial murderers have been estimated to account for 1 to 2 percent of homicide victims in the United States, which is similar to the proportion in Great Britain. The murder rates in the United States are so much higher than for other comparable developed societies that comparing absolute numbers of serial killers across countries is a meaningless exercise. Additionally, there is the issue of unreliability of the information from international sources.⁷ The outward impression that Americans have a much greater proclivity for serial murder—at least as is based upon absolute numbers of such murderers—is spurious.

⁶Personal communication, Robert Ressler, retired F.B.I. Supervisory Special Agent, May, 1987.

⁷This problem is documented in the literature on international crime rates. Comparisons are difficult to make because of differences in criminal justice systems, crime reporting and recording practices, definitions of crimes, methods of reporting information to international agencies, and, of course, differences in language. See Carol Kalish (1988) for a discussion of these problems.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SERIAL MURDERER SELF

Murderers, as a group, may differ along particular psychological dimensions from those who cannot and/or do not kill. It need not follow, however, that all of those who kill are psychologically the same as one another. This work argues that serial murderers possess what may be termed a distinctive psychology which distinguishes them from others, including other kinds of murderers. At the same time, however, we should guard against allowing apparent psychological differences to mask common psychological elements, particularly those that relate to self process. This research marks an attempt to (1) identify distinctive aspects of the psychology of serial killers that enable them to engage in behaviors seemingly so far from common experience as to render them incomprehensible, and (2) locate a frame of reference that makes the behavior intelligible. This work is about how five serial murderers see themselves relative to us and to the world as they experience it.

To gain a better understanding of serial murder we need to know how we differ from those who perpetrate it. Just as importantly, however, we need to know how we are alike. Do we operate in accordance with the same organizing principles for our lives? For example, by way of analogy, do we share the same kinds of appetites but differ by virtue of idiosyncratic tastes? Common is sexual appetite; rare is its fetishistic fulfillment. The fundamental referent for such discussion is the self, since it constitutes the core experiential aspect of our being. As an agent that oversees the ways in which we organize our lives, is the self process of serial murderers distinguishable from that of other individuals?

Are there distinctive aspects of self process that we can identify in serial murderers?

Serial murderers invest much of themselves, in the form of their thoughts, fantasies, feelings, and actions, in their killings. The series of murders—those committed as well as those yet to be committed—claim a central place in the mental life of the perpetrator. What the repeated acts of killing mean to the serial murderer is a product of how he views the world and his position in it. Only in the context of the killer's life experiences can his motivations be articulated, his behavior understood. These experiences are processed by and become incorporated into the self of the individual serial murderer. Serial murder may be conceived as a *complex* of thoughts, feelings, and actions that arise from the individual's experiences and "telescope" out of one another.

How do we understand serial murder? Proper address of this question, regardless of the paradigm one adopts, necessitates that we examine motivation. Any explanation of serial murder must make sense of the apparent need on the part of the killer to repeatedly kill. Serial murder is an extreme and distinct form of crime, not essentially motivated by such customary factors as economic gain, a familiarity that has bred rageful contempt, or political terrorism. Killing is not the means to an end but, rather, the end toward which the offender behaves. Underlying motive speaks to what it is that the repeated acts of killing do for him. There appear to be a number of different *modus operandi* that distinguish various serial murderers, which is at least suggestive of differing motivational dynamics at work for different killers. Alternately, different *modus operandi* may represent individuated means but to the same

end. We are required, therefore, to look directly at individual offenders to understand their killings.

A. PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Mad or bad? It is difficult to understand the apparently senseless violence of the serial murderer who otherwise seems rational, coherent, and controlled. There is a pervasive and stubborn perception that many of the atrocities that serial murderers visit upon their victims are the mark of “inhuman” or evil beings. Given the inherent untestability of such propositions, they cannot be systematically examined. Notwithstanding the conceivability of a role for “evil” in serial murder, it is significant that there is frequent resistance⁸ to the view that serial murder is a mere product of the human condition. But when it is, most often it is said to be the result of serious mental illness.

Do serial murderers fit established categories of psychopathology?

The behavioral evidence gleaned from serial murder crime scenes—particularly what is done to the victims, the extreme brutality and apparent senselessness of

⁸In many forums [e.g., for the Mystery Writers of America (authors of fact and fiction works), university and professional audiences (in classes and at conferences)], during interviews by newspaper and newsmagazine journalists, and while being consulted by television and motion picture writers and producers I have observed a distinct resistance to the idea that serial murderers are anything but “crazy” in the clinical sense or, if not “crazy,” evil. When I have probed on this point, I have generally found that what is being interpreted as “crazy” or evil is the behavior—not the individual per se. It is viewed as incomprehensible and senseless. Stephen Michaud, who coauthored *The Only Living Witness* with Hugh Aynesworth, interviewed serial killer Theodore Robert Bundy over hundreds of hours. Michaud appears to appreciate the complexity of Bundy’s behavior and yet when I asked him how he understood Bundy, he responded with a singular word: “evil.” Indeed, while it may be fair to describe much of the atrocious behavior of serial killers as “crazy” or evil, it does not advance our understanding to ascribe these traits to the serial killer himself.

their murders—suggests major psychiatric disorder. Since psychosis represents the most serious form of psychopathological disturbance it is logical to question whether serial murders are the product of psychotic process.

As a generic term, psychosis refers to those mental disorders in which the individual is not able to distinguish reality from nonreality at any given moment. He may experience false perceptions (hallucinations) or false beliefs (delusions) that intrude into his mental life. The individual, as a result, shows impaired or negated ability to function according to the demands of the real world. By way of broad classification, Johnson (1984) refers to three nondiscrete categories of psychopathology based on the presence or absence of psychosis: individuals who are manifestly psychotic; those who are not psychotic; and those who are potentially psychotic. Within each of these categories are subgroups. These subgroups may overlap to the extent they share certain behaviors and psychological dynamics. For example, psychopathic behavior is characteristic of antisocial personality disorder, a nonpsychotic condition. It is also, however, observed in pseudopsychopathic schizophrenia, a functional psychosis. Serial murderers can be found in both these categories. The clinical picture is complicated if not confounded by the presence of different kinds and degrees of mental disorder across individuals. In Johnson's scheme, the primary discriminating factor would be the presence or absence of psychotic process, since both may also present psychopathic symptoms. What do we know about the incidence of specific psychoses among serial murderers?

According to psychiatrist Donald Lunde (1976), "the incidence of psychosis among murderers [in general] is no greater than the incidence of psychosis in the total population" (p. 93) [but] "mass murderers are almost always insane."

(p. 48) This statement, fortunately, is clarified and qualified in Lunde's subsequent discussion. The two examples he provides to illustrate "insanity" are actually cases of a mass killer (John Frazier) and of a serial murderer (Edmund Emil Kemper III). Lunde's use of the term "insane" corresponds not to its customary legal meaning but, rather, its generic clinical connotation. It is also apparent that he is describing serious mental disturbance, but not necessarily psychosis. In the case of mass murderer John Frazier, who killed five people in the same household and then set multiple fires in the house, the crimes were in compliance with his deluded belief that he had a God-given mission to save the world from materialism. The five victims were a necessary sacrifice in order to restore the hilltop on which their house stood to its natural state. Frazier is presented as an example of paranoid schizophrenia, where the psychosis is alleged to underlie the crime.⁹ While psychotic serial killers do exist, most serial murderers appear to have a firm grounding in reality and experience neither hallucinations nor delusional thinking. With respect to serial killers in general, however, it does appear that their perception of the environment and of their role in it are particularly personalized and somewhat distorted.

Such distortions of self and the world may or may not be a product of psychosis. In fact, it could be argued that the apparent misperceptions of self and others

⁹The mere existence of a psychosis is not sufficient to conclude that criminal behaviors are a product of the disorder. Individuals who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder may engage in behaviors that are unrelated to the existing disorder. A person with paranoid schizophrenia may, for example, commit an assault that has nothing to do with any of his hallucinations or delusions, but rather originate from the fact that he experiences "normal" anger at another person at that moment. It is also conceivable that a psychosis may be the result of criminal behavior; that an individual commits a crime and then has a psychotic break with reality as the result of his inability to cope with what he has done.

are a function of low “emotional intelligence”¹⁰ rather than of mental disorder per se. Goleman (1995) brings Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) intriguing concept to the current debate on human behavior. He argues there are basic “people skills” that are needed in order to successfully negotiate one’s place in the world. For example, effective and healthy relationships with others require that individuals be able to accurately read other people’s feelings. Being able to do so enables one to become a team player. Misreading the feelings of others can result in social rejection and/or isolation. The person who believes that others are angry at or disappointed in him may be inclined to answer with anger of his own. The fact that his perception is wrong does not diminish the import of his angry withdrawal from those whom he feels have shunned him. It will also have the consequence of interfering with his ability to develop empathy,¹¹ a prominent lack among serial murderers, the inability to put

¹⁰The concept of emotional intelligence is not to be confused with cognitive ability—that form of intelligence related to verbal and quantitative reasoning and problem-solving ability. As with people in general, the level of formal intelligence (i.e., cognitive ability) varies across individual serial killers. There is a general perception, however, that serial murderers are quite intelligent. Even in cases where I.Q. has been determined to be low, the individual serial killer nonetheless appears to be very “street smart.” Henry Lee Lucas may fall into this category. While in a state reform school at 15 years of age, his I.Q. was determined to be 76. (Cox, 1991) Although Lucas’s score indicates low cognitive ability, the fact that he was able to successfully elude police for eight years while he killed perhaps scores of people, speaks to this point. In general, however, the research on intelligence indicates that “[a]s a group, criminals are below average.” (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, p. 236) Criticisms of standard I.Q. tests notwithstanding (e.g., as culturally biased instruments), such measures of intelligence do appear to “match . . . whatever it is that people mean when they use the word *intelligent* or *smart* in ordinary language, and to have reliable statistical relationships with important social phenomena,” (p.22) Regardless of these issues, the systematic study of the intelligence of serial killers based upon reliable information has not yet been conducted.

¹¹The present research underscores the importance of distinguishing the cognitive and affective aspects of empathy. Scully (1988) examined rapists’ perceptions of the responses of their victims to the assaults and found that while many were able to intellectually conceptualize their victims’ “points of view,” fewer could identify with their victims’ feelings during the attacks. With cognitive empathy, one person is able to *intellectually* put himself in the place

themselves in their victims' places. They are thus unable to appreciate the consequences of their actions. Another indicator of limited emotional intelligence is the inability to delay gratification. Impulsiveness has long been associated with criminal behavior (e.g., Volavka, 1995; Wishnie, 1979).

In general, research has shown that individuals with low emotional intelligence are more likely to encounter problems in life. They are more likely, for example, to be sentenced to jail than are others who demonstrate self control in this regard. The present research accepts that applying diagnostic categories to serial murderers (e.g., schizophrenia; antisocial personality disorder; intermittent explosive disorder) has some utility, but also argues for other ways of framing our understanding. The concept of emotional intelligence offers a viable adjunct, if not alternative, to the traditional approach of applying clinically established criteria. It confers more of a process-oriented understanding of serial murder and, as such, has the potential to open new doors to understanding the behavior; unlike psychiatric diagnoses—which tend to close them.

During serial killer Ted Bundy's final rampage on the night of the two *Chi Omega* sorority killings in Florida in 1978, his behavior was disorganized and impulsive; this in marked contrast to the sophistication and self-control

of another person. In emotional empathy, the person is able to emotionally put himself in the place of another. During one of his killings Edmund Kemper had picked up a female hitchhiker who at one point realized he had intent to do her harm. In describing the scene Kemper says that when she began panicking he pulled out his gun—"to calm her down." (See note 13.) This, of course, escalated her fear. Yet he was perplexed when he found that putting the gun back down calmed her down. Kemper's I.Q. is in the superior intelligence range and psychiatric testing did not reveal major mental illness. It was as if he truly was unable to put himself in his victim's place emotionally. He understood—intellectually—that she would fear the gun; yet he was not able to (vicariously) experience her terror.

exhibited in his dozens of previous killings. The wounds on the two deceased women (and on three other surviving victims of that same night) revealed tremendous rage. Not only did he leave the victims at the scene of his crime (as opposed to his usual *modus operandi*, which included depositing their mutilated bodies elsewhere) but he also left behind the main evidence that ultimately served to convict him: two intact rows of teeth marks in the buttocks of one of his victims. By all indications,¹² Bundy knew better.

Bundy's chaotic behavior may have been the product of an acute escalation in his need to kill following his period of incarceration, since these murders were immediately preceeded by his second escape from jail. That his final assaults were so erratic might signal that he was experiencing something of the order of "micropsychotic deterioration." Halbreich and Endicott (1984) speak of transient psychotic episodes in terms of extreme psychological states lasting between two minutes and two weeks. These fleeting breaks with reality are observed in borderline and schizotypal personality disorders. The range of symptomatology includes depersonalization, depression, paranoia, occasionally hallucinations, derealization, and depressive delusional themes.¹³ Bundy's final

¹²F.B.I. Special Agent Gregg McCrary (personal communication, Quantico, VA, January 24, 1989) in relating information from Special Agent Bill Hagameier, who was granted privileged access to Bundy by Bundy himself in the days before his execution.

¹³ Several factors facilitate or precipitate brief psychotic episodes. Psychosocial stressors may be involved. Physiological factors may also be involved. Physical illness can contribute to psychological deterioration, in a chronic or acute manner. (LaBruzza, 1984) Glandular dysfunction with its associated hormonal aberrations may be indicated. (Goldstein & Halbreich, 1984) Thyroid dysfunction, parathyroid disorder, hormonal changes with puberty, paramenstrual conditions, and post-partum disorders are all examples of physiologic dysfunctions that can significantly alter psychological functioning. Drug/alcohol consumption may also produce transient psychoses.

rampage may have resulted from a psychotic break, not from a longstanding psychotic illness—a significant distinction.

Difficulties in arriving at reliable diagnoses for serial murderers can be as problematic as they can be for anyone else. Harvey Carignan, known both as “Harvey the Hammer” and the “Want-Ad Killer” killed several women (possibly scores) in Canada and the United States between 1951 and 1975 (Newton, 1990; Stack, 1983). He claimed he experienced severe head pain and heard voices immediately before he murdered the two women he admitted to killing. Johnson (1984) suggests that Carignan may have ruminated over depressive delusional themes and experienced micropsychotic episodes. But the evidence of head pain and auditory hallucinations is limited to Carignan's self-report. Whether he actually experienced psychotic deterioration or was ‘psychopathically’ conning his professional audience is open to question. Unfortunately, this is very much not an isolated case. The very nature of antisocial personality disorder is such that when it is present, the validity of self-reported information is always confounded by proclivity toward deceit. For this reason psychological assessments need to be as comprehensive and systematic as possible. In view of the many exigencies of court proceedings, even in high profile (read, sensational) cases, evaluations are often limited by demands of time and availability of resources (including people who can speak to the veracity of information reported by the defendant), thereby compromising the assessment.

When one examines the evidence of the actual behaviors of the serial murderer at the scenes of his crimes, it is often difficult to interpret them as anything but “sick.” Clearly, they are deviant and suggest pathology. But is the individual “crazy” in the clinical sense of the term? Is he psychotic? Generally, serial

murderers are keenly in touch with reality. They know who they are, what they are doing when they kill, and that what they are doing is wrong. In his day-to-day dealings with us the serial killer enjoys a comfortable fit to his mask of normalcy—as we are comfortable with him. By many people who know them, they are perceived, apart from their crimes, as quite ordinary. It is as if there is an “other” self, beyond our perceptual grasp, which maintains a parallel existence. This suggests that dissociative processes operate in the mental life of the serial murderer, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Although a counterintuitive notion, the most seriously disturbed behaviors need not be a function of the most serious kinds of psychopathologies. Relatively few known serial killers have been diagnosed as psychotic. Indeed, it is likely the absence of major mental illness that enables most serial killers to perpetrate their series of murders before or without getting caught. Psychotic killers are more likely to leave evidence—blatant as well as trace evidence—at the scene of their murders, linking them to their crimes. One schizophrenic killer, for example, left his fingerprints on the glass he used to drink the blood of his victim. He left the glass near the body.¹⁴ Most serial killers, however, are ultimately caught as the result of good basic police legwork. For example, David Berkowitz, New York’s “Son of Sam” killer, was identified as a suspect after police placed his car near an area of one of the killings noting it had been tagged with a parking ticket on that day. Nonetheless, the dual facts of the brutality and apparent senselessness of their killings clearly point to psychological disturbance in serial murderers. But if not psychosis, what?

¹⁴F.B.I. Special Agent Gary Claxton (personal communication, New York, NY, February, 1986)

Holmes and DeBurger (1985) believe that the “intrinsic locus of motives” of serial murderers has its origins in an abnormal personality.

The concept of a “criminal personality” is an intriguing, if dubious explanation for criminal behavior. The idea that individuals engage in behaviors that violate criminal laws as an aspect of enduring characterologic traits that are criminogenic in nature has intuitive appeal. Personality, as a multidimensional construct, serves to organize our thinking about why people behave in the ways they do. Credence is given to the existence of a criminal temperament by virtue of the observation that serious criminality in adulthood is foreshadowed by a pattern of serious delinquent behavior in childhood. Yochelson and Samenow (1976) propose that criminals are distinguished by the way they think. Their pattern of thinking includes “thinking errors” that enable them to behave irresponsibly—and criminally—without any sense of the wrongfulness of their conduct. It is not that they do not know “the rules” for appropriate living but, rather, that they think in a way that exempts them from judgment and culpability.

Adrian Raine (1993) puts forth a persuasive case for criminality as a clinical disorder in its own right. As a syndrome, it is the result of certain biological and genetic predispositions toward, for example, being impulsive and aggressive, as well as psychological (and psychobiological) and environmental factors. A consistent finding in his data has been a baseline pattern of psychophysiological underarousal in criminal individuals. Raine’s research (albeit on a small sample where multiple murderers are concerned) has found differences between single and serial murderers in the activity levels of the prefrontal cortex of the brain. Typically, single murderers show depressed

levels of arousal in this region—the area responsible for executive functions and planning. In contrast, multiple murderers show a substantial degree of prefrontal activity (even though other psychophysiological indicators are depressed). Raine reasons that these observations are consistent with the crimes of the respective subjects in that single murderers tend to kill on impulse, while the multiple killer murders according to a careful plan. Overall, Raine's work represents an integration of different paradigms, recognizing the importance of different kinds of factors (including such variables as maternal rejection) in violent behavior. Notwithstanding the controversial premise that crime is a disorder, Raine's research is a model of integrative theory and, as such, is more capable of explaining criminal behavior than single-factor or single-paradigm theories.

Are serial murders the product of an inherent criminality or does the behavior arise more out of a specific and traditional psychopathological condition, such as antisocial personality disorder?¹⁵ As with Yochelson and Samenow's case for a criminal personality, Herrnstein (1995) notes that antisocial personality disorder very rarely emerges in adulthood (brain injury and disease excepted) but, rather, is evidenced as a pattern of antisocial behavior throughout childhood. Unlike the case with criminal personality, however, psychopathy is

¹⁵This work will use the terms antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy interchangeably. Presuming a clinical disorder exists that can be recognized by a core set of symptoms (including lack of remorse, lifelong pattern of antisocial behavior, and the like), the fact that it has been identified by a series of different terms through successive editions of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* risks obscuring the long-documented observation that essentially one specific disorder exists—that the various diagnostic labels essentially represent the same disorder.

not considered a thinking disorder. It is a nonpsychotic¹⁶ characterologic disorder whereby the individual seemingly lacks the capacity to experience remorse for a lifelong pattern of antisocial acts.¹⁷ Correlations between psychopathy and criminality are well-documented in the literature (e.g., Hare, 1993; McCord, 1982). Hare reports that recidivism rates for psychopathic offenders who commit violent offenses are three times greater than those for other offenders. This observation may have relevance for serial murderers who, like the subjects of Hare's study, are violent offenders who continue to commit their crimes over time.

The implication is that psychopathy, or at least elements of psychopathy are involved in serial murder. Case studies of convicted serial killers do suggest that many, if not most of them have an antisocial personality disorder (Hare, 1993). In other cases, serial murderers may be thought to have different disorders but disorders that include psychopathic features. For example, court-appointed psychiatrist George Palermo concluded that serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer could be classified as a mixed personality disorder with strong psychopathic and sadistic characteristics (Palermo & Knudten, 1994). The literature on the

¹⁶Although there is consensus in the psychiatric community that antisocial personality disorder is not a psychosis, it is noteworthy, perhaps especially in a discussion of serial murderers, that Pritchard (1835) described individuals with these characteristics as being "morally insane." While the clinical disorder has been associated with different terms since first identified by Pinel (1801)—including *manie sans délire*, sociopathy, psychopathy, antisocial personality disorder—the author finds Pritchard's idea of moral insanity to be most apt in capturing the essence of the disorder.

¹⁷ Hare (1993) argues that psychopathic individuals lack the capacity for empathy. Further, they objectify others in the service of their own needs. As a result, their antisocial behaviors (i.e., victimizing others) would not be expected to evoke guilt or internal conflict. This position challenges the alternative position that psychopaths are inherently empathic but are capable of reprehensible acts through the activation of psychological defenses and dissociative processes.

psychological makeup of serial murderers points more often to psychopathy, or a psychopathic component, than to any other disorder.

Psychopaths often appear to “connect” with other people but they are, in actual fact, egocentric and lack true compassion. Their development is akin to “pseudosocialization.” These are individuals who may outwardly behave in socially acceptable ways but who do not internalize, intrinsically, the social values. They create their own rules, tailored to their own needs and desires. Throughout their lifetime they work to manipulate others. As with the psychopath, the serial murderer’s relationships with others seem defined by the degree to which he can use them to satisfy his own ends. The failure or inability of an individual to emotionally empathize with others may be the key element in the psychodynamics of the psychopath. With no emotional comprehension of the needs and feelings of others, his antisocial behavior does not arouse intrapsychic conflict. There is no internal mechanism to keep his behavior in check. This may go far to explain how serial killers can kill repeatedly without any seeming remorse. They are thus enabled by a psychopathic process.¹⁸

The internalization of moral values is one of the most important psychological mechanisms through which an individual becomes socialized in the prescribed

¹⁸Alternately, it could be argued that the psychopath does, at least partially, recognize and relate to the emotions of others but is able to engage in his atrocities by virtue of a process of dissociation. Meloy (1992a) contends that dissociation is “ubiquitous in the psychopath,” (p. 151) it being necessary to defend against coexisting egodystonic aspects of oneself. The psychic representations of one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions are compartmentalized toward this end. Dissociative experiences are described by Meloy as “transient sensory-perceptual states” (p.152) that afford the individual a permanent (and acceptable) sense of self.

ways of his culture. According to Ausubel and Kirk (1977), "Socialization demands the learning of self-control and self-discipline, the subordination of personal desires to the needs and wishes of others, the acquisition of skills and self-sufficiency, the curbing of hedonistic and aggressive impulses, and the assimilation of culturally sanctioned patterns of behavior." (p. 182) The psychopath's self orientation and gratification to the exclusion of consideration of others reflects a failure on his part to be effectively socialized. He appears to lack a conscience and the capacity to relate empathically with others, helping us to understand how psychopaths are able to violate the rights of others seemingly without the inhibitions aroused by guilt. This failure to be effectively socialized, leading to lack of emotional empathy and inability to experience remorse, also goes some distance in enabling the serial killer to carry out his series of murders. Regarding the relationship between psychopathy and serial murder we must, however, remain mindful that very few psychopathic individuals commit serial murder and, further, that not all serial killers are psychopaths.

The role of psychopathy in serial murder could be further elucidated by examining serial killers in terms of specific aspects known to differentiate psychopaths from others. For example, research such as that conducted by Hare and Schalling (1978) on tolerance of frustration and on stimulus-seeking behaviors—areas linked to psychopathy—should be conducted on serial murderers. It may be that serial killers fall at the extreme end of *particular* continua that distinguish psychopaths from nonpsychopaths. One such characterologic trait associated with psychopathic individuals is a pathologic egocentricity.

In the limited psychological literature that specifically addresses serial murder, narcissism is a prominent theme. Whether it is viewed as a personality disorder and the essential pathology of the serial killer, or as existing in some combination with other disorders, or whether it is considered as a trait, as opposed to a clinical disorder per se, narcissism is frequently observed in serial murderers. Liebert (1985) and Rappaport (1988) believe that narcissistic (and borderline) personality disorders figure prominently in the picture of the pathology of serial killers.

Once more, however, if we are trying truly to understand the serial murderer, mere application of the concept of narcissistic personality disorder does not actually advance us to that end. Hickey (1997), in a more general way, speaks of serial murderers as possessing “highly developed narcissistic, or self-centered qualities.” (p. 39) In his consideration of clinical and theoretical motivations for serial murder, Pollock (1995) examines the case of a man who killed 4 people over 8 days and infers the presence of pathological narcissism and psychopathic tendencies. In the general psychological literature, Kernberg (1992) elaborates upon Fromm’s (1973) term of “malignant narcissism,” describing an extreme form of narcissistic pathology in which narcissistic personality coexists with egosyntonic aggression and paranoid and antisocial features. Stone (1989) applies the concept of *malignant narcissism*—as the coexistence of narcissistic and antisocial traits—to serial murderers. Invoking a more generic concept of narcissism to explain serial murder fails to suffice, however, by virtue of the fact that not all narcissists are serial killers and not all serial killers are narcissists.

Work by de Zulueta (1994) proves more instructive. She uses the conceptual tool of attachment theory (particularly from Bowlby, 1969, 1973) whereby inadequate or defective early bonding environments are implicated in the formation of poorly integrated, insecure individuals who lack the capacity for attachment to others. The result can be an exaggerated need for attention and acceptance from others that can be accompanied by resentment at having the need. Meloy (1992b) also speaks in terms of a pathology of attachment. He understands predatory violence as one outcome of a “conscienceless, detached psychology” (p. xvii) which follows from disturbed early attachment (between infant and mother or surrogate-mother). De Zulueta views violence as the result of a narcissistic rage originating in early childhood when a needed attachment with the parent is not secured. The child internalizes the real lived-through relations that in turn form the basis of psychic re-creations which become the working models for his subsequent roles with others in his life: a template for future object-relations. Because the child cannot afford to hate the rejecting (or non-nurturing) parent—because he needs that parent—he introjects the trauma arising out of unfulfilled attachment needs. This internalized trauma gives verse to the angry and destructive scripts he applies to future relationships.

Rather than examining the question of psychopathology from the standpoint of diagnostic categories one can infer aspects of the perpetrator’s psychological makeup from his behavior during the commission of his crimes. Just as the particulars of a serial murderer’s background can make specifics of his behavior more intelligible, his behavior can be examined in a way that reveals his background. One may infer aspects of the perpetrator’s psychological makeup as well as other distinguishing characteristics (e.g., physical traits)

from behavioral evidence at his crime scenes. In their discussion of “lust”¹⁹ murderers—killers who sexually mutilate their victims—Hazelwood and Douglas (1980) propose a dichotomy of personality: organized nonsocial killers and disorganized asocial murderers. Basically, they contend that lust killers perpetrate their crimes in one of two ways: either in a prepared and methodical manner or in an impulsive and chaotic way.

While behaviors may be appropriately classified as organized or disorganized, however, this scheme does not appear to correlate with discrete personality structures. For example, Dietz (1986) relates a case of a psychotic individual (apparently paranoid schizophrenic; i.e., “disorganized”) who maintained a deluded murderous plan over an eight-year period. Yet he committed the murder in a highly organized manner. By way of further criticism, there are a number of serial killers (including Hazelwood and Douglas’ lust murder type) whose crimes exhibit elements of both organized and disorganized behaviors, revealing a “mixed” category, thereby attenuating the utility of the dichotomy.

Retired F.B.I. Special Agent Robert Ressler speaks of serial killer John Wayne Gacy as a “classic organized personality.”²⁰ Notwithstanding a limited utility for

¹⁹The term lust murder requires clarification given the substantively different ways it is used by different authors. The original German *lustmörder* referred to killings perpetrated for the mere enjoyment of killing. In subsequent usage, the term lust murder has acquired a sexual valence. As described by Podolsky (1965), lust murder is characterized by periodic outbursts of sexual desires that usually involve cutting or stabbing, particularly of the breasts or genitals. Sometimes erection and ejaculation occur and are followed by violation of the victim—often without attempt at intercourse. Liebert (1985) views lust murder as the extreme sadomasochistic and sociopathic end of the borderline-narcissistic personality disorder spectrum.

²⁰This description of Gacy was presented during F.B.I. Supervisory Special Agent Robert Ressler’s session on investigative profiling during the “The Homicide Investigators’ Course” of the Police Department of the City of New York in 1987, which the author completed.

this designation in criminal investigations, it does not represent a valid or reliable construct as applied to the psychological makeup of serial killers. Rather than seeking to attach specific clinical disorders to serial killers (and thereby presuming to “explain” their murders), it may be more productive to identify particular psychological processes involved in the perpetration of their murders. Beyond mere descriptions, such labels, like dichotomies, do little to further our understanding of serial murder. More importantly, they risk being counterproductive. If we restrict how we look at serial killers—by reducing them to clinical disorders—we will be limited in what we can see.

It may be more useful to consider behaviors as part of the process by which an individual operates on and develops in the world as he perceives it, rather than as fitting into descriptive categories. Conceptualizing the behavior of serial murder in terms of a process of disorganization of personality, rather than as a disorganized personality per se, provides for a more sophisticated and individuated level of understanding. Satten, Menninger, Rosen, and Mayman (1960) reviewed four case histories of ‘senseless’ killing and attributed the crimes to a disorganization of the offenders’ personalities. They found that all four murderers exhibited significant weakness of impulse control, blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality with periods of altered states of consciousness, blunted and shallow emotional responses, and a violent and primitive fantasy life. The researchers related the killings to an escalating tension and disorganization of the personality of individuals who are predisposed to lapses in ego control and to open expression of violence. Although the four cases involved single homicides, there is significant potential relevance of such a scheme to serial murder in which in addition to the above

characteristics, the offender derives singular pleasure or relief from the act of killing.

Serial killers run the gamut of what is psychopathologically possible. Overall, the type and degree of psychopathology does not present a consistent clinical picture, except, *perhaps*, antisocial personality disorder—and even then psychopathy is not the exclusive domain of serial killers. Psychopathy per se is not what distinguishes serial murderers. Clinical diagnoses are insufficient to explain the apparent need to kill repeatedly. Instead, we need to better acquaint ourselves with the individual serial murderer; to examine his processes of observing, thinking, remembering, rethinking, and understanding; to better see the world as he sees it. Anguished memories, distorted beliefs, and unresolved conflicts are windows into his life as he has experienced it. And—on both a conscious and unconscious level—they motivate specific behaviors.

One aspect of the serial murderer's conscious thinking relates to *mens rea* (criminal intent). For many serial killers *mens rea* is demonstrated by the satisfaction they derive from "beating the criminal justice system." Indeed, this satisfaction may be secondary only to the gratification derived from the act of killing itself. (This is consistent with the narcissism often observed in nonpsychotic serial murderers.) Yet even with the full knowledge of what he is doing, the degree of insight the individual has into his killings may be shallow to none. The level of conscious awareness the serial murderer has of these processes is open to question, but one can speculate that we would expect to find that it varies as a function of the extent and kind of pathology involved.

Pathology may manifest itself by disabling the individual from understanding the wrongfulness of his behavior. Or, it may preempt his ability to conform his behavior to the requirements of law, as by compulsion or irresistible impulse. A powerful element in the repetition of the murders likely relates to the physiological conditioning of a heightened arousal state to a particular circumstance or fantasy. Alternately, or concurrently, the murders may relate to the physiological conditioning of a state of reduced anxiety. Either way, the repeated acts of murder could be compared to an addictive process. The act of killing is reinforced by a desired physiological state. With respect to the apparent compulsive or irresistible impulse [to kill] of serial murderers, the dynamics of addiction become relevant. In many cases there is evidence of an escalating urge that once satisfied, is followed by a period of relief. When the ability to function is impaired by a dependency on some external substance or agent an individual may be said to have an addiction. Ted Bundy asserts in a documentary video, *Fatal Addiction*,²¹ that his years of murderous rampage were primarily the product of his self-proclaimed addiction to violent sexual pornography which fueled the violent fantasies he ultimately acted out. Whether or not the pornography was a mechanism or simply a mere symptom of Bundy's deviance, the literature provides many examples of serial killers who claim to have experienced mounting tension and irritability that could be dissipated only through an act of killing. One of the serial murderers the author interviewed at length for this research found himself increasingly restless and agitated between his murders. Although not an alcoholic, he compared the tension to that of "a growing need for a drink."

²¹Stiles, Steven. (Producer/Director). (1989). Fatal Addiction: Ted Bundy's Final Interview. Focus on the Family.

As with the complex of addictive processes, once the murder is committed the serial killer may describe feelings of release from his mounting tension. The murderer is often able, for example, to relax into a sound sleep. This was indicated by serial murderers this author interviewed; by other interviewers of serial killers with whom this author spoke (e.g., Gregg McCrary, former Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Behavioral Science Unit; investigative journalist Stephen Michaud, who, with Hugh Aynesworth, spent hundreds of hours interviewing Ted Bundy); and is reported elsewhere in the literature (e.g., MacCulloch, Snowden, Wood, & Mills, 1983). For some time afterward, a feeling of calm pervades. While some elements of what we recognize as addiction appear to be present, it is premature to identify serial murder as an addiction.

It may be more useful, if not more correct, to examine those aspects of serial murder that suggest addiction as component processes—with addictive features—in a system of interacting physiological, psychological, and social elements. Similarly, the apparent compulsive quality of the series of killings is better addressed from a broader systems approach than as a compulsion per se. It will be in the complexities and nuances of patterns of behavior that we will find their essential meaning. In attempting to understand the serial murderer we need to consider his behavior with a perspective that will bring into focus the meaning of the killings as he experiences them. What, then, can be said of his psychology?

Herrnstein (1995) contends that “the average offender is psychologically atypical in various respects, not necessarily to a pathological degree, but enough so that the normal prohibitions against crime are relatively

ineffective.” (p. 39) But what of the atypical offender? What of the offender whose violations are of such an order that differences in degree of pathology are not adequate to explain the extremity of his behavior? To explain the serial murderer—one who invests so much of himself in the destruction of others, often in bizarre and sadistic ways—may require a differences-in-kind approach that is not limited by established psychiatric categories. Traditional clinical (i.e., psychometric and diagnostic) approaches may actually be counterindicated. While it is possible to describe individual serial killers in terms of their degree of apparent and recognized psychopathology, it may advance our understanding of serial murder more not to do so. It is a working assumption of this research that we are limiting our understanding of serial murder behavior by imposing traditional constructs of clinical disorder onto the individual. Rather than attempting to find a “best-fit” diagnosis, an approach of another order—at the level of process—may prove to be more meaningful and thus more informative. At the very least, such a tact avoids diagnosis as tautological exercise. The next section will speak more directly to this matter.

In discussing his psychiatric evaluation of serial killer Edmund Kemper for the court, Donald Lunde stated that Kemper “. . . does not fit any recognized category or kind of mental illness that the psychiatric profession recognizes. . . And believe me, I looked!”²² Currently, as the preceding section illustrates, there has been a movement in the direction of assigning particular diagnoses to serial murderers. There is no consensus, however, regarding the involvement of particular and distinguishing disorders. Perhaps this reveals the inadequacy of existing classification schemes—not in the sense that they need further

²²Anderson, Bob. (Producer/Director). (1978). 50 Weeks of Planned Killing. American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.

refinement but, rather, that they signal a need for other ways of looking at serial killers, as the present study attempts.

Wishnie (1979) offers an alternative perspective regarding people who tend to behave in an impulsive and destructive manner. Under the broader heading of impulsive character pathology, he distinguishes individuals who act out their impulses from persons who successfully sublimate or repress them. Wishnie argues against mere application of diagnostic labels in favor of understanding the dynamic origins of impulsive behaviors; this as a way to gain a sense of the individual's existential experience—focusing with particularity on pervasive emptiness, panic, or depression.

Sears (1991) frames the etiology of serial murder in terms of a catathymic crisis wherein nothing but a violent act dispels the emotional tensions brought on by distortions of thinking. In Wertham's (1967) discussion of this psychiatric condition, the abused child, in his helplessness, conjures fantasies of power which can effectively take on a life of their own. They become preoccupying images whereby he manipulates and controls others—thereby experiencing control over his own life. As the child grows there is little incentive to abandon these fantasies for the real world with its possibilities of rejection and insecurity. He may develop what Wertham considers an obvious thinking disorder, focused on meeting his own needs and desires with no consideration for the needs and desires of others. When he tries to transfer his fantasized omnipotence to the real world he does not succeed. He is unable, for example, to match the sexual prowess of his fantasies with his experiences of actual sexual encounters. The fantasies are not fulfilled. According to Wertham, the

individual turns to violence to experience himself as powerful. He is gratified by the total power he holds over his victim.

In a sense, the violence breathes life into his fantasies. Once he commits the violent act there is a release of the tension that attended his earlier feelings of powerlessness. He is calm. But since the serial murderer is apparently unable to gain insight into his violent behavior—and understand it as a product of disturbed thinking—Sears contends that the individual does not achieve Wertham's final stage in which he moves beyond the need for violence. Instead he seeks to recreate the experience of power; hence the repeated acts of violence.

Wishnie and Wertham (and thus Sears) assume a psychodynamic—and process-based—approach to understanding violent behavior. The present research relies upon similar argument: that more will be achieved by an idiographic approach which maintains as its focus the individuals under study and their respective lived-experiences.

B. SELF PSYCHOLOGY: SELF AS PROCESS AND PRODUCT

There are numerous and varied perspectives that purport to explain particular patterns of behavior. It is generally assumed that individuals develop a repertoire of behaviors comprising, in essence, a personal “style” for coping with the world. While factors external to the individual impact upon him to a greater or lesser degree, it is ultimately the individual who behaves. It is imperative therefore to examine individual serial killers in the context of the facts and factors of their lives. This study examines how individual serial killers come to commit their crimes and cope, intrapsychically, with their atrocities.

Rather than seeking to identify the psychopathology of serial murderers in terms of specific categories of disorder, this research examines the psychopathology as an aspect of the self process of the individual serial killer; to locate his disturbance in the lived-meaning he has of himself and the world. To discover the psychological meaning of his killings we need to apply the tools of psychology to examine the self—in its substance and process—which gives rise to those behaviors.

Largely because of wide-ranging ideas about how to conceptualize and define the self, studies of the self have produced a remarkably diverse theoretical and empirical literature based upon different premises. Many posit specific dimensions thought to distinguish critical aspects of an operationally defined self. Research has tended to examine the self in terms of its three main aspects: (1) its development—as the formative self; (2) evaluative process—as self-esteem; and (3) its substance—as self concept. Within each of these domains is a literature on pathologies related to the self. These pathologies, whether in terms of the development, evaluation, or sense of the self, imply that, in some way, a boundary has been crossed.

(i) Personal Boundaries and the Search for Authenticity

Being human involves a process of defining oneself as a significant presence in the world. One of the ways in which we define ourselves involves the setting of personal boundaries. If any single aspect of serial murderers can be isolated as a common feature, it may be the diffuse identity each of them appears to have as an individual. The serial killer seems to lack a definitive boundary between

himself and others. It is as if there is no operational limit to his self.²³ In describing each of his hitchhiking victims, Edmund Emil Kemper III stated, "when she put her hand on my car door, she was mine; what was in her pockets was mine. . ." He explained his acts of cannibalism as "want[ing] to make her part of me."²⁴

As a general matter, definitions are largely about boundaries. Things are defined and thus distinguished from one another using the terms of their common boundaries, by the borders that separate them from other things. We are defined by limits that are imposed upon us—by our biological and psychological makeup, and social constraints—as well as by limits we set for ourselves. A clear sense of self requires recognition of oneself as, at once, an individual who is like others in certain important ways, and unlike others in other important ways. This exercise of defining oneself in relation to others in ways that are meaningful to the individual is the basis of George Kelly's (1955) repertory grid technique. The method is derived from his personal construct theory, in which individuals are said to develop, idiosyncratically, the terms of reference—bipolar constructs—for their personal model of the world. The repertory grid technique provides a way to reveal the personally constructed and organized dimensions that form the basis of this representation of the world.

²³Serial murderers typically choose a personal weapon in the perpetration of their crimes. They tend to use their hands or knives rather than guns. A personal weapon may constitute an extension of the self. In this way the victim can be more intimately 'possessed' or 'consumed' by the offender, blurring the boundary between himself and his victim.

²⁴Ibid. (See note 15)

According to Kelly's theory, individuals are said to experience the world in accordance with a system of dialectical constructs (e.g., inhibited versus lively; domineering versus submissive) derived from their own life experiences. They define themselves and others in terms of these constructs. Each person contemplates, in his individuated way, the events of his life. He lives in a model of the world of his own construction. To some degree the models developed by different people overlap. In other respects they are unique to each individual. According to Kelly, a model—the individual's working system of personal constructs—can be modified over time by further experience. Understanding a person is chiefly a matter of knowing how he proceeds with the task of making sense of his world—an exploration of his intrapersonal space—with particular attention to how he defines personal boundaries.

A serial murderer's model of the world thus includes his perception of the extent of his occupation in it; whether, for example, he recognizes certain boundaries limiting his place in the world. A diffuse or fragmented self would suggest little sense of boundary. When there are changes in the boundaries that individuals are expected to recognize, confusion about personal identity can be the result as the individual negotiates his place in the world in accordance with changing amounts of freedom. Since, as discussed in Chapter 2, it appears that the number of serial murderers is increasing in modern American society, a question arises as to whether this increase may relate to changing demands—freedoms or restrictions—upon the self.

Lifton (1993) discusses how, at the end of the twentieth century, unprecedented historical changes are prompting demands to transform and expand the self. The at once exciting and terrifying prospects of mass media—a technological

revolution that connects us to each other closer than ever before, while bringing us closer to images of collective-self-annihilation through nuclear holocaust if not ecological destruction, signal the need for change. In a similar vein, Baumeister (1991) offers the observation that “our modern society uses the self to supply meaning to life in a way that previous eras did not.” (p. 78) An intensified individualism calls for each of us to be introspective and call upon ourselves for the answers to living life, rather than looking outwardly to external sources of value and validation such as those traditionally provided by religion. Even the idea held by some that God resides within the individual could be interpreted as a shift toward increasing the burden of moral authority onto individuals.

Increasingly, moral authority is being transferred to the self in its search for authenticity. Not to be confused with selfishness, in which greed and ego gratification are essential motives, Baumeister contends that it is as if “morality has become subservient to the self” (p. 103) in the interest of defining oneself as an individual. Today’s imperative of individualism has shifted the authority that once came from an external moral code to the self. This dislocation has placed both new freedom and additional burden upon the individual. Baumeister discusses how changing historical circumstances have prompted modern individuals to question (and even abandon) the moral consensus of earlier times. Increasingly, the self is becoming the “ultimate arbiter of right and wrong.” (p.103) In the absence of external criteria for right and wrong and good and evil, the self—in the service of selfhood—is the sole provider of moral guidance. One cannot help but be reminded of Norman Mailer’s (1994) prediction in his provocative essay *The White Negro* that by the end of this century the increasing violence, greater urbanization, and dominance of

mass media would foster psychopathy as the dominant expression of human nature.

In modern American society, the self has become a common preoccupation. Lifton and Baumeister discuss how changes in society have led to problems for individuals as they struggle to find meaning in life. In particular, the diminution of family and religion as organizing agents of people's lives has led to a default position for the self as, itself, the main source of meaning in life. While the self is being called upon to provide the meaning of one's life, it is, at the same time, undergoing a dislocation from its former roots. Social institutions that previously had served to connect the individual to society are deteriorating, losing their import for and impact on individual development. Evolving economic, political, and social patterns of relations have called for a reliance upon individualism. Technologies have kept stride by accommodating the move toward increasing self-indulgence. Remote controls for television, for example, contribute to an environment in which self-gratification is immediate. What does not satisfy or "fit" is summarily terminated by the touch of a button on an electronic device. The question for us is, Is the self able to keep up with the increasing expectations put upon it to be the organizing agent of an individual's life—to provide him/her with needed meaning?

For that self to possess psychological health, Binswanger (1963) proposes, requires the experience of authenticity, which in turn depends upon self-actualizing experiences. Much emphasis is placed on the "inner world of experience" in existentialist philosophical discourse, with the defining feature of the human condition being the nature of its relation to the world, human beings having no existence separate from the world. The experience of being,

according to this argument, depends upon an external milieu which alters and is altered by the individual. When social prescriptions in this milieu constrict the self, an authentic self fails to develop, resulting in such outcomes as feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, depression, and anger. If unresolved, psychopathology is a possible consequence. On the other hand, development of an integrity of self—even if in socially disapproved of ways—is an evolution toward greater authenticity. Is the serial murderer, then, enhancing his psychological health by virtue of his murderous acts?

Where is the locus of authenticity for the serial murderer? What is his own experience of his true self? Are his boundaries defined by points that violate normative allowance? If so, in order to actualize his self he must cross borders beyond acceptable behavior. Societal norms set the boundaries for appropriate behavior, and thus are the “measure” of an individual’s normalcy. For those whose self definition exists in terms of degrees of deviance, self actualization will encounter if not resistance from others, at least the judgment from others, and they will be labeled outsiders.

Sexual behavior is one axis by which an individual is defined, serving as an instrument of self expression. The varied and often bizarre sexual histories of serial killers imply a process of psychosexual development that is not contained by conventional boundaries. Their impersonal, pansexual behaviors—whereby sexual partners are experienced as objects to be possessed and consumed—are consistent with a diffuse self identity, and preclude genuine and reciprocal pair bonding. In this psychosexual aspect of their actualized selves, they are sexual outlaws. The fact of their deviance notwithstanding, acting out their aberrant inclinations may be seen as movement toward greater authenticity.

Lifton (1993) speaks of the “resilience” of the self as it responds to the extraordinary flux that is characteristic of our time. The actual form and substance that the self assumes is one of many possibilities, owing to a property of the self that Lifton refers to as fluidity. As a process this “protean self” is operationalized as “continuous exploration and personal experiment.” (p. 1) “[T]he protean self process is the continuous psychic re-creation of the self as “a symbol of one’s organism.” (p. 5) The self is thus a dynamic, changing entity that responds to and is shaped by its contextual housing. For the serial murderer, being true to himself may mean a continual process of experimentation—trying to force his diffuse identity onto—demanding recognition from—the world. Yet his is not a protean response. The serial killer’s experimentations do not open up new possibilities for his future. On the contrary, he becomes fixed into a pattern of behavior that fleetingly gives him the illusion of a wholeness of self. In contrast with protean possibilities of growth and transformation, his mode of being is maladaptive. Violence, according to Wilson (1975), is connected to the need to be something more than one is. Existential fears—possibly experienced as being “nobody” or someone of no consequence—are only superficially dispatched by his acts of violence. His existence, then, is one without meaning and defined by its very precariousness—a kind of living death. Existence without meaning. He may be as T. S. Eliot’s *hollow men*:

“Shape without form, shade without color”

We are asked not to judge their trespasses but to have compassion for their emptiness, which they “stuff” with existential imperatives. Violence combats the dread, for it is foremost a primitive assertion of being.

“Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.”²⁵

What if the serial killer’s boundaries are grounded in the most primitive foundations of our experience in the world, unaffected by societal expectations? Under this perspective, he is concerned only with raw experience. Sex, for example, has no meaning beyond orgasm. It is unfettered by dictates of humanity and morality. For people in general, the *moment* of orgasm could be said to represent a dissociated state, physically—whereby the individual lacks the capacity to respond to any extraneous stimuli—and mentally, in that the moment has no meaning other than the importance of the feeling of gratification itself. For the most part, however, unlike serial murderers, people identify with some degree of mutuality during sexual activity. For the serial murderer whose crimes involve sex, the entire sexual scenario—from fantasy to enactment to orgasm—is one of primitive detachment. It is solely about personal gratification. Is this primitive detachment characteristic of his whole being? Does the serial murderer represent primal aspects of the human condition? This suggests ineffective socialization during his formative development, which would implicate psychodynamic processes.

²⁵Excerpted from *The Hollow Men*. In T. S. Eliot. (1963). Collected Poems: 1909-1962. London: Faber and Faber, p.89.

Although the writings of Sigmund Freud do not have much to say about criminal behaviors directly, implications regarding certain aspects of his thinking for violence are evident. Freud's concept of *thanatos*, a death instinct that operates to generate (self-)destructive feelings, relates violent behavior to an innate condition of mankind. Libido, as a manifestation of *eros* and death instincts—and their inherent tensions—motivates the individual to act in particular ways. One need not invoke Freud's theory of a death instinct *per se*, however, to permit death and aggression a central voice in discussions of human behavior in general, and violent behavior in particular. Neo-Freudian discussions of the broader experience of death anxiety have tended to supersede Freud's death instinct and its fatalistic corollaries.

Psychoanalyst Arno Gruen (1992) challenges Freud's contention that man has an inborn tendency toward destruction and violence, arguing instead that self-hatred is at the root of such evils. He sees the self-hatred as a rage stemming from the self-betrayal that occurs in childhood when the child surrenders autonomy in order to secure the love of those who hold power over him; it is thus a product of his socialization and not an innate drive. As the child grows so does a smoldering self-resentment because of his submission. He has traded away his actual self for a false self that hopes to share in the power that subjugates him. Connections to his own interior world become increasingly tenuous because of the need to preserve the image-orientation that enables him to be obedient to those with power—at a cost.

According to Gruen, an individual seeks the power that derives from potent image. He is driven to secure the kind of image that commands attention, if not esteem, from others. His inner world dissociated from external realities and

their demand for obedience, the individual's autonomy is seriously compromised if not thwarted. He essentially loses who he is, and the development of a true self is precluded. The needs of the true inner self go unattended and eventually unrecognized, having been exchanged for those of a false, image-based self. Conformity comes at the cost of the autonomy that is otherwise gained from personal experiment.

Individuals who relinquished their autonomy in this way do not develop an authentic self; nor have they genuinely invested in their false self—not having engaged in the kinds of personal experimentation involved in search of autonomy. There is little resilience to this false self, for it is organized according to outside (parental and societal) prescriptions but lacks the conviction of that authority. Their sense of who they are, without the firm foundation of conviction, is particularly vulnerable to challenge or threat. People with such “misdirected” development, as Gruen calls it, are prone to extremes of violence. The violence compensates for the rage at having relinquished the self, and for the pervasive feelings of helplessness. Empowerment is achieved through the excessive exercise of power over others. “[O]nly destructiveness imparts the feeling of aliveness.” (p. viii) Without the violence they experience themselves as impotent. In everyone's eyes—including their own—they are nothing.

Wilson (1975) similarly identifies the experience of betrayal as potent cause for violence but believes the betrayal to be one the murderer's society has perpetrated against him. He discusses violence for its own sake—what he calls “demonic” violence—as a form of romanticism in an age of defeat, reflecting disgust with society or life in general. Wilson distinguishes the murderer who

kills for personal gain and does so looking over his shoulder—knowing he is doing wrong—from the “assassin” who is punishing society for its false promises—its statements of promise of and entitlement to, say, personal transcendence from the mundane. The reality fails to deliver. Life is banal. For Wilson’s assassin, “murder is not only an ultimate purpose, but also a means of self-fulfilment, a creative act.” (p. 11) The “demonic” murder is a response to the boredom and frustration induced by a repressive and depersonalized society.²⁶ For the murderer there is no compunction to engage in violence, because he feels only contempt for society and its values. Yet there is a quality of absurdity to the killings of defenseless victims. This seems a poor substitute for waging a war against society. As Wilson notes, however, through “magical thinking,” essentially a process of emotional self-deception, killing may dispatch, at least temporarily, the injustice life has dealt. Feelings of vindication may permit him to grasp a justification of who he is and, for the moment at least, a semblance of meaning to his life.

Whether rage is linked to a betrayal of the self by society as Gruen believes, or by one’s own self as Wilson contends, the resulting violence becomes the way for the individual to sustain a needed sense of potency. In crossing the boundaries to violence he can experience himself as a significant presence in the world.

²⁶ Both Wilson (1975) and Leyton (1986) argue that the phenomenon of serial killing is, essentially, an individual response to societal strain. Both authors cite industrialization as a critical element in the prevalence of serial murder in a society. It must be noted, however, that serial murders have long been documented in history. For example, the French confidante of Joan of Arc, Gilles de Rais, tortured and murdered hundreds of children from 1431 to 1440. He was known to rip out their throats and keep various anatomical parts as souvenirs. Serial killing by arsenic poisoning was a commonly used method, particularly by females, in sixteenth to eighteenth century Europe. Douthwaite (1929) provides many such examples.

(ii) The Formative Self

The extreme deviance and violence frequently observed in serial murders is of particular significance. Questions of etiology naturally arise. How can one individual visit such cruelty upon another? Most people can identify with the urge to do harm to others—including murder—at some point in their lives. Fortunately, most people do not act upon it. What is it that sets apart the serial killer, who does so again and again, from the rest of us? Biology?

The ability to exercise restraint is, certainly, one trait that sets serial killers apart from others of us. The facility with which an individual is able to delay gratification has a biological component. Research on the neurotransmitter serotonin, for example, clearly demonstrates that some individuals—with low levels of serotonin—are predisposed to behave more impulsively than others.²⁷ Much of the research on psychopathy has documented a seeming inability for psychopaths to delay gratification.²⁸ They typically do not set future goals for themselves that they diligently work toward. Rather, they tend to be centered in the moment and act on impulse. An individual with low levels of serotonin, thereby predisposed to behave impulsively—as opposed to one who is able to delay gratification—is more likely to find himself in situations where he violates the rights of others in self-serving interest. Other important research is

²⁷Researchers at the University of Texas and Yale University manipulated diet to lower the concentration of serotonin in the brain and found subjects became aggressive until the effects wore off. When dietary changes were administered to autistic individuals, they exhibited more severe symptoms of their disorder, especially the more violent aspects such as self-hitting and self-biting (Moeller, Dougherty, Swann, Collins, Davis, & Cherek, 1996).

²⁸The impulsiveness of psychopaths is well-documented in the psychiatric and psychological literature from Hervey Cleckley's early descriptions to Robert Hare's current research.

examining the role of psychophysiological underarousal (as measured by electrodermal, cardiovascular, and cerebral indicators) in episodic violence (Raine, 1993).

Such factors form the biological substrate that affects behaviors and from which the self develops. While the present research does not examine such factors, it accepts that they have a major role in the ongoing development and expression of the self of every individual. Biological factors have a significant role in how an individual behaves—the tendency toward impulse or aggression, for example. But the actual form that such predispositions take is largely a function of that individual's psychology. Aggressive proclivity can lead to violent behavior. It can also lead to conventional success. To borrow from an earlier analogy, biology gives us our appetites, but it is essentially our psychological makeup that determines our idiosyncratic tastes. For the serial killer, the series of murders are an expression of his particular mental and emotional makeup.

What of psychological propensities? Is an individual's violence a manifestation of his identification with a perceived aggressor? In this scheme the individual takes on attributes of his aggressor, thereby transforming him from the person who was threatened to the one who threatens (Freud, 1966). The case of serial killer John Wayne Gacy, convicted of (sexually torturing and) murdering 33 adolescent boys and young men, is suggestive in this regard. According to Cahill (1986), Gacy's father was an alcoholic and frequently flew into rages in the home. Gacy apparently told psychiatrists for his defense that his father resented getting passed over for promotions by younger men, so he "drank like a fish and took it all out on his son. Nobody was going to outsmart John Stanley

Gacy in his own home.” (p. 25) Could the boy who grew up to kill boys in his own home have been punishing them—in order that he no longer be the one punished? What appears as offensive behavior is, in actuality, defensive. These kinds of experiences tell us more about the individual and thus take us closer to understanding his behavior than would a clinical diagnosis of sexual sadism or intermittent explosive disorder. They would also go further toward explaining certain patterns of victimization by individual offenders than would specific biological factors. Organic brain damage could, for example, explain the violent behavior of a serial murderer, but not so much his particular choice to kill adolescent boys.

There is a substantial literature on the relationship between victimization of children by abuse and neglect and subsequent difficulties manifested in various ways, including becoming abusive toward others. A causal link is inferred from the experience of being victimized to later status as victimizer. Notable in this regard is Albert Bandura’s (1979) research on aggression as socially learned behavior. Individuals are said to learn to be aggressive through their life experiences. The man who batters his wife was likely the boy who had observed his father repeatedly beat his mother with impunity. The man who molests children may well have been the boy who himself had been molested. This kind of so-called observational learning may be instrumental in later violence; once again, however, it does not suffice as an explanation of (domestic) violence. Not all children who grow up in such homes become violent, and not all violent adults come from such homes. Dorothy Otnow Lewis speaks of exposure to extreme family violence as one of three factors collectively associated with homicidal aggression in juveniles, the other two being major neurological impairment and previously undiagnosed psychiatric disorder (Lewis et al.,

1988). These studies appear to demonstrate that the presence of abusive conditions in the family act as potentiating factors for extremely violent behavior when in the presence of certain biological and psychological factors.

The hypothesis in the “cycle of violence” research is that the experience of violence in childhood predisposes individuals to violence in adulthood. Researchers attribute many psychological and behavioral problems to histories of child abuse and neglect. Widom (1989), for one, has concluded from her extensive research that “the experience of child abuse and neglect has a substantial impact even on individuals with otherwise little likelihood of engaging in officially recorded criminal behavior.” (p. 164) Alice Miller (1986) discusses the development of the self relative to traditional punitive child-rearing practices which she asserts can have devastating effects on the psychological health of the developing child. Even though the parent may believe punishment is in the best interests of the child, the child’s experiences of pain, shame, humiliation, helplessness, fear, and anger can result in the suppression of his vitality, creativity, and feeling. In other words, the main paths to authentic self expression are blocked. Natural feelings of exuberance are to be contained in the service or order (—and subjugation). With childish logic, to rebel is to risk losing the parent. Formative development gets perverted as true feelings—particularly the rage toward the authoritarian parents—get repressed. Ultimately, according to Miller, the dam of repressed feelings breaks into outbursts of rage which—like the case she cites of child killer Jürgen Bartsch—can include repeated acts of murder.

The developmental environments of many serial killers are markedly pathological and may account in large measure for their own “sick” behaviors.

For example, when John Wayne Gacy was an infant his mother gave him a daily enema for no known medical reason. His father, a heavy drinker, was verbally and physically abusive to John and other family members. At 36 years of age, Gacy was linked to 33 murders in Chicago committed during the late 1970's (Cahill, 1986). Gerald Stano, a self-confessed killer of over 30 women in the Florida area, was put into a foster home at 6 months of age. Social workers determined he had been severely physically and emotionally abused by his single-parent mother (Sears, 1991). Ted Bundy was born out of wedlock. His illegitimacy appears to have shamed his mother so much that she moved them from Vermont (his place of birth) to Philadelphia. There she apparently concocted a lie that Ted's grandparents were his actual parents and that she was his older sister. Before he was 5-years-old, Ted had three different last names and two father figures, neither of whom was his biological father. As an adult, and before his apprehension, Bundy confided in his friend, Ann Rule, that he was more troubled by his mother's initial denial that he was her child than anything else in his life.²⁹

While there is little or no doubt that early childhood trauma can greatly affect the course of an individual's life, it is also true that not all abused children become disturbed in their psychological or behavioral functioning. Child abuse statistics will not inform us about serial murder. Of the million children reportedly abused each year,³⁰ it is certainly only a tiny fraction who grow up

²⁹Crime-writer and friend of Ted Bundy, Ann Rule, personal communication, Louisville, KY, November 28, 1984.

³⁰From National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse surveys, roughly 3 million cases of child abuse and neglect are reported to authorities on any given year. Approximately one-third of the cases are considered "substantiated" and result in state agency intervention (Siegel & Senna, 1997).

to be serial killers. The vast majority of abused and neglected children, in fact, do not. Moreover, not all people who show psychological or behavioral aberration—including serial murderers—come from violent or traumatic home environments. Examination of the childhood of serial child-killer Westley Alan Dodd reveals nothing untoward in that regard.³¹ Dodd himself, before he was executed, maintained that he came from a “normal” family—albeit one lacking in displays of affection—free from any kind of outward abuse.³²

None of this is to say that childhood abuse is not a decisive factor in the formative development of serial murderers. It is to say, rather, that childhood abuse is not, apparently, a necessary or sufficient condition in the etiology of their extreme behavior. When we review the literature on this subject as it relates specifically to serial murderers (commonly in the form of journalistic accounts of individual cases), we need to know how abuse is operationalized—how has it been measured? And has it been verified beyond self-report disclosures? Most importantly, is abuse defined (and measured) by the extent of subjective trauma or by an apparent objective reality? The critical significance of this distinction is discussed in the next section.

In a related scheme, it is not overt abuse that is at issue but, rather, the importance of the legitimacy that follows from (parental) acceptance. Leyton (1986) describes serial murderers as having a “truncated sense of self and identity,” (p. 30)

³¹Mike McLeod. (Director). (1992, November 10). *Monsters Among Us*. In D. Fanning (Executive Producer), *Frontline*. WGBH Educational Foundation and Oregon Public Broadcasting.

³²*Ibid.*

the result of having been adopted, illegitimate, or spending most of their formative years in institutions such as orphanages or juvenile facilities. As if “unwanted” they are denied a foundation for developing their own legitimacy. The killings enable the serial murderer, according to Leyton, to lay claim to an identity in his own right, establishing a place for him as someone of consequence. When this identity is coupled with the celebrity that often attends the serial murderer, a powerful motivating force—to continue the killings—is unleashed.

An inquiry directed at understanding behavior must be mindful of, if not focused upon, various aspects of the self of the actor. While research has unequivocally demonstrated a role for biological (including genetic), psychological, and environmental factors in shaping and determining behavior, it is ultimately the individual—as a product of the interactions between many complex variables—who acts. How certain conditions and circumstances affect actual behaviors must be assessed within the very specific context of the self of a given individual. We cannot infer that the mere existence of a condition or occurrence of circumstance in the life of a particular individual has any effect on his behavior. One might conceive of the self as an evolving substrate upon which forces act. It is important not only to examine the nature and extent of these forces but crucial to understand their interface with the internal makeup of the individual. Only by delimiting the actual impact and import of specific variables upon an individual can a true understanding of his behavior emerge. This is true both for elements that are generally thought of in positive terms such as exposure to a safe and loving formative environment, as well as for such potentially harmful factors as abuse.

(iii) The Phenomenological Self

It is a contention of this work that only one criterion is significant with regard to the potency of abuse: *how the individual child experiences his situation*. Thus, to attempt to render an objective evaluation as to whether or not a particular child is being abused is not meaningful (and is perhaps misleading). The critical factor is the individual child's experience, not (our assessment of) merely the conditions of that child's developmental environment. In this regard, an individual's biological proclivities and psychological constitution enable or disable aspects of the self to cope with an abusive authority figure. While a child may indeed be subjected to an abusive parent, it does not necessarily follow that the child experiences the parent's behavior as abusive. The child need not be adversely affected by the parent's abusive or neglectful actions.

A simplistic example may be in order to clarify this most important point. Two brothers, 8 and 9 years of age, may be treated very similarly by their parents, by all objective accounts. Neither child is favored; neither is treated abusively. An objective observer may conclude that the relationships among members of this household are generally loving and healthy, with no signs of abuse of authority on the part of either parent. The mother may tell the younger brother that "he must clean up his room" and ask him "what was wrong with him that he did not do it when he was first told to clean it." This boy may respond by shrugging his shoulders and then proceeding to tidy the room. After completing the task, he resumes his previous activities with his earlier enthusiasm.

The mother may tell the older brother the same thing: that “he must clean up his room” and also ask him “what was wrong with him that he did not do it when he was first told to clean it.” This boy may respond very differently. He may feel very guilty and even cry before going to clean up the room. His mother’s words, although the same as for the younger brother, are devastating to him. He may feel he is a failure and fear that his mother will answer this failure by rejecting him. He may be much more sensitive to his mother’s words than is his younger brother, who was, essentially, “unfazed” by the chastisement. This brief example is not intended to suggest that differences in the brothers’ behaviors are due exclusively to differences in their individual biological and psychological constitutions. Certainly, the boys will not be treated identically by this parent across all similar situations. Thus, their respective behaviors will be, in part, a function of each boy’s individual history with his mother. The example does, however, illustrate that each child is an individual and, as such, the product of his own biological and psychological makeup. The critical assertion is that understanding a person can be achieved only to the extent that we know his subjective experience of the world, not its objective reality.

This same point has another aspect to it that needs to be addressed and relates to how we probe subjective experience. Baumeister (1991) conceptualizes the self as a product of nature and culture, consisting of a physical aspect—the body—and a personal identity derived from a set of definitions that collectively address the question of who one is. Identity is made out of meaning. Social identity relies upon shared meanings. It is a contention of this work that an individual’s personal sense of identity, in contrast with his social persona, may or may not be anchored in shared meanings. The sense of self of a psychotically disposed person illustrates this distinction. He who harbors the delusional belief that he

is Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, is responding to an “other” reality; one that departs from our common sense of who he is. The idea may be less obvious, however, as it relates to people who see themselves using the same terms that have currency in society, yet which are not grounded in similar, or shared, meaning. The behavior of a serial murderer who might describe himself as “dominating” may, in actuality, be more akin to “abominating.” Idiosyncratic associations can obscure the meaning of a term that enjoys common usage.

Language works between people because it is based upon the fact that they generally hold certain meanings in common. It is also true, however, that mere application of a term of language does not imply shared associations and, thus, shared understanding. From Ryle (1975), “[C]ommon language can conceal the degree to which our individual histories have left us with different assumptions and expectations.” (p. 2) The representations that two different people have of the world—their cognitive maps—may make use of the notion of interpersonal distances (e.g., the extent to which people they know are like or unlike each other in certain respects), yet each person may use a difference in scale that would obliterate any meaningful comparisons between the two people based upon such distances. For example, the term intimacy may imply an intense emotional bond for one person, and merely physical contact or physical proximity for the other. For this reason, having a person respond to a prepared inventory of attributes or traits may obscure rather than clarify how he/she actually experiences and views him/herself. The interpreter of the results of such surveys assumes that the items in the inventory mean, essentially, the same thing to the respondent as they do to him/her; that the respondent is “trying on” items from an inventory of common stock (i.e., with a universally-understood meaning) to see if they “fit.”

This assumption is unwarranted given, for example, the apparent lack of empathy observed in individuals with antisocial personality disorder. It would be an exercise of questionable merit, then, to present serial murderers, who have been frequently labeled, if not clinically diagnosed, as psychopaths, with an inventory-style instrument for the purpose of deriving a meaningful representation of their world view (including their own self-perception). Hervey Cleckley (1982) identified a characteristic among psychopaths³³ whereby they may voice regret for their antisocial deeds, but the articulation of the words is not endowed with emotional meaning. He labeled this phenomenon *semantic aphasia*. By way of figurative analogy, Johns and Quay (1962) speak of the psychopath as an individual who is familiar with the words to “the song” but incapable of feeling the music. Grant (1977) depicts the psychopath as one who knows the “book meaning” of words, but not their living meaning.

Research suggests there is a biological correlate of, if not basis for, this essential emotional difference between psychopaths and nonpsychopaths. Psychophysiological data provide evidence that psychopathic individuals respond differently to emotionally laden terms than do nonpsychopaths. For example, Williamson, Harpur, and Hare (1991) found that psychopaths respond to emotionally laden words as if they are neutral words—without physiological

³³This work will use the terms antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy interchangeably. Presuming a clinical disorder exists that can be recognized by a core set of symptoms (including lack of remorse, lifelong pattern of antisocial behavior, and the like), the fact that it has been identified by a series of different terms through successive editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders risks obscuring the long-documented observation that essentially one specific disorder exists—that the various diagnostic labels represent the same essential disorder. This research assumes that a clinical entity as described by the generic concept of psychopathy exists.

reaction. Thus, whether the psychopath associates the same substance and intensity of emotional meaning with regard to a given term is in serious doubt. Since so many serial murderers have been characterized as psychopaths we are cautioned against assuming that the meanings they attach to words (and thus experiences) correspond to commonly shared meanings.

Baumeister (1991) offers an astute comment that may have particular relevance for how we study the serial killer: “Thanks to meaning, human life is not so much guided by the *sensations* of pain and pleasure, but rather by pleasant and unpleasant *emotions*.” (p.19) He is describing, it seems, the layer of humanity that is the product of acculturation. For the individual whose ability to experience emotions is impaired or curbed in some way, however, sensations take center stage. He is motivated to maximize sensations of pleasure and minimize sensations of pain while unable to factor emotions into the experience of those sensations. His sense of the world is severely limited—which would facilitate the kind of primitive detachment discussed earlier. He will have learned the vocabulary of emotions without having truly experienced them—and not know the difference. It is as Lakoff (1987) argues, the meaning of many terms is defined by the makeup or experience of the individual, not by objectively defineable stimulus conditions. For example, the meaning of the term “pain” means the experience (of pain) not a “pain situation” objectively defined without reference to the experience itself. It is this difference that we as researchers need to elucidate.

How access to the self is achieved by researchers will determine what is learned—or mislearned—about a particular individual. An alternative means of coming to understand how an individual—psychopathic or not—views and

experiences the world and himself, is to take a more phenomenological approach. Rather than present subjects with pre-chosen sets of terms/attributes representing preconceived factors and themes believed to be important to certain groups of people in particular ways, which is the conventional approach in psychology, individuals could be provided with the opportunity to relate, *in their own words, their own choices of their experiences* that are meaningful to them. An alternative strategy to literally putting words into individual mouths and seeing how they “fit,” is to establish an interview environment in which the interviewee is more proactive in relating personal perceptions and information. Meanings are inferred from what the subject relates and how he relates it, unskewed by the researcher’s preconceived ideas of meaning. Since one’s identity is fashioned out of the meanings that he uses to navigate the world, an individual’s own view of himself (and the world) is necessary to understand him. This premise underlies the method of the present study and is elaborated upon further in the next chapter.

(iv) Integrity of the Self

Ex-police officer and serial murderer Gerard Schaefer kept a detailed diary of his killings. In the manuscript, he uses the first-person to describe his activities. When describing the commission of such reprehensible acts as necrophilia or sodomy, however, Schaefer attributes them to “the executioner.” Not only does he appear to justify the cruel acts as deserved punishment, he “removes” himself from the scene, thereby discharging himself of responsibility (Cheek, 1984, November).

One approach to understanding this duality as a kind of psychological dissociation is offered by Lifton (1986) who uses the term “doubling” to describe the process by which an individual forms a second, autonomously functioning self in response to circumstances that are otherwise psychologically intolerable. In the case of Gerard Schaefer, who referred to “the executioner” whenever describing certain acts, it is as if he completely dissociates himself from the most reprehensible aspects of his crimes; “the executioner” takes over. Thus a dissociative process enables the individual to cope with a situation that threatens the integrity of his self.

As a form of dissociation, doubling offers an explanation for what presents as a distinct duality of self residing in the same person. In Lifton’s (1986) study of Nazi doctors—those otherwise disposed to help others—revealed that to survive the Auschwitz environment and preserve their psychological integrity, the doctors would evolve, in effect, a second self. This self would be capable of killing on behalf of the Nazi project, while being essentially dissociated from the former, pre-Nazi self. The context defines the prescriptive roles that the individual assumes. For the doctor who has embraced the Hippocratic oath and who is then called upon to apply his medical knowledge and skill to advance the Nazi cause, the experience of guilt is averted through a circumscribed redefinition of self and purpose that is in the service of a greater “good.” It is the atrocity of the situation that necessitates a doubling of self. Doubling provides the means of coping with an otherwise untenable reality. It goes far toward helping us understand how individual physicians maintained their traditional roles as husbands, fathers, and community leaders, and reconciled their oath while participating in the human experiments and killings of the Nazi project.

In times of major threat to the psyche, dissociative processes may be instrumental in preserving its integrity, an effective strategy for psychic survival. Dissociation may provide the “adaptive mechanism” by which reprehensible acts are perpetrated. In the case of the serial murderer, the level of conscious awareness (and understanding) he has of the atrocity of his acts is open to question, but it certainly varies as a function of the pathology and/or dissociative process involved. Dissociation is generally viewed in the context of disorder, yet it serves the individual by providing a mechanism for coping with, if not precluding, psychological trauma.

Is it possible that serial murderers cope with their atrocities through a process of doubling? If so, it could explain how they commit their horrendous murders and manage to live—with their selves—in the world. For the most part, serial killers function in their everyday lives in conventional ways. Apart from their crimes, their lives may be, on the surface at least, quite unremarkable. They can go through the social motions that make them appear connected to others, even if only marginally. The reality, however, is that such behaviors are insincere. And this is what may ultimately invalidate a comparison between serial killers and most Nazi doctors. Serial murderers appear to present a “pseudoimage” to the world. The true self is neither revealed nor invested in their interactions with others. This appears to differ from what Lifton has observed among Nazi doctors. For the most part, the physicians appear to have been remarkably conventional individuals whose adaptation—read, survival—to an extreme situation was accomplished through the process of doubling. In the case of the serial killer, however, conventional leanings are disingenuous. There are no indications that serial murderers experience selfless caring for

others; other people are important to them to the extent that they can be used to fulfill personal needs and desires. There is no need, then, for the self to double since the fact of his antisocial acts does not arouse intrapsychic tension or remorse. This is not to say that some manner of dissociation does not occur in serial murderers, but rather that it may not operate in the same manner (or to the same degree) as appears to occur in the process of doubling.

Dissociation is a process whereby aspects of one's thoughts, emotions, and actions are disconnected in some manner from one another—compartmentalized to some degree. It may function in familiar or “habitual” situations, and as a strategy for psychic survival. There are a number of different modes of dissociative process. Spiegel and Spiegel (1978) give many examples of altered awareness, dissociated or hypnotic-like experiences which occur in everyday living. In the normal course of driving our cars, we find that at intervals our attention is displaced from the road ahead onto some other matter of concern or interest. It is as if we have driven the previous block in autopilot, with no recollection of having driven it. Yet we negotiated speed and roadway successfully. This suggests a kind of “split” reality, involving conscious attention to some matter beyond driving, and the simultaneous—and unconscious—piloting of the car. By and large, our minds are not so far removed from the immediate task of driving that we are unable to reengage conscious awareness to meet exigent circumstances of the road and react to the ball that bounces onto the street.

There is suggestive evidence that psychopaths have a relatively high dissociative capacity. For example, they tend to have higher pain thresholds than do nonpsychopaths (Hare & Schalling, 1978). The capacity of an individual

to dissociate his thoughts from his emotions (and therefore his actions) may provide insight as to how certain people behave in antisocial ways apparently without any guilt for having done so. The ability to make reasoned inferences regarding psychological (dissociative) defenses necessitates this kind of empirical approach. Spiegel and Spiegel (1978) present a means of assessing hypnotic capacity (i.e., the Hypnotic Induction Profile). From their clinical studies, they report that sociopaths have a medium trance (and, therefore, dissociative) capacity. Given earlier discussion regarding the apparent likelihood of psychopathy in serial murderers, do they, as a group, have an even higher dissociative capacity? There is an important need for more systematic study of dissociative phenomena as they may—or may not—relate to serial murderers. We do not yet understand the mechanism by which they are able to psychically survive—and live with—the knowledge of their repeated killings.

In their various forms, dissociative states offer a way of understanding behaviors that may otherwise seem incomprehensible. In the case of the serial murderer, how his self manages the facts of his horrendous misdeeds provides a window to the self's integrity. Amnesic states and fugues, multiple personality structures, and psychic numbing in general may enable a person to repeatedly engage in extremely pathological behavior without conceding his psychological integrity. How was it that Dennis Nilsen was able to keep the decomposing bodies of victims in his suburban London flat "to keep him company" for days after they were murdered? He describes in a journal written in prison how he kept the corpse of one of his victims stashed in a closet during the day while he was at work, and then would take it out to be with him in the evening (Masters, 1985). He cleaned the body, dressed it and would sit it up in the armchair next to his. Nilsen recalled taking the victim's hand and talking to him about his day

and about what “they” were watching on television. Nilsen had, at various times, both complete and partial corpses under the floorboards of his flat. There they remained until he dismembered the bodies and prepared the parts for disposal. This did not always occur before they began to smell from decomposition. On occasion, he apparently forgot that he had yet to move a more recent victim from its temporary storage place in the cupboard. In his journal he wrote that he might be suddenly reminded of his situation when he opened the cupboard and was met by the falling out of a pair of bare legs. Thus, it is as if Nilsen had created a second reality that was only partially or intermittently known to the person of his otherwise day-to-day functioning.

Fantasy is a means by which an individual can remove himself from reality and may, as such, be viewed as a dissociating mechanism. In fact, a person may elaborate an “alter-reality” to such a degree that through frequent [pre]occupation, it ultimately creates a kind of other reality for him, perhaps in some sense not unlike Lifton’s idea of doubling. Fantasy may have a pivotal role, transcending the individual to a “reality” where, for example, he experiences himself as omnipotent. Ressler et al. (1985) speak in terms of a “split-reality” for serial murderers. For male serial killers who sexually violate their victims, fantasies are highly sexually charged and obsessively rehearsed. In many cases the fantasies appear to be so compelling as to command a kind of allegiance from the serial murderer. In order to be gratified he is obligated to follow the terms of his fantasies. Specific images in the fantasies may constitute a plan for enactment—a script for his violence.³⁴ In so doing they may acquire

³⁴See C. Skrapec (1996) for more extensive discussion of the relationship between fantasy and behavior in serial murderers who sexually violate their victims.

an anticipatory quality, which then generate motivational force. In one case of a suspected serial murderer, among the piles of nude and semi-nude pictures and photographs found in his possession were some that included the addition of hand-drawn slash and stab wounds on the bodies—wounds that corresponded with those on the body of another actual victim he was believed to have killed.³⁵

Some have focused on the fantasy process as the key to the apparent “dual self” of the serial murderer. In contrast with the mundane social reality of the “normal” world, the psychological vitality of the fantasy may provide the impetus for killing. The act of killing offers excitement and confers a temporary importance and (perverted) meaning to his life. In the Nietzsche sense of the will to power, he takes purposive—and destructive—action as a way of asserting his being. It may also serve to avoid otherwise persistent feelings of anxiety and depression regarding his existence. In a quest for transcendence, he struggles to free himself from the burden of “who he isn’t” or from the “nothing” he is destined to become. Killing offers, at least temporarily, a vehicle for self-expression. And it may become eroticized. During his many years of incarceration, the Marquis de Sade occupied himself by writing works filled with scenes of rape, torture, mutilation, and murder—all in the sole service of gratification of the hero. De Sade’s writings were—and are—to many, the mark of depravity. For Wilson (1988), however, the Marquis’ violent fantasies were a testament to his ability to survive psychically; necessary to prevent self-disintegration. Had he not had the abilities of the creative writer—and, indeed, called upon them—he would have gone mad, there

³⁵The case was one that was observed during a two-year internship in homicide investigation that the author completed with the New York City Police Department, from 1985 to 1987.

being no mechanism to discharge existential anxieties. Wilson sees the serial murderer as someone who kills because he has not cultivated—and may be unable to cultivate—alternative means of self-expression. He maintains that the serial killer experiences the same kinds of passions as others, but is “unfortunate” in that he is unable to discharge them in acceptable ways.³⁶

Fantasies may operate to reduce existential fears. In Wilson’s (1956) insightful work *The Outsider*, we are directed to the Henri Barbusse novel *L’Enfer*. The hero is struck by the sight of women’s skirts as they are lifted by gusts of wind. He is overcome by a need to know all women. As he walks a Paris street driven by this urge, he comes upon a woman who, after a brief exchange of words, takes him home. He seeks in her, all women. The reality, of course, never matches the fantasy. He speaks of the sex with her as going “through the banal scene.” Soon he is again, restlessly, trolling the pavement. The protagonist is angered by what he experiences as betrayal. He is deceived by a reality that fails to deliver. He is able to perceive, according to Wilson, that that which is counterfeit is truth. Yet the fantasy is so compelling that he continues the quest. And so it may be for serial killers—propelled by fantasies of potency they are distracted from fears surrounding their own mortality.

In fantasy, unlike real-world relations, success is virtually ensured. Bonime (1969) points to masturbatory fantasy as providing optimal conditions for pathological gratification. He states, “[t]he *fantasy, physically augmented through pleasurable arousal and orgasm, is a symbolic and sexual charade expressing the optimum conditions for the (pathologically) most gratifying*

³⁶Colin Wilson (personal communication, Gorran Haven, Cornwall, April, 1993)

interpersonal success." (p. 33) [emphasis in original] With orgasm there is "a surge of power and triumph accompanied by a feeling of completeness and wholeness, a feeling only short-lived." (p. 216) Like the quest of Barbusse's hero, fulfillment is elusive. For some, fantasy becomes their most reliable "reality," however fleeting. It is certainly the only "reality" they can completely control.

Fantasies may be elaborated beyond the normal boundaries where themes of eroticism and potency intersect. It has been argued (e.g., Nettler, 1983) that there is a fundamental connection between eroticism and brutality. Normal sexuality is infused with themes of dominance and submission. Fantasies serve to both focus and intensify sexual experience and may be augmented by pornography. Masturbatory fantasies often evolve from pornography that combines images of brutality, domination, and sex. Although fantasies are one thing and actual behaviors another, Donnerstein, Linz, and Penrod (1987) have demonstrated that exposure to sexually violent and degrading materials result in sexually aggressive behavior toward women. In 1986, the United States Attorney General's Commission on Pornography concluded that exposure to violent sexually explicit material is related to sexually violent behaviour.³⁷ Disturbed behaviour is thus the likely product of a consuming preoccupation with sexualized themes of debasement, mutilation, and killing. Stoller (1975) conceives sex murder as a perversion like necrophilia, fetishism, or rape in that each includes—overtly or not, "but essential in the fantasy—hostility, revenge, triumph, and a dehumanized object." (p. 9) These themes both enable and encourage the individual toward violent behavior. It is little wonder that each

³⁷Department of Justice. (1986). Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Final Report. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

of the subjects in the present study reported having an extensive and intensive fantasy life beginning from an early age.

Most serial killers are acutely aware of the details of their murders. In fact, some serial murderers are noted for their eidetic memory of minute details of events and circumstances surrounding their killings.³⁸ In cases of sexual killings, perpetrators often take “trophy” from victims—personal belongings or, even, on occasion, body parts—to enhance later masturbatory fantasies. The issue is generally, therefore, not one of awareness or memory of his crimes but, rather, how he manages with the knowledge of what he has done, to live with it, and then to do it again, repeatedly. He seems if not detached from the facts of what he has done, then from its meaning. His may be a dissociation of self from humanity. As Leyton (1986) notes, serial killers have rejected the fundamental option of our humanity: to refuse to kill.

The nature, extent, and flexibility of behaviors available to cope with the world depend upon the integrity of the self, or the degree to which an individual's cognitions and emotions are integrated into a functioning whole. A fragile or diffuse self image renders an individual vulnerable to a host of pathologies, including self-deception. The narcissist, for example, projects an exaggerated self-importance which defends against underlying fragility. The omnipotent image serves to reconstitute an otherwise diminished sense of who he is. It may be that the “false bravado” often reflected in high-risk behaviors of serial murderers serves similar purpose.³⁹

³⁸For example, Karl Berg's (1954) account of German serial killer Peter Kürten reveals the incredible detail with which Kürten recalled his crimes.

³⁹When serial murderers realize they have managed to elude detection after a number of killings they may take this to reflect their invincibility, which they

Depending upon how it is framed, the degree of conscious awareness that the serial murderer has of his killings, and how he feels about them, may reveal a pathology of his self or speak to its adaptability—or both.⁴⁰ The present research elects the view that dissociation is in the service of maintaining integrity of the self, and is, in that sense, adaptive; notwithstanding that, as noted earlier, repeated violence is, by its very nature, ultimately maladaptive. If, for the serial murderer, killing is a mode of adaptive strategy, presumably there is extreme threat, and presumably to his own survival. Whether the threat has any basis in reality is irrelevant. The fact of its power over the individual is its validity. What, then, is the threat?

C. MOTIVATIONAL DYNAMICS OF SERIAL MURDER

Serial murder is, in large measure, defined by the nature of the motives of the murderer. It appears to be distinguished from other murders by the murderer's need *to kill*. Whether or not he eroticizes the act of killing, the serial murderer needs the result of the corpse. Understanding serial killing can follow only from an understanding of the repetition of the murders. What causes the serial killer to commit his series of murders?

may come to experience as “invisibility.” This puts them at greater risk of apprehension since they are more likely to flaunt this self-perceived invincibility/invisibility and make the kind of errors in judgment or action that get them caught.

⁴⁰Psychopathology may be understood as an adaptive potential of the human condition. Costello (1976) discusses anxiety and depression as adaptive emotions that signal to us aspects of our lives that require change. William Glasser (1990) argues that an individual hears voices in his head because they are safer for him to relate to than are voices of people in the real world. Hallucinations are a way of coping with a more fearful—real world—reality.

Before proceeding with this question, let us consider how many articles and books—in both the academic and popular literatures—have described serial murder as “motiveless” and “random” killing. Neither characterization accurately reflects the phenomenon, and, this research argues, both are misleading. The term “motiveless” generally refers to the lack of identifiable motive in the sense that the offender is not killing, for example, to gain monetary advantage. The title of one television documentary on serial killers is *Murder: No Apparent Motive*.⁴¹ The often vicious and mutilative despoiling of victims before, during, and after the killing, confers a “senseless” quality to the behavior. This research argues that, on the contrary, powerful motive exists.

Use of the term random generally denotes that victims are in most cases strangers to the offender and are chosen for no apparent reason but for the fact that they happen to be there. Most serial murderers target a preferred type of victim such as prostitutes, female college students, homosexual males, or children. Although a victim may not have a prior relationship with the offender, he or she may, in a potent sense, represent or symbolize something or someone well-known to the murderer. In very real terms, then, the offender may consider the victim a familiar if not intimate acquaintance. He chooses these women—prostitutes—because he “knows” them—sluts who must be punished. The killings are also said to be random in that they lack a definite plan. On the contrary, the “plan” for the initial murder is generally mapped out in extensive detail by fantasy and then elaborated upon by experience with subsequent killings. Both of these terms—motiveless and random—are thus unfortunate choices.

⁴¹Imre Horvath. (Producer). (1984). *Murder: No Apparent Motive*. Rainbow Broadcasting Company.

(i) Typologies by Motive

While both serial and nonserial murder evidence an individual's capacity to kill, there are significant differences at their respective crime scenes that suggest distinctive motivational dynamics are at work for serial and nonserial murderers. The very fact of the series of murders for the serial killer signals an ongoing need to kill which, even if present in the single murderer, is limited by a particular time or circumstance. Some researchers have sought to understand differences between murderers by proposing taxonomies of murder based on motive. Jesse (1952) proposed the classification of murders according to six motives: killing for personal gain, revenge, elimination, jealousy, the lust of killing, and conviction.

Buss (1961) appreciated the complexity of motive and understood that in many cases, a murder is driven by multiple forces. Indeed, Brophy (1967) writes “. . . anyone with a minimum experience of adult life knows, motives are apt to be ‘mixed’: different forces are likely to be at work within the mind, and in the external world also, if not simultaneously then during the same period, all contributing to a single effect.” (p. 31) Both jealousy and the desire for personal gain could, for example, combine to precipitate murder. Such overlap in Jesse's taxonomy compromises the validity and utility of the taxonomy. Buss responded by proposing a scheme distinguishing two broad types of murders: those in which the motive is to injure the victim and those in which the murder is the means to an end. The *angry aggression* murder is the murder of a wife by her battering husband during one of his rages. *Instrumental aggression* is illustrated by the mugger who kills his victim after the victim refuses to hand over her purse. Buss' two-category taxonomy, however, has the same potential for overlapping motives. A murder could be perpetrated by the enraged

husband who believes his wife to be unfaithful, and who also seeks to acquire certain of her assets upon her death. To effectively classify murders by motive would require a complex system of cross references, "so elaborate as to stultify the classifier's purpose." (Brophy, 1967, p.31)

In serial murder, the fact of the repetition of the murders distinguishes the perpetrator from one-time killers. While appreciating that similar motives may be involved for both kinds of offenders, the element of repetition in serial murderers suggests motivational differences. Of those who have sought to categorize serial killers (terrorists and professional assassins excepted), Holmes and De Burger (1985) offer a typology according to presumed motives: the visionary, the mission-oriented, the power/control, and the hedonistic serial murderer.

Holmes' and De Burger's "visionary type" killer commits murder in response to voices he hears or visions he has which demand that he kill a particular person or category of persons. The individual believes there has been a miraculous intervention in his life. His role to eliminate evil may be mandated by God (e.g., as claimed by Harvey Carignan, Washington's "Want-Ad Killer") or by demons (e.g., as claimed by Richard Ramirez, the Los Angeles "Night Stalker"). Such hallucinations and delusions qualify him as psychotic. Under Holmes' and De Burger's "mission-oriented" model, there is a conscious effort on the part of the individual to get rid of a problem. One might speculate that the "Green River Killer" recently active in the Seattle, Washington, area (likely responsible for killing dozens of women to date) is motivated in this manner. All of his victims have been prostitutes (or "prostitute types"). For one who might believe that "prostitutes pollute the streets and the minds of men," their eradication may

seem the only solution for a moral society. With this type of serial killer, according to the Holmes and De Burger typology, psychosis is absent. The third category of serial murderer is termed the “power/control-oriented type.” Where power is the goal, the serial murder may be readily understood. For what greater power is there than having the control over life and death? The individual is motivated to capture and assert control over his victims, whom he renders helpless. The murderer derives pleasure from having total control over their lives. Here there is an overwhelming need to dominate and possess the victim, certainly through the act of murder itself, and also by his acts of torture, mutilation, sexual assault, and cannibalism, as well as taking “souvenirs” of his exploits. This type of serial killer is not psychotic, but his lifestyle is characteristically psychopathic.

Like Holmes’ and De Burger’s power-control type, Wilson’s (1975) so-called assassin murders to establish dominance. Wilson argues, referring to Nietzsche, that this kind of murder satisfies a frustrated will-to-power. He contends that where there is a sadistic component to the murder it is not, in essence, sexual in nature but, rather, derives from a basic need to dominate. Souvenirs from the crime scene are akin to trophies of personal power acquisition. And yet, the victims are unprepared and generally defenseless, thus attenuating the outward image of the offender as powerful, though his own experience of himself is as omnipotent.

Finally, the Holmes and De Burger “hedonistic” mode is based on the principle that killing is “fun.” Victims are not seen as people; rather, they are objects for personal gratification. The pleasure is in the frenzy and violence of the act of killing. “They kill because the thrill becomes an end in itself.” (p. 32) Myron

Lance and Walter Kelbach are two serial murderers who may well fit this category. Together they killed six people in Salt Lake City in 1966. In relating the murders they laugh as they recall "having a good time."⁴²

Like Jesse's typology of murder, Holmes' and De Burger's four categories of serial killers are not mutually exclusive, and are thus of questionable conceptual utility. DeHart and Mahoney (1994) suggest extending Holmes' and De Burger's nosology of motives by applying broader models of deviance and aggression to serial murder. Although their research lacks systematic rigor, offering instead a number of motivational theories and supporting each of them with only a few—or no—actual cases, their work at least presumes a diversity of motivational dynamics operate among serial killers. Any discussion of the motives underlying particular behaviors must be tempered by an awareness of the difficulties inherent in assessing their reliability and validity. This is particularly the case where posited motives are, at least in part, unconscious.

A more macro-level understanding is offered by Leyton (1986) who views serial murder as one outcome of social conflict. He speaks of the apparent rise in the number of multiple murderers in recent times and attributes this to the growing number of individuals who are rebelling against a society that has denied their ambitions. According to Leyton, the serial killer derives particular pleasure from the killing—it being his "personalized social protest." (p. 27) Through his murders the serial killer also gains revenge, celebrity, identity, and sexual relief, all of which are reinforcing and, in turn, motivating forces. Van Vogt's (1962) "right man" has an obsession about being "in the right" in his

⁴²Ibid.

desperation to supplant insecurity with self-esteem. The harms he visits upon others are born of his anger at not being recognized by society, coupled with righteous indignation. In this regard he parallels Leyton's "rebels." Ego gratification comes from proving himself; from conquering all. If for serial murderers the primary motive is a rebellion against those in whose society they have failed, it is perhaps surprising that there are not far more serial killers than there are. Leyton's position persuades but is not compelling. Jenkins' (1994) work has shown that there were many serial murderers operating in the United States at different times in the twentieth century—including times when the kinds of pressures Leyton links to today's apparent rise in the number of serial murderers did not prevail.

A greater concern relating to Leyton's macro-level approach is that, to a significant degree, the individual gets "lost" owing to the nature of the sociological paradigm. What is it about those very few among the large numbers of disenfranchized that they should mark their protest by perpetrating a series of murders? Further, social conflict may be very much a part of the motivational dynamics for some serial killers but not for others who are in similar situations. What makes the difference? Typologies—whether micro- or macro-level—as per their intended function, blur the differences between the members of a given categorical type and at the same time obscure the similarities among members of different categories. When individuals are grouped into arbitrary and static categories of motive, important information—including information about motive—is lost. Serial murder is, no doubt, the product of complex and dynamic elements. The task of understanding it requires no less complex and dynamic an approach.

(ii) Behavioral Referents of Motive: Modus Operandi

Motivation is not a static condition but the fluid product of a dynamic process. To analyze the motivational dynamics involved in serial murder requires specific knowledge about what the killer does to experience the world. Behaviors, not unlike the symptoms of a medical illness, are important not so much in themselves, but for what they ultimately mean to the individual who engages in them. Since we infer motivation by observing its behavioral manifestations, it is appropriate to examine what serial killers do, with particular—but not exclusive—focus on their crimes. An offender's modus operandi—his method of operation—can tell us much about him.

Careful examination and comparison of the series of crime scenes will generally expose the serial murderer's "behavioral signature." Particular and idiosyncratic behaviors will be repeated from one crime to another. Ted Bundy used a consistent type of ruse to manipulate his female victims into his comfort zone.⁴³ For example, he applied fake bandaging to one arm and asked young women to accompany him and help him with some bogus task. Albert DeSalvo, the "Boston Strangler" left victims with bows tied around their necks that he had fashioned from stockings, scarves, or brassieres (Brussel, 1968). The significance of this appears to somehow relate to a daily routine he engaged in with his young daughter who, because of a leg deformity, had to have her legs in braces. DeSalvo would put her legs into the braces—which were apparently frightening to the child—and then tie a pretty bow around her neck to make her feel better. In other cases, killers have bound their victims in elaborate and

⁴³The concept of a comfort zone comes from law enforcement and denotes a geographical area in which an individual feels at ease. Most serial killers, for example, tend to kill in places with which they are familiar—near or in their homes or place of employment or prior residence or job site.

specific ways, often using very specific binding materials. This kind of behavior goes beyond the restraints needed to manage a victim and instead indicates an element of ritualism in the commission of the crime. The “signature” a killer leaves behind at his crime scenes may be subtle or an obvious signpost. In sum, he is likely to repeat those specific elements of his modus operandi that work for him—that enable him to commit his crime or to express a strong sentiment or emotion, or sexually gratify him.

Serial killers, particularly as their series of crimes progress, tend to become increasingly efficient criminals. Although they may experiment, thereby altering their modus operandi to some degree, they will continue to engage in those behaviors that have worked for them in past murders. “Son of Sam” killer David Berkowitz attacked his first victim with a knife. He recalled in an interview with psychiatrist David Abrahamsen (1985) that his young female victim screamed “pitifully” and tried to grab him. He claimed that he was disturbed by her reaction to the attack and that, along with the bloodiness of that first unsuccessful murder attempt, prompted him to try a gun in his next attack. It is conceivable, however, that Berkowitz’s discomfort had deeper psychological meaning and that he changed his modus operandi to involve a more impersonal weapon because he was unable to cope with the “closeness” of encounter that using the knife brought. (This would be consistent with his history of very limited social and sexual experience, and Abrahamsen’s assessment of him as fearful of intimacy.) A gun affords greater distance between the perpetrator and his victim: greater physical distance as well as—and, in the case of Berkowitz, perhaps more importantly—greater psychological distance.

The preference for impersonal weapons is atypical of serial murderers. The majority appear to prefer to use more personal weapons—especially their own hands for strangling victims, but also knives.⁴⁴ In Berkowitz's case, using a gun seems to have worked for him since he never again used a knife in subsequent attacks. He appears to have found that using a gun best met his needs—practical and psychological needs—in committing the murders. When we identify specific behaviors that are used repeatedly across his crimes, we can use them as a window to motive. For if we can understand what it is that his behavior actually does for him—what needs are being met by doing things in the manner in which he does them—we move closer to understanding his killing.

The most revealing element of a serial killer's modus operandi may relate to his choice and treatment of victims. Serial murderers typically select victims who share certain physical or demographic characteristics in common, or who symbolize something or someone to which or to whom the killer associates some deeply-rooted anger. Covering the faces of the women he rapes and murders may suggest that an offender experiences guilt regarding his crimes. Other killers "posture" their victims in sexually degrading ways before leaving the crime scene, revealing the killer's disdain for them or what they represent to him. The victimology of serial murder is thus essential to understanding the perpetrators.

⁴⁴In psychoanalytic terms, knives may be considered symbolic of the penis. Repeated insertion of the knife corresponds with penile penetration. Many serial killers experience sexual arousal during the stabbing of their victims. This may account for the excessive stabbing of victims—far beyond that which is necessary to incapacitate or kill the victim—that is observed in many cases of serial murder. Flora Schreiber (1983) spent thousands of hours interviewing serial killer Joseph Kallinger who described thrusting a knife into his victims, recalling the particular pleasure of the soft spots. He said that he had only one thing on his mind—an orgasm. (Personal communication, New York City, January 6, 1988)

Contrary to the notion that a serial murderer kills his victims in order to elude identification and subsequent apprehension, it is more likely that the killing represents an escalation of violence in the real or imagined experiences of the perpetrator. Child molester Westley Alan Dodd is a case in point. He progressed from exposing himself at age 13 to murder at age 28. By his own account, he molested well in excess of 100 children before finally killing three of them. After his conviction for the murders, Dodd sent a series of letters and audiotapes to retired police officer Lori Steinhorst that were ultimately compiled into a book. In one of his letters he wrote that although he had been sent to jail three times—for 17 days, 4 months, and 118 days—he feared his luck would run out and that another conviction would lead to serious prison time. He stated that he initially planned to kill for the practical purpose of leaving no witness behind to testify against him. “[D]ead kids can not [sic] identify me.” (Steinhorst & Rose, 1994, p. 191) But Dodd came to fantasize about the killing itself and grew obsessed with thoughts of sexual torture and murder. He incorporated the killing into his repertoire of sexual sadism.

To paraphrase Holmes (1983), violence heightens the experience, enhancing the perpetrator's sexual energy and feelings of power and virility. In Dodd's case, the violence conferred an added dimension (in terms of arousal) to the sexual scenario. His *modus operandi* thus evolved to better serve the desired end: sexual gratification. In general, *modus operandi* constitutes the means to an end, and thereby can be taken to evince motive. The behaviors involved in the commission of a crime are meaningful to the extent they advance the perpetrator to his desired ends.

(iii) Life and Death Equivalents

As part of an equilibrium between the self and the world, killing may become integral to the serial murderer's self process, allowing him the experience of *being*. As his mode of self actualization killing may become routinized, murder a "habit." It may further assume an "addictive" quality as it comes to be associated with a desired state of heightened psychophysiological arousal. Experimental evidence demonstrates that psychopathic individuals actively seek stimulation. (e.g., Hare, 1993; Hare & Schalling, 1978; Quay, 1965) They do not tolerate boredom well and will situate themselves in high-risk circumstances as if to "jump start" their lives—which, in actual fact, may be linked to a needed "jump start" of an underaroused cerebral cortex. Recent research on chronic violent offenders relates serious violence to an intolerable psychophysiological state of underarousal (Raine, 1993). In a similar vein, Katz (1988) speaks in terms of the "seductions" of crime whereby crime is experienced as "exciting." (Katz, 1988) In addition to the apparent physiological arousal, commission of the crime is experienced psychologically as a thrill, thus doubly reinforcing the criminal behavior.

Sexual gratification seems to be a driving force for many serial killers. How overtly it is manifest varies both across and within individual offenders. Ted Bundy is perhaps typical of most male serial murderers in that all of his killings involved sexual violation of his victims; in his case, apparently pre- and post-mortem. The 11 murders attributed to Albert DeSalvo, the "Boston Strangler," are unusual in that the first five in the series were murders of middle-aged and elderly women against whom no intercourse was attempted. There was vaginal assault, but manually and instrumentally. The next six women were much younger. Although there was much more savagery visited on their bodies,

there was also evidence of penile penetration. Then he stopped killing. DeSalvo was apprehended after he went back to his earlier behavior of molesting and raping women. At that time he confessed to the killings. Psychiatrist James Brussel (1968) surmised that the changing *modus operandi* reflected a process of psychosexual maturation on DeSalvo's part, from a man who regressed to childhood, demonstrating infantile sexual curiosity, to one who progressed to exhibit total sexual potency.

Sexuality may be disguised or absent in the behavior of the killer yet nonetheless be a powerful motivating force in his crimes. There need not be actual sexual violation of the victim for the killing scenario to be sexually charged. Offensive behaviors with no seeming sexual attachment may nonetheless be highly arousing for the offender. In the Whitechapel district of London in 1888, an unidentified man, "Jack the Ripper," cut the throats of at least five prostitutes and mutilated their bodies. The manner in which he disembowelled his victims suggested that he groped among their intestines. In some instances he cut out their genitalia, but there was never evidence of intercourse. It is probable that "the murderous act and subsequent mutilation of the corpse were equivalents of the sexual act." (van Krafft-Ebing, 1978, p. 59) Caputi (1987) also describes the violence and mutilation that "Jack" visited upon his victims as sexually charged.

There is a compelling quality to sex, as reinforced by orgasm, which is not to say that sex is a compulsive activity. The observation that serial murderers do not kill with a police officer at arm's length need not be construed as evidence of their ability to control their behavior, or that there is not a compulsive aspect to their killings. One might expect that the presentation of a suitable victim under

high-risk circumstances would generate tension: the desire to gratify oneself intruded upon by the risk of apprehension. Efforts to resist the compulsive behavior—the killing—are likely frequent and ongoing. The fact that the individual attempts to resist the behavior does not diminish the compelling nature of the desire.

Whether overt or covert, sex is not, however, always part of the picture. Not all serial killers sexually violate their victims or experience sexual arousal in conjunction with any aspect of the killing. One of the subjects interviewed for this study in fact stated that he felt “extremely aroused” when he was killing, but clarified that it was not sexual. He added that it was “better” [than sex]. Regardless of the presence or absence of sexual involvement in the killings of different serial murderers—and since, in any case, sex may be in the service of higher-order motives—it is reasonable to speculate that common motive may be identified among serial killers. They do appear to need, after all, the result of a corpse.

Many questions need to be addressed in order to understand the undoubtedly complex motivations for serial murder. Like the individual who loses control in the passion of heated argument and kills his spouse, is there a point beyond which the serial killer cannot control his murderous impulses? Does the act of killing serve to ventilate rage, displace aggression, and/or relieve psychic or sexual tension? Sexual assaults tend to be attributed more to motivations of power and anger, than to sexual desire per se (Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Groth, 1984). We need to be cautious, however, about diminishing or dismissing the role of sex in sexual assault. Statements that rape is about power or about men hating women do not explain the erection. Sex is very much involved. Sexual

desire, displaced anger, and a need to control all factor—albeit differentially—into the etiology of different rapists. Motive is a product of dynamic tensions. Why would we think it would be different for serial killers, whether their patterned *modus operandi* includes sexual assault or not?

We must acknowledge the high frequency with which serial murder victims are sexually violated⁴⁵ but not lose sight of those cases in which sex has no role in the killing. Regardless of *modus operandi*, there is a common element: the recurring if not ongoing need to kill. How might we proceed to understand this apparent need in serial killers? Here we return to the proposition advanced earlier that the murders relate in some way to a threat to the self of the serial murderer. The remedy sought is through repeated acts of murder: bringing about death. The concept of a death drive was of primary importance to Freud's thinking about the human psyche. He came to view death—along with *eros*—as primordial forces in the life of the individual. While Neo-Freudians have tended to retain, if not expand upon other key psychoanalytic constructs such as the unconscious, defense mechanisms, and the agencies of the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, they have not, by and large, embraced the centrality of a self-destructive drive in their thinking. Sexuality, as *eros*-associated drive, continues though, to enjoy a viable role in psychoanalytic discourse. Pontalis (1978) suspects that the death instinct has been largely superseded by the theme of sexuality “so as to cover up the former” (p. 287)—perhaps further testimony of our discomfort with mortality. Whether or not tensions associated with life and death derive

⁴⁵In his study of serial murderers and their victims, Hickey (1997) found that sexual gratification was the most common motivation in a subsample of 337 male offenders—accounting for up to 46% of the subjects—but that only 9% of these offenders reported sex as the only reason for killing.

from tensions between the kinds of forces proposed by psychoanalysts, there is no question as to their importance in behavior.

The fact is that we are motivated both by our discomfort regarding death as well as our desire for vitality, such as that experienced through the life-affirming qualities of love and sex. Edmund White discusses love and sex as different responses to death. The writer, who was living with AIDS, related,

When I feel menaced by death . . . I plunge myself into sex and I feel a very close rapport between the affirmation of life through sex and the fear of death. I remember one night, when I told my lover that I was positive for AIDS, then I had nothing but the most extraordinary fantasies about sex afterwards because it was like the only way—the most violent and deep fantasies about sex because it was the only way I could feel that I was part of the human race still, that I wasn't being drawn into these shadows. Love, I think, is a very different sort of thing because I think love makes you feel very attached to another person, but it's a false assurance in the face of death, since, in fact, . . . [y]ou're going to be alone [when you die].⁴⁶

In Mednick's (1977-78) study on death anxiety and sexual fantasy, individuals with either high or repressed death anxiety were found to have greater frequencies of sexual fantasies than people with moderate fear of death. We thus appear to invest much thought if not actual behavior in matters related to these fears and desires. Fantasy themes of serial murderers seem to center around death and its equivalents (which they project onto their victims). One might think that the internal experience that the murderer has of his victim's corpse would conjure threatening images of static lifelessness, essentially

⁴⁶Gregory Colbert. (Director). (1990, Fall). To Live with AIDS. The AIDS Quarterly. WGBH Educational Foundation.

reinforcing death-related fears. The excitement of the killing, however, often accompanied by frenzied violence, may be its life-affirming counterpoint (Lifton, 1983a). This argument finds particular strength in those cases in which the offender is sexually gratified by the killing.

In Philip Carlo's (1996) biography of serial murderer Richard Ramirez, whose moniker "The Night Stalker" reflected his nighttime entry into the homes of his victims whereupon he raped and murdered, and 13 of his victims died, in describing killing Ramirez is quoted as saying "*It's like nothing else; you can't explain its intensity in words. To have that power over life—nothing is more sexually exciting; it's the ultimate, something very few people experience.*" (italics in original, p.38)

Nadelson (1992) interviewed five former Vietnam combatants who had been diagnosed as having post-traumatic stress disorder. Their immersion in life-threatening situations in which normative guides to behavior were replaced by the double imperatives—to live and to be loyal to one's command—dislodged them from their moral center. Upon their return to the United States, each of the subjects described feeling exhilarated by recalling memories of events involving mortal risk and killing. Veteran A related, "The second time I went back [to Vietnam] it wasn't for flag or country; it was for the killing. It's [pause] addictive." (p. 131) Another veteran (C), now a paraplegic, disclosed, "You know, I hate to say it, but these nightmares [of combat and killing], . . . I want them. Sometimes I . . . drink coffee [in order to] stay up to go over them. It's the details." (p. 131) The arousal brought on by recollecting details of mortal combat seems, to Nadelson, to displace desperate feelings of separation and anomie as otherwise experienced by many of the returning Vietnam veterans.

They, like addicts, chase a transient feeling of control, dominance, and vitality—which they had experienced in war. In killing, they celebrated not only their own survival, literally, but also the experience of themselves as omnipotent. Veteran B in Nadelson's study related, "Christ, I got off on it, collecting ears . . . for a while I'd rather fight than screw." (p. 139) Killing imparts the feeling of being alive: getting life from death.

(iv) **Preservational Imperatives**

Our desire for life, definable as an expectation of death, creates an existential dilemma. We are living to die. As Unamuno (1967) presents in his notion of tragedy as a "sense of life," which comes from man's endeavor to *be forever*, tragedy is a mode of experience, a subjective shaping and way of organizing the experiences of existence. "What is tragic does not inhere in the external events, but rather in the internal meaning with which events are imbued and interpreted." (Rubens, 1992, p. 348) It is necessary, therefore, to examine the derivatives of an individual's sense of life and death and how he confronts his "truths."

In their work *The Criminal Personality* Yochelson and Samenow (1976) present the concept of a *zero state*. This is an incapacitating aspect of the criminal personality that the offender experiences in which he fears being "reduced to nothing." (p. 265) Yochelson and Samenow note that while this sense of worthlessness is in actuality transient, it is experienced by the individual, at the time, as being hopelessly permanent. Anger—often a more tolerable state than fear—may be an individual's displaced response to his sense that he is approaching a zero state and the terror of nothingness. For some, the palliative—to feel alive—is murder.

Whether it is the existential fear of “being nothing” in the Sartre (1966) sense, or an actual slide into a zero state as proposed by Yochelson and Samenow, nihilistic dread may be a primary factor in the murderous pathology of the serial killer. Kierkegaard (1940) speaks of dread as an aspect of experience unique to the human condition in that man alone has knowledge of his own death. “Psychic numbing, as the central impairment within the formative process, can occur in association with the entire gamut of survivor experience, including that of everyday life.” (Lifton, 1983b, p. 79). It is, then, not only the life-threatening event which can evoke death anxiety: the very knowledge of mortality can be a recurring or unrelenting preoccupation with deleterious consequences. Avoidance is one response to death anxiety. People can learn to avoid the experience of fear and dread by various means more or less injurious to their psychological (and physical) well-being. Alcoholism and drug addiction can serve such a purpose.

William Glasser (1990) would similarly argue that becoming psychotic is more tenable—doable—than facing certain realities. In such ways realities are “numbed” by alter-realities. In this regard, Feifel (1959) notes that “[a] person’s thinking and behavior may be influenced more than we recognize by his views, hopes, and fears concerning the nature and meaning of death.” (p. 116) He suggests that the denial of reality in schizophrenia may somehow function “as a magical holding back, if not undoing, of the possibility of death.” (p. 115) The “logic” is that if living in the world inevitably leads to death, then death can be thwarted by living not in the world.

Death anxiety can also manifest itself in ways that, rather than removing the individual from the world with its promises of death, prompt him instead to take the lead in a kind of dance with death—by committing acts of unprovoked violence. In an ostensibly deadened state, Camus' "stranger," Meursault, commits a senseless murder. Lifton (1983b) sees Meursault's impaired mourning over the death of his mother as linked to his subsequent murderous violence. This single murder is understood as an "attempt to recover a sense of vitality," attesting to the destructive potential of unresolved anxieties regarding death. (p. 118)

From an existential perspective, serial murder may be seen as a strategy to resolve the human condition; to manage a fear of disintegration of the self by establishing a measure of control over life and death. A parallel—albeit perverse—logic for such a quest may be found in Lifton's (1967) observations of survivors of the bombing of Hiroshima and by Nederland (1968b), who studied more than 2000 Holocaust survivors and observed similarities in their tales of insomnia, nightmares, chronic depression, anxiety, and other psychosomatic symptoms. Nederland (1968a) actually defines a distinct clinical disorder, "survivor's syndrome," in which people feel guilty when they survive tragedy in which others die.

There is a literature concerned with the link between the deaths of others and one's own survival, however non-causally. Lifton identifies the struggle of survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima who, sensing their own relief upon encountering the deaths of others, were then plagued by guilt over their own survival in the face of the deaths of others around them. He speaks of this as "guilt over survival priority." (1983b, p. 42) When a survivor witnesses the

expiration of someone else who experienced similar exposure to the bomb, a psychological tension can be articulated: “Why have I survived and not another?”—Read: “over another?” It may be, as Lifton (1967) suggests, that the survivor constructs an unconscious impression of “an organic social balance” (p. 489) which leads him to link the deaths of others with his own survival. On some level, he believes that his life is preserved at the expense of another’s. In this sequence, the death of others has no internal locus of control except perhaps in the wishing for others to die in order that one may continue to live. Guilt is a likely outcome among those who believe that their wish was fulfilled.

The individual who survives in the face of death may assume a somewhat mystical sense of self, and may become, in effect, addicted to surviving. He may actively seek to cultivate death encounters by engaging in high-risk behaviors. That is, he assumes a proactive stance, instigating challenges to his mortality.

Psychoanalyst David Abrahamsen (1973) discusses the case of a boy whose home environment was marked by daily beatings and neglect. The boy engaged in temper tantrums, was enuretic, and performed poorly in school despite his strong cognitive abilities. He was expelled from school, an angry and defiant youth, for falsifying records. One night, after his father struck him, the boy killed him with a shotgun. Abrahamsen argues that the boy murdered his father in part because he was afraid of dying. A common trait among battered children—although one that they are often not cognizant of—is that the years of abuse generate fears for their own life. Abrahamsen contends “[d]eep down in us we somehow have the feeling that by murdering another human being we try unwittingly to rid ourselves of the fear of death which is always at our heels.

As long as human beings consciously or unconsciously have the fear of dying, they will go on killing.” (p. 17)

Further, there are other experiential elements that contribute to the repetition aspect of serial killing:

Force, in the hands of another, exercises over the soul the same tyranny that extreme hunger does; for it possesses, and in perpetuo, the power of life and death. Its rule, moreover, is as cold and hard as the rule of inert matter. The man who knows himself weaker than another is more alone in the heart of the city than a man lost in the desert.

[F]orce is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second, it crushes, the first it intoxicates.

Simone Weil, 1956, *The Iliad or the Poem of Force*, 7-11

Is the experience of the serial murderer, as Korn (1971) might have us understand, the experience of “force?” Korn likens force to an intoxicant. For some, he believes it to be the only antidote against an inner sense of doom. “The killer, for a moment, intoxicates himself with the illusion that he himself is beyond the fate of his victim; the policeman, the prosecutor and the judge dream that they are beyond sharing the fate of the felon; and the jailor, chained to his own leash as a watchdog, indulges in the fantasy that he himself is not a prisoner.” (p. 35) The illusion will suffice until he “sobers up” to existential reality.

Fetishism similarly offers an explanatory model by which to understand the apparent need for killing in serial murderers. In Fenichel’s (1945) writings on

neurosis he discusses fetishism as “an attempt to deny a truth known simultaneously by another part of the personality.” (p. 343) This presupposes a defensive (or, I would add, dissociative) process whereby the individual is protected from, for example, knowledge of his own mortality. In his psychoanalytic argument, Fenichel explains the sadistic features of some fetishists as attempts to commit symbolic castrations. He cites the rare phenomenon of braid cutting as a perversion that combines a fetishistic preference for hair with a sadistic attack. The individual is reassured, according to Fenichel, by identifying with the aggressor. “The meaning is: ‘If I cut others’ braids off, my own will not be cut off. I am the cutter, and not the one who is cut.’” (p. 349) With the braid as a phallic symbol, in effect he is saying, “I am not the one who is castrated.” The anxiety is subsumed by the psychic energies involved in the preoccupying fetish, and then is (temporarily) discharged by the fetishistic act.

In a broader sense—stripped of its usual sexual trappings—the concept of fetishism may go far as an explanatory concept with which to understand the serial killer’s apparent need for a corpse. Fetishistic behavior displaces and transforms intolerable anxiety. Cutting the braid wards off being castrated. Killing protects against being killed. Specifically, death anxiety may be the underlying, compelling element involved in serial murder. The series of murders become the solution to the individual’s problems with death. Serial murder may come to serve as the essential—“life or death”—means by which the individual copes with the anxiety that attends a pronounced fear of psychological disintegration. This anxiety may assume fetishistic form and proportion, especially as evidenced in cases where victims are sexually violated.

Abrahamsen (1973) describes a “striking” correspondence between the acts of sex and violent murder. He posits that “[i]f we can think of the sexual act as an intensification of the equilibrium between tension and release, we can understand how murder, as it is experienced psychologically by the killer, can also be conceived as a vital expression of tension which explodes into release.” (p. 40)

When the integrity of the self is threatened by possibilities of annihilation or disintegration, the need for the experience of vitality may become paramount. Initially this may consist merely of fantasies of omnipotence. In time, and with increasing emotional reinforcement (i.e., “it feels good”), the individual engages in repetitive antisocial acts that ultimately lead to murder. The act of killing provides excitement and confers a temporary importance and (perverted) meaning to his life. For Fenichel (1945), among others, this process acts as a defense mechanism for the individual, serving to avoid otherwise persistent feelings of anxiety and depression regarding his existence. In the serial murderer, the self asserts its vitality through the killings and through some manner of rationalization or dissociation, does so without debilitating guilt. Working against his fear of impending annihilation or disintegration, the serial murderer may be consumed by his quest for vitality. Herein lies the paradox of finding life in death. Indeed, the author has viewed homicide crime scenes that, upon reconstructing enactments of the crimes, can be seen to be scenes of death remarkably charged with life—punctuated by vitality.⁴⁷ The frenzied violence of the offender is evidenced by blood-spatter patterns on the ceiling and walls.

⁴⁷These observations were made during the author’s work as the Coordinator of the Police Crisis Unit for Calgary Police Services (1980-1983) and homicide investigation internship placements with the New York City Police Department (1986-1988), as well as case consultations for homicide investigators.

Man seeks to transcend death by finding meaning in life. Attempts to disguise or negate the knowledge of our inevitable death can undermine actualization of the self. The individual's sense of self may attach to externally defined measures of permanence. Striving to extend one's existence through works of art or literature, or through the fact of their children—as ways to immortality—can impede acceptance of, if not resolution of death—and, similarly, life. Leyton (1986) comments on the immortality attained by serial killers, largely through their media celebrity. This is consistent with a narcissistic nihilism that may be integral to the self percept of the serial murderer. That is, his behavior may be taken to reflect a core sense of impotence, emptiness, futility, and meaninglessness pervading his life. This may well be a primary factor underlying his murderous pathology: to inject his life with meaning; to make him important in the world; a person of consequence. The need to recreate the experience of power evolves to preoccupy him as it replaces his otherwise deadened existence.

We may, then, look at serial murder as a strategy to resolve existential fears. That it works for a time is suggested by the fact of the repetition of the killings—he kills and kills again because it relieves his tensions; also, that it does not effectively resolve his conflict is evidenced by the fact of the repetition of the killings—he continues to need to kill.

During an interview in at Utah State Prison, serial killer Myron Lance stated :
 “We are born to die. . . . Life has no value to me.”⁴⁸ For some, existential anguish can be incapacitating. For others it can be a highly motivating force to live at

⁴⁸Michael Youngren. (Producer). Thou Shalt Not Kill. Salt Lake City: NBC News.

all costs since there is really nothing to lose. How does the serial killer conceive of life and death? Is it in a way that evinces dialectical tension? Is it possible to determine whether, in serial murder, death is linked to life through a continuing and inevitable process?

The degree of integration or disintegration of the self (i.e., psychological integrity) is manifested by the pathological behavior of the serial murderer. Where an individual's sense of self is threatened, he may feel compelled to test and affirm life. When the perceived threat is extreme, as when a person experiences an "image feeling" that he will disintegrate or be annihilated, the response may be extreme. The result is a need to sublimate the fear or displace or transform it in some way. About his murders, British serial murderer Dennis Nilsen wrote in his prison journal "I never sensed the feeling of *killing* as such, only a feeling of stopping *something terrible from happening*, a compulsion to squeeze the person by the throat to relieve and absolve . . . me from something terrible." (Masters, 1985, p. 143)

In dispensing death the serial murderer is perhaps trying to give himself (more) life—to control fate. He may seek life-affirming equivalents. The breast from a victim that he now uses as a paperweight is testament to his own potency. He has conquered death. From his aberrant life experiences he evolves distorted images of vitality. The ensuing fantasies are embedded with forceful, often bizarre death imagery.

Serial murder highlights for us the paradoxical relationship between vitality and mortality. In the serial killer we find a life that is sustained by death. An impotence of self at the prospect of death—at least as experienced by the

individual—is perhaps the key to understanding the serial murderer. The fear, existential or not, of being no one (or “nothing,” in the Nietzsche sense) may be emotionalized as rage and rationalized as entitlement. It is, in essence, a primitive posture that is offensively defensive. And it suggests psychological and emotional deficit.

In coming to understand the motivation for serial murder—what gives energy and direction to the serial killer’s murders: What is his motive?—we are moved closer to the meaning the murders hold for him, for motive evinces meaning. The present study seeks to learn more about the kind of individual who has demonstrated his capacity to kill a number of people over a period of time. It proposes to examine those themes which bear upon that individual's sense of who he is, what he did, and why he did it.

*. . . at least be
sure that you go to the author to get at his meaning,
not to find yours.*

—Ruskin
Sesame and Lilies, Lecture i. *Of Kings' Treasuries*, §13

IV. METHODOLOGY

William Blake wrote, “To generalize is to be an idiot.” While many would consider this hyperbole and some would argue it is simply wrong, the process of grouping individuals into categories does result in the loss of important information about those individuals and about the phenomenon under investigation. The situation is further complicated by Kluckhohn and Murray’s (1953) dictum: “Every man is in certain respects (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, [and] (c) like no other man.” (p. 53) So how do we proceed to understand serial murderers? As discussed in Chapter 3, serial murder is essentially distinguished by the nature of the motives of the killer. Understanding serial murder requires an understanding of the repetition of the murders—identifying motive. The task of elucidating the motive forces underlying serial murder in such a manner that evinces its meaning cannot rely upon traditional clinical and psychometric approaches. The argument developed in Chapter 3 holds that an alternative—phenomenological—approach is called for; one which examines the experiential aspects of self process as they relate to the repeated acts of murder.

The strength of qualitative methods is in the process of induction whereby a generalized theme or principle is inferred from particular instances. The data “emerge” to provide theory in contrast with the more traditional logico-deductive approach in which a hypothesized general premise is used to infer

particular instances. Inductive reasoning provides a different perspective—another window—on phenomena we seek to understand.

A. EMPIRICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

Lifton (1993) conceives of the self as "one's inclusive sense (or symbolization) of one's own being." (p.2) This definition recognizes a crucial aspect of our understanding of the self: that our experience of it is essentially subjective.

Freeman (1992) defines the self as an ongoing narrative or interpretive creation of an individual about himself. He is thus concerned with the broader phenomenological and experiential issues around defining and elucidating the self. Freeman, like Lifton, denies an orderly development of the self in favor of a view of the self as the rather protean product of the flux of life experiences. Narratives are considered "a part of the very fabric of the self" (p. 25) even if there are mythologized and fictive renditions. Freeman concludes that, "on some level we are the stories we tell about ourselves." (p. 25) Even if self-reported histories are outright lies, Rosenberg (1988) contends these are, nonetheless, useful. Personal narratives reveal the meanings that organize an individual's life—whether they are derived from actual lived-experiences or whether the individual fabricates experiences and incorporates them into his narrative—ostensibly *because* they are meaningful to him.

The methodology used in this study—empirical phenomenology—focuses on an individual's experience in order to gather comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a structural analysis that represents the essence of his experience. Put another way, the underlying structures of an experience are determined by interpreting an individual's narrative about the situations in which the experience occurs. Is there an inner narrative which drives the

serial murderer to kill and kill again? The aim is to determine what the experience of repeatedly killing means for individuals who have had that experience and are able to give a comprehensive description of it. The task requires examining each act of murder in terms of what it means to the murderer, being mindful to identify common themes across the series of murders.

Phenomenology was introduced by Edmund Husserl in 1900 as a rigorous philosophy seeking to describe the life of consciousness in its primordial experience with the world. The term *phenomenon* has its origins in the Greek term *phaenesthai*, meaning to show itself, to appear. According to Heidegger (1994) it essentially means bringing to light the totality of all that lies before us. Hence the maxim of phenomenology: “To the things themselves.”

Psychology has, over the past century, developed this qualitative research tradition. The present study seeks to derive the constituent meanings of the experience of killing a number of people over a period of time. “[T]he conscious description of experience and the underlying dynamics or structures that account for that experience—provides a central meaning and unity that enables one to understand the substance and essence of the experience.” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 9) An empirical-phenomenological psychology, which this research represents, seeks to obtain descriptions by individual serial murderers of their experience of killing and then rigorously analyze these descriptions to arrive at the structure of their experience.

B. CONDUCTING THE STUDY

The research proceeded as follows. Before approaching any penal institutions with a request to conduct this study, a formal research proposal was submitted to the Committee on Protection of Human Subjects of The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York for its approval. Once granted I contacted the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada, providing a copy of the proposal, and requested permission to approach inmates to interview. After a delay of almost a year (owing to concerns arising from a situation in which an incarcerated serial murderer had been threatening to sue a researcher who had arranged to interview him) I received a letter granting access to Canadian prisons for the purpose of conducting the interviews. I was also given a list of inmates, each convicted of at least two murders⁴⁹ who had been approached by the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada and who agreed to participate in the study.⁵⁰

⁴⁹For purposes of this research the operational definition of a serial murderer was "an individual who was convicted of at least two murders that were committed over a period of time." Although the researcher is most comfortable with a definition that specifies at least three such murders, SUBJECT #2 was included in this study because he killed two men and attempted to kill two others. That is, it was not by design that his other two victims survived.

It is noteworthy that as a result of the proposal for this study when staff of the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada sought to draw up a list of potential subjects it was learned that the national database was not coded in a way that distinguished individuals convicted of multiple murderers from those convicted of a single murder. This necessitated the Branch staff having to make contacts with individual institutions across Canada. What this reveals is that the number of multiple (including serial) killers in Canadian prisons was not known before this study.

⁵⁰Although this dissertation is based upon interviews with five serial murderers, I also interviewed a sixth subject who was convicted of the mass murder of five people. Results of this interview are not part of this dissertation as the present study focuses exclusively on serial murderers. It is the intention of the researcher to present these results in another academic forum.

Interviews began the following summer and took place over a 3-week period. I travelled to four different prisons in the two provinces of Quebec and Ontario. The researcher met with each inmate subject over a period of 3 consecutive days.

Although all interviews had been pre-arranged with inmates months prior to the actual sessions, all subjects were advised that they could withdraw their participation at any time. When I arrived at the Cowansville Institution I was informed by prison administration that SUBJECT #1 had changed his mind and no longer wished to participate in the study. I requested that the inmate be asked if he would agree to meet with me for 5 minutes, during which time he would not be subjected to any kind of persuasion or coercion; the purpose of the meeting solely being to give him the opportunity to meet me in person and then decide whether he would participate in the study or not. SUBJECT #1 complied with this request and within less than the 5 minutes, agreed to participate. In fact, the interview began from that point. He was eager to “get started.”

Following a reading aloud of the “Introduction” portion of the interview protocol as set out in Appendix B, each subject was presented with the consent form devised for this research⁵¹ (Appendix A). The researcher read a copy of the form, again aloud, while the subject read along on a copy presented to him for his signature. He was then asked if he had any questions. Four of the subjects asked for clarification regarding the stipulation that there would be no confidentiality regarding information they would provide—this despite the fact that their names would not be used. All four indicated that they had no problem with the researcher using their names. They were thanked but it was explained

⁵¹The wording of the consent form used in this study was constructed with the advice and assistance of the Committee on Protection of Human Subjects of The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York.

that no names would be used in the study. Once the consent form was signed they were again told that they could withdraw their participation at anytime during the interviews. With that reminder, the first interview session began.

The interviews were conducted according to a semi-structured protocol as set out in Appendix B. The protocol was developed by combining and modifying interview instruments I have used in clinical practice, then finalizing the protocol in consultation with the members of my Dissertation Committee. Although the interviews followed the semi-structured protocol, subjects essentially had complete control over what they talked about. The purpose of the protocol was to prompt discussion in broad content areas that the subject could take in any direction he felt reflected meaningful experiences for him in those areas. Needless to say, “tangents”—relative to the protocol—were frequent, but always significant by virtue of the fact they were meaningful to the subject. In all cases subjects were directly asked to “take me by the hand and walk me through their killings.”

All interview sessions were audiotaped to satisfy two purposes: (1) to preserve the words and “voice” (e.g., tone of voice, laughter, pauses, and the like) of each subject; and (2) to enable me to stay with each subject “in the moment” and keep up with the flow of the exchange, not being hindered by attempting to take verbatim notes. Each night of an interview I reviewed that day’s audiotapes, making notes of specific questions to raise the following day by way of clarifying or furthering a particular matter as discussed by that subject.

Ultimately the audiotaped interviews were transcribed, although the tapes were repeatedly reviewed even as the transcribed hard copies of the interviews were available. This was done to minimize the loss of information related to changes

in voice inflection, pauses, and the like—to continue to keep subjects' voices more literally in my own head as I proceeded to analyze the data.

Interviews proceeded as permitted by prison regulations and exigencies—which took precedence at all times. I was met at each institution by the warden and other administrators who had been prepared for my visit by the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada.⁵²

Information obtained during interviews was supplemented by other sources where possible. Although the researcher was familiar with one of the “cases” (i.e., subjects) prior to the study, much of the detailed information regarding this subject (#3) and his killings was not known before meeting with him. In fact, for all subjects, supplementary information about them or their “case” was not reviewed until after the second day of interview sessions with them. A few times information from other sources appeared to conflict with what a subject presented in a session. He was asked to clarify or speak to any such discrepancies during the final day of interviews. The primary reason for approaching this situation in this manner—and not reading inmate files and reports before conducting interviews—was to reduce the possibility of the researcher being distracted or “contaminated” by other sources of information.

Supplemental information about subjects was provided by correctional personnel who were familiar with a particular inmate. Personnel sources included prison

⁵²In fact I learned that the Warden at Kingston Penitentiary had received a letter from the Commissioner of Corrections in Canada advising him that upon my arrival there, if I wished, I may be given research access to a particular inmate who had previously been banned from involvement with any media events or research projects—owing to his notoriety and problems he had caused within the system. I gratefully accepted the opportunity. This inmate is SUBJECT #3 in this study.

administrators, correctional officers and case management personnel, and prison psychologists. Additionally, the researcher was given access to inmate files which included copies of original police and coroners' reports, summaries of court decisions, case progress reports, psychological evaluations, and parole application documents. All subjects gave their permission for the researcher to have access to their files.

Collection and analysis of the data followed the outline as provided by von Eckartsberg (1986) for empirical phenomenological research. Accordingly, the research steps consisted of: (1) formulating the research question in a manner that is understandable to others; (2) gathering a descriptive narrative from each subject based on an interview dialogue in which the subject is considered as co-researcher; and (3) reviewing and scrutinizing the data "so as to reveal their structure, meaning, configuration, coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrence and clustering," emphasizing the "configuration of meaning [and] involving both the structure of meaning and how it is created." (p. 27) The essential task was to attend to what each subject said about himself and his experiences, as well as to read between his lines—and to establish with him if that reading was accurate and valid.

This method, empirical phenomenology, is about staying close to the data, enabling them to "speak for themselves." The rigor of the process involves the dual task of continually monitoring and confirming the substance of the narrative while identifying and refining the categories of meaning inherent in those data. The exercise involves pouring over each subject's narrative, identifying what for him are his motives and searching for the meaning he attaches to his killings.

V. THE SUBJECTS

In addition to conveying considerable information about the subjects, their lives, and their crimes, the interviews revealed much about the way the five men construe the world and their place in it. Before proceeding with an examination of the actual murders, this chapter presents a background summary of each of the five subjects based upon information obtained from interviewing the inmate subjects as well as from inmate files as provided by the Correctional Service of Canada; interviews with psychologists and correctional staff familiar with the inmates; and secondary sources, including published newspaper and book accounts related to the cases. The information is organized into the following categories: Family and Childhood, Adult Adjustment, Sexual History, Marital History, Psychiatric History, and Delinquent/Criminal History. It is intended to convey an overall sense of each subject in terms of his personal history as well as his status in prison at the time of the interviews.

A. INDIVIDUAL CASE HISTORIES

(i) Subject #1

SUBJECT #1 is a 33-year-old French Canadian male who has been in prison for over 11 years. He killed a 13-year-old girl in 1972, when he was 14, and was sent to l'Institute Philippe Pinel for psychiatric assessment and treatment where, despite several escapes, he spent the next 4 years. Then, at age 21, he killed two women. He was sentenced to life imprisonment on two counts of manslaughter in 1979. Parole eligibility was set at 7 years. To date, his biennial requests have been denied. Interviews for this study were conducted during his incarceration at the medium-security Cowansville Institution at Cowansville, Quebec, where he

has served the last 2 years of his 12 years in prison. His demeanor throughout the interview sessions was friendly and cooperative.

Family and Childhood

SUBJECT #1 has a biological sister one year older than he is, whom his parents kept and raised. SUBJECT #1 was put up for adoption at 6 months of age into a family of three girls, the youngest of whom was 7 years older than he was, the oldest 10 years older. According to SUBJECT #1, his parents, with whom he had periodic contact throughout his childhood, later told him that they could not afford to keep him. He explained that he did not believe this since they continued to acquire material things such as new cars over the years. "They always lived beyond their means." SUBJECT #1 stated that he believed that his biological father did not want him. Although he was quick to add that he did not know why, he suggested that maybe children were too stressful for his father, noting that his biological sister was largely raised by their grandmother. This still, of course, does not address the fact that his parents did keep his sister—and not him. Although he saw his biological parents on occasion throughout his childhood since they did not live far from each other, SUBJECT #1 did not spend much time with them. His biological mother was a heavy drinker. "She is very nervous. She is like me, needing to be with someone. . . . When she drank she was reclusive. She was not very expressive." SUBJECT #1's father drank also, but would become very dominant and abusive. "I felt pity for her, and anger at her not taking responsibility for herself. If she had left him, in a way, my sister and me, we would have had a better life, too."

SUBJECT #1 stated that his adoptive father had wanted a son. He believes his arrival into the adoptive family was not welcomed by his adoptive sisters over

whom he was favored, and who had to babysit him. He remembers his adoptive parents as “always arguing.” His adoptive father would come home from work and instead of saying “hello” would yell, “Give me a beer!” SUBJECT #1 described how he would then sit in his rocking chair and drink for the rest of the night. “He’s there but he’s not there.” Both his biological and adoptive fathers drank heavily (his adoptive father died of cirrhosis of the liver) and both were physically abusive toward their wives.

SUBJECT #1 wet the bed until he was about 4 years old but his adoptive parents did not react negatively. He says he was not a bully growing up but, rather, the one who was bullied. He tended to be afraid of other children. Growing up, SUBJECT #1 said there were no rules for him at home. “It’s like I was not there. . . . I think my parents thought that because I was a boy I could take anything. I used to be able to take a lot, and put it away, not deal with it.” Yet SUBJECT #1 knew on some level that it bothered him for he acknowledges, “I was willing to do anything for attention . . . but I was never comfortable around people. I felt that I was the only person who would not hurt me. I never got into fights because I was afraid of getting hurt.”

SUBJECT #1’s medical history is unremarkable. “I have never had a headache in my life. Once I went to a doctor to see if I was normal. I have never really been sick. I had my appendix out when I was 15—they operated on me with shackles on my feet—as if they were afraid of me!”

SUBJECT #1 singles out his grandfather as someone in his life for whom he had strong feelings. His grandfather has died since his imprisonment, but no one told him until 4 years after the event, upsetting him very much. SUBJECT #1

stated that when he learned that his grandfather had died he had an image of a library burning, "because he was full of stories that are now gone." SUBJECT #1's adoptive father also died 4 years ago. "For the first month I was walking on a tightrope. Emotionally, I had a lot of love for him. And the opposite, you know. I was afraid of letting myself go with that love because I didn't want to be homosexual."

Adult Adjustment

In terms of work history, SUBJECT #1 states he "couldn't stay long with a job. Got to move, you know. Not get caged." He continued to use drugs and alcohol into adulthood.

Sexual History

Although SUBJECT #1 was not, he feels, actually sexually molested, his adoptive father approached him sexually on occasion. For example, he played "games" with him such as putting his penis in SUBJECT #1's hand. He would also make the subject apply ointment to his hemorrhoids. "I knew it was not normal and I was scared in a way. I knew it was an adult thing and I felt bad doing it."

SUBJECT #1 learned about sex when he was 12 or 13 years old. "I was afraid of sex. It was bad to think about it." What the subject said next suggested that he may have engaged in voyeurism.

One night at about 2 o'clock in the morning I was walking on the street and went between two houses and saw a couple making love in the basement. The woman got angry and then the man got the same way. And they liked that, you know? He was hitting her and insulting her. She hit him, too. For me, I think, that was the first clear image I had. The feeling of that, I enjoy a part of that.

My first sexual experience was a disaster—with [his first victim]. I had seen a film that was almost like my parents' view—that sex was bad. But I was excited by the action. But I was too much strained about sexual things so when I would see something like that I would naturally want to do the same thing. But underneath it, there was also something else about sex—violence. To put the anger into love, and the excitement, all into one package. For me those things went together—very powerful. . . . And I was with older guys who talked about getting pleasure from women as if they were objects.

Psychiatric evaluations describe the sadomasochistic sexual relationship that apparently existed between SUBJECT #1 and his girlfriend, L.. With some difficulty, the subject reported that within the context of their relationship he engaged in a ménage à trois with L. and her girlfriend. His discomfort appeared to relate to his feelings about the nature of the relationship that the two women shared with each other—that “they did everything together.”

As a child, SUBJECT #1 claimed he had a very active imagination. He imagined going on far away adventures, going all over the world and into outer space.

Some of it was sexual. As a boy it was mostly the curiosity. I've got a thing, girls don't have a thing, you know? . . . Now the fantasies are different. It's not violence but it's the power of having a woman—it's an obsession. Like control. To have her to yourself, you know. . . . It's like you have a bottle and you can only put one glass of water in it, but I have 15 glasses of water. So what I want is too big. . . . I have too much affection to give.

SUBJECT #1's choice of the term “affection” in the preceding passage did not seem to be an appropriate word in the context of his discussion of sexual fantasies. When he was asked to describe what he meant by “affection” he

replied, “You know, too much emotion,” suggesting that he attaches a somewhat different meaning to the word than is generally assumed.

A favorite fantasy of his is to make love on a horse, adding with a laugh,

—not to a horse. A horse represents liberty, freedom to me. The woman has long hair and is a little wild, like the horse. Yet she is soft. The act is soft and sensual. . . . Making love on a bus with a bunch of people is another fantasy. The woman is excited to take the risk, too. Something to do under the nose of other people.”

More than the desire to be free of normative constraints, SUBJECT #1 seems to relish the idea of rebelling against them.

“I miss sex, women, you know, the most. It has been 11 years since I had real sex. I had some sex in here but it was too fast. So for me it meant nothing—like you empty a bottle and it’s finished. For me, it is more than that.” When asked what he does he said, laughingly “Well, there’s my right hand. And there’s my left hand. I cannot do it with another guy. I tried but I couldn’t. If I could have done it, I would have been the biggest bitch in the place!” [laughs]

He sees himself as a sexually attractive man.

Before I came here, when I was young, everybody considered me like dirt. Not attractive. The last 5 years I have been able to see how others find me attractive. In here, you can play with that. You can have sexual relations without touching each other. It could be more interesting to do it that way than in bed.

Marital History

SUBJECT #1 has never been married. He had been living with his second victim, however, for approximately 4 years at the time of her murder. They had been introduced by her brother, who had been an inmate with SUBJECT #1 at l'Institut de Philippe Pinel.

Psychiatric History

From 15 to 18 years of age, SUBJECT #1 was in Pinel for purposes of psychiatric assessment and treatment following his first murder. There he was diagnosed as having a passive-aggressive personality with sadomasochistic features. It was also thought that he may have a borderline personality disorder at that time. Since his incarceration for the two murders SUBJECT #1 subsequently committed as an adult, he has been psychiatrically evaluated and was initially diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. More recently, prison psychiatrists diagnosed him with antisocial personality disorder.

Delinquent/Criminal History

After the fourth grade SUBJECT #1 skipped school regularly and spent his time with much older "marginal people" who were drinking alcohol and using drugs. His extensive drug abuse history began at 11 years of age. During his adolescence SUBJECT #1 got into trouble with the police. One such episode involved stealing a car with a friend. It bothered him that his adoptive father never asked him if anything was wrong or why he did it, but instead just strapped him.

When I was 11, I went with two friends about 19 years old to a cabin. We demolished it inside and out. Drove the [stolen] car into it and everything. Then, later, they talked about it and I got caught. Nothing happened to me

.

because I was too young. In my mind, a good friend will protect the other friend. They betrayed me. After that I was pretty much on my own.

SUBJECT #1 ran away from home several times. "When I ran away from home I felt free—from myself, my parents, from life, from rules, and I was searching for something." What he said next reveals that he experienced boredom as an equivalent of death and, further, that it was a potent motivating force. "I was always trying to find something out of the ordinary, exciting. I was feeling dead. I was bored with everything. School. Nothing interested me. I needed something substantial." By the fifth grade he was not attending school anymore.

At 12 my [biological] parents asked me to live with them. I felt uncomfortable, like I didn't belong there. . . . My mother caught me in the bathroom sniffing glue. She reprimanded me. I tried to explain why I was doing it. I said, 'I want to die, but I don't know how. I'm tired of feeling like that.' She said to me, 'I don't care if you want to do that.' She said, 'I don't care what you do. If you want to die, maybe it's good for you.' After that, nobody had control over me. I stayed with them about a month. I was in trouble for stealing and I was placed in a juvenile center for a couple of months. Then they put me back with my adoptive family, where I stayed until the thing [the first murder] happened.

(ii) Subject #2

Subject #2 is a 30-year-old bilingual French Canadian interviewed at the medium-security Federal Training Centre in Laval, Quebec. He presented in a most congenial manner, clearly happy to talk about himself and his "case." His personal mannerisms are notably effeminate. SUBJECT #2, in apparently homophobic-panic attacks, stabbed four men over a 4-year period (1979 to 1983), two of whom died. He was sentenced to life in prison in 1983 for two

manslaughter convictions and two attempted murder convictions. He was eligible for parole this year but his application was refused. His next review will be in 2 years.

Family and Childhood

SUBJECT #2 has one brother 10 years his senior and one sister 5 years older than he is. He describes the household as filled with tension most of the time, relating numerous stories in which his mother was verbally abusive to members of the family and physically violent with his father. SUBJECT #2 states that he could never understand why his father never stood up to her. She apparently drank heavily and frequently took pills that she obtained by going to three different doctors, each of whom was apparently unaware of the others' prescriptions. "When she was not drunk or on pills she was really good—maybe one day in five." According to SUBJECT #2, his mother was "very manipulative and almost always upset."

SUBJECT #2 related that his mother always blamed him whenever there was anything wrong around the house. She would punish him by making him sit for hours holding books in his extended arms. After being punished he would usually go to his room and cry with his cat. "I was safe then." On one occasion, when he was 17, she took a loaded .22 caliber gun and pointed it to shoot into his bedroom. His father managed to get the gun away from her.

"I can't defend myself. From about 10 years old I have always been afraid of getting hurt. . . . I had a big fear of the basement until I was 18. . . . I did a lot of daydreaming when I was a boy because I was alone so much. I liked school because it was not home. . . . I did not do well but I did not get in trouble." (He obtained a high school diploma and a certificate in kitchen management.)

SUBJECT #2 suggests that problems in his family began in 1959, the year before he was born. At that time his mother apparently had sexual intercourse with her doctor and the incident was witnessed by his father. Although the doctor left town problems remained in the marriage. SUBJECT #2 was born a year later, and, according to him, his father stopped having sexual relations with his wife. Throughout his childhood, SUBJECT #2 listened to his mother's suspicions that his father was homosexual. He believes this had no basis in reality but instead was all in her head. The subject describes what seems to be a folie à deux whereby his mother repeatedly accused him of being homosexual and he grew up terrified he might be homosexual. On one occasion he asked his mother for shorts to wear for gym at school. She refused to allow him to get any.

Then, the next day, she went to the doctor and lied about me having trouble with my feet—so I could not go to gym at all! Do you know what that did to me? I was not allowed to play with the others. I wasn't part of the groups with the other children. . . . She was afraid that I would be changing with other boys.

SUBJECT #2 remembers that often, when his mother was drunk, she would say, "Your father fucked you. Your father fucked A." [—SUBJECT #2's brother] All his father would say is, "She's drunk again." The subject remarks that he noticed that his father never denied it, which confused him. So he tried to find out if there were any records of him being hospitalized between the ages of 6 months and 2 years (because of what his mother had said) but could not locate any record of such abuse. SUBJECT #2 said that he would later be told by a relative that his mother had been molested when she was very young and he reasons the experience probably caused her problems.

His parents separated when he was 22 and his father is very happy with his new female partner. SUBJECT #2 related a recent telephone call that he had with his father in which his father began to cry. He learned that his father was sitting in the bathtub and his partner had just given him a cup of coffee. SUBJECT #2 himself cried as he said, "Can you imagine it? My father never had a wife who made for him a cup of coffee before." About his father SUBJECT #2 says, "His only problem is that he is really too good." After his parents separated he tried to avoid seeing his mother whom he feared might try to poison him.

Adult Adjustment

Before his incarceration, SUBJECT #2 maintained employment doing the kind of culinary work he had trained for.

He does not have a history of drug use but he drank frequently. He was under the influence of alcohol during each of his criminal attacks.

SUBJECT #2 describes himself as "the little bird in the nest too afraid to jump. I was too weak to leave home before I did." He did not tell his mother that he was taking cooking classes because he believed she would have interfered—"it was too feminine."

Sexual History

SUBJECT #2 had his first erection at 14 years of age and did not know what was happening. He was with some friends at the time and remembers feeling first surprised and then embarrassed. In his home growing up sex was a taboo subject. The subject states that his mother removed the pages in the dictionary in which

male and female were defined and described. Immediately after relating this he said, "I don't have a sexual identity."

SUBJECT #2 did not masturbate for the first time until he was 17 years old. He had platonic girlfriends until he was 20 or 21 years old, at which time he had his first sexual experience with a female. It was during the same period that he tried homosexual relations. Before his final attack, he had moved to Alberta from Quebec. He spent a year and a half working as a sous-chef for major hotels. He discovered that "I could do whatever I wanted there. I had some friends, some women. I had fun and some sex with them. It's my business. Never does she [his mother] know who I am with. And I don't have to say what I am." On two occasions in Alberta, and then once upon his return to Quebec, SUBJECT #2 tried homosexuality,

. . . to know. I wanted to know full relations. I wanted to know if I am or if I'm not. Today when I talk to you I know. I never had fun with men. Some said I was too tense and too rigid and needed to relax. But it was not normal for me. . . . I now have friends here [in prison], homosexual and not, and I know I am not homosexual. Now I can say when I am approached, 'thank you but no thank you.'

Psychiatric reports summarize SUBJECT #2's sex life as virtually nonexistent, extremely idealized, and marked by constraints and taboos.

Marital History

SUBJECT #2 has never been married, nor has he had a relationship of any duration with either a male or female.

Psychiatric History

After his conviction, SUBJECT #2 attempted suicide while under psychiatric observation at Le Centre de Prévention de Montréal (Parthenais) by hoarding medications and then taking 36 of them all at once. He says that he felt he "needed to make peace. It was too much what I did. I was alone in my hole." He was in a coma for 3 days but recovered. Early in his incarceration he was diagnosed with schizoid personality disorder with obsessive and antisocial features. More recent psychiatric evaluation describes him as having a borderline personality disorder.

Delinquent/Criminal History

SUBJECT #2 derided himself for not being strong enough to express his feelings when he was younger. He recalls seventh grade as the hardest time for him at home. He had much anger toward his mother but, "I could not verbalize it or confront it directly. I did shit on the side. I stole. . . . One time I set fire to a house. Because all those little fucking things made a bomb inside. I was always revolting and always alone. . . . When I am drunk enough I'm at war with people who have the same ideas as my mother."

(iii) Subject #3

Subject #3 is a 50-year-old English-speaking Canadian who was interviewed in the Protective Custody unit of the maximum-security institution Kingston Penitentiary, in Kingston, Ontario, where he has been the past 8 years for his protection from other inmates owing to his notoriety and the nature of his crimes. He has spent approximately 30 of his 50 years in jail or prison. SUBJECT #3 presents as remarkably immature for an adult of his age. Most striking is his

exaggerated sense of self importance,⁵³ making full use of his notoriety to command (read, demand) attention. Of the 3 days spent with SUBJECT #3, much of the first 2 days was taken up by him detailing the numerous lawsuits he has filed since his incarceration. He is serving 11 concurrent life sentences for each of 11 convictions of first-degree murder in British Columbia. Under Canadian law SUBJECT #3 is eligible to apply for judicial review of his sentence—to determine if he can be considered for early release—in 1997, when he will have served 15 years.

Family and Childhood

SUBJECT #3 is the oldest of four children. He has a sister 4 years younger than he is, a brother 5 years younger, and another younger brother. At 6 weeks of age he had an operation to insert a length of “catgut” to help him digest food. He claims that except for that and the fact of his enuresis until he was 10 years of age, he had no physical problems in his childhood years.

Although SUBJECT #3 states that he enjoyed school, adding that he “excelled in all sports,” he dropped out in 1957 after completing the eighth grade. Yet he also says that “I was often strapped at school. I was truant and swore at

⁵³Subject #3 gave the researcher a large number, literally stacks, of documents including copies of his writs to the courts. He has initiated a large number of lawsuits and boasts, “I’m an expert in criminal law. I have them tied up in 14 statement of claims before the Federal Court of Canada. Nine of them I’ve won. Eight of ’em I’ve lost but I’ve got a few of them under appeal.” The subject also gave the researcher copies of his poetry, writings on his personal philosophies, and even a copy of his fingerprints. He made a point of personally signing—as if to autograph—each paper. Over the three days of interview sessions he frequently made statements like, “I am the most high-profile serial murderer Canada will probably have.” He proudly related that, “I’m the only inmate in Canada to have a private member’s bill introduced in the House of Commons to have [me] hung.” SUBJECT #3 made frequent references to the names of well-known politicians, lawyers, and writers with whom he has initiated contact. “You cannot believe the people who want access to me.”

teachers.” The year before he quit school SUBJECT #3 was in army cadets, “because dad was in the army.” For a year he had a paper route when he was 14 and then got a job walking horses at the local racetrack. For awhile he had a job at a mink farm. “We used to throw rats in with the minks. Rats wouldn’t last 10 seconds. Minks’d eat ’em to death.”

SUBJECT #3 was reluctant to discuss his parents in any detail. Only when directly asked did he offer, “My dad was an alcoholic but he could handle it. He’d drink a bottle of C.C. [Canadian Club whiskey] a day but could handle it.” The only thing he would say beyond this is that his mother and father had arguments over his father’s drinking. He describes his relationship with his mother as being “real close” until he got into trouble in 1957. Later he would relate—with no sign of emotion—that his mother had said to him “she would have strangled him if she would have known [the trouble he would bring].”

As for the rest of the family he offers, “I always had a good relationship with them at all times. At all times. . . . My dad gave me the odd lickin’ now and then but my mom’d stick up for me. We really didn’t have rules and regulations. You’d have to do your chores and that was it.” He claims that he is the only one among the siblings who got into trouble. At 16 he says he did things “more for the excitement. . . . I always had schemes going for money.”

“I always used to think I was smarter than everyone else—but what kid don’t? . . . I was an average kid. Likeable. Kindness. Would give anything to anybody—to a fault. I had no problems. Normal childhood.”^{54,55}

⁵⁴This portrayal of a childhood unmarred by significant untoward events is at odds with information he has disclosed elsewhere. For example, in an interview published in *Saturday Night* (July/August, 1993) SUBJECT #3 claimed to

Adult Adjustment

During the relatively limited time that SUBJECT #3 has not been incarcerated during his adult life, he worked in jobs in construction and carpentry. He states he was never fired from a job.

He claims that he did not drink alcohol until he got out of prison in 1978 after serving 8 years, and contended that all of the time spent behind bars without any help for his problems is responsible for the problems he had after getting out, including starting to drink. He does not smoke, "except a cigar to be a big-shot."

SUBJECT #3 did not demonstrate any genuine interest in others. During interview sessions the questions he posed were essentially pro forma and usually he did not wait for the researcher to finish a response. When asked about people involved in his present life, SUBJECT #3 responded, "I got lots of people and kids who write me all the time. They're real close." He produced scores of letters he has received from many people, including copies of letters he wrote to them. Although there were many examples of statements this subject made that might otherwise suggest that an interpersonal relationship

Canadian journalist Peter Worthington that he recalled "being 'bum-fucked' by an 'uncle'" when he was 4 years old but added "it was no big deal, the sort of thing all kids go through." (p. 35)

⁵⁵Numerous times when SUBJECT #3 was asked a specific question (that is, when he did not originate discussion on that topic) he would respond but with little elaboration. This contrasted greatly with the many details he would offer when he would be talking about something of his own choosing. Often, in response to direct questions, his responses were minimal as if to try and quickly dispatch of them. To indicate he was finished talking he would say, "Okay, now?"—as if asking, "What is next? Let's get on with it." Many times he appeared to lack the level of insight that would be required of more elaborative responses. Other times it seemed he was withholding information or being untruthful. Several times he contradicted himself.

had been established between him and his correspondent, the overall context of the correspondence revealed that these were largely inappropriate remarks given the obvious lack of familiarity between him and his correspondents. In a similar vein, SUBJECT #3 asserts, "I'm well-liked by everybody and respected by everybody [in prison]." This statement is clearly at odds not only with other information but with observations I had the opportunity to make of this inmate with other people. He has not had any contact with any of his immediate family since the murders.

Marital Status

SUBJECT #3 is divorced. He was married in 1981 shortly after the birth of his son, and 4 days before one of his murders.

Sexual History

SUBJECT #3 states that he learned about sex when he was 10 or 11 years old. He remembers masturbating at 14, and first experiencing sexual intercourse at 16. He claims that his parents never discussed sex nor did teachers at school. But as if to demonstrate his competence in sexual matters he added, "The basic biological structure of males and females is about sex." Much of this subject's sexual history involved criminal sexual behavior and is discussed below.

Psychiatric History

Early in his extensive history of incarceration, before the murders, SUBJECT #3 was diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder. Regarding his mental status he says of himself, "I'm not psychotic or anything like that. I was diagnosed a highly organized psychopath. . . . I couldn't have qualified under a Lieutenant

Governor's warrant.⁵⁶ You can't be around people who are not normal for very long." The implication here is that he sees himself, even if a psychopath, as psychologically normal.

Delinquent/Criminal History

SUBJECT #3 gained the reputation of being a bully and a thief at an early age. Former teachers recall him as a liar, con artist, and thief. "I always had a lot of money. Everyone knew I was stealing. I would do things like steal peaches and pears out of their backyards and then go to their front doors and sell them to them. . . . I used to clean milk bottles out at 25 cents a crack. Easy come easy go." As for drug use in adolescence, SUBJECT #3 said, "A lot of the kids in the 50s would smoke pot, but I was never into that." Within a minute of that comment, however, he laughed as he related, "We'd smoke it [pot] at school but not get caught."

He was given his first jail sentence in 1957. From 1957 to 1981, SUBJECT #3 was arrested 94 times and served time on charges of forgery, possession of firearms, break and enter, false pretenses, armed robbery, possession of stolen property, parole violation and impaired driving. Charges also included escaping lawful custody—from 1957 to 1968 he escaped from federal penitentiaries seven times. Over this 24-year period he was incarcerated a total of approximately 21 years.

It is noteworthy that none of his convictions were for sexual offenses or, except for armed robbery, for other crimes of violence. SUBJECT #3 is first to point out

⁵⁶A Lieutenant Governor's warrant is issued in cases where an individual is deemed to be at risk of harming himself or others and provides a legal means for the involuntary commitment of that individual for a specified period of time for purposes of psychiatric assessment.

that he has never been convicted of a sex offense yet as early as 1973 while out on mandatory supervision he was arrested but never convicted on two buggery charges. The next year he was accused of repeatedly raping a 17-year-old co-inmate while in the prison. No charges were laid. Then in 1980, again while on mandatory supervision, he sodomized a 14-year-old boy. Because of insufficient evidence charges were stayed. He was known as a stool pigeon in prison, even orchestrating a written confession by a fellow inmate to the rape and mutilation-murder of a 9-year-old girl. SUBJECT #3 testified for the prosecution at the trial at which this inmate was convicted. When out of prison, he continued to act as a police informant.

According to a correctional officer familiar with SUBJECT #3 and his criminal history, before this subject committed his series of murders he was generally considered to be a nuisance, but not a menace.

(iv) Subject #4

Subject #4 is a 42-year-old inmate at the maximum-security Kingston Penitentiary, in Kingston, Ontario. He has been incarcerated in maximum- and supermaximum-security institutions, as well as Special Handling Units and psychiatric prison units since his 1983 sentence of 25 years to life on two counts of murder (committed in 1981 and 1982). In 1981 at 34 years of age, SUBJECT #4 murdered his first victim, an acquaintance. Three months later (in 1982) he committed a second murder, the victim a stranger. At trial, his plea was not guilty by reason of insanity for these two murders but he was found criminally responsible and sentenced to two life-terms. In 1986 SUBJECT #4 killed his third victim, a fellow inmate, while both were housed at the Regional Psychiatric

Centre in Saskatoon, adding a third life term. He will be eligible to apply for a judicial review of his case in 1998.

SUBJECT #4 was especially cooperative and personable and demonstrated a good sense of humor throughout the sessions. At one point during the interviews, however, during the afternoon of the second day, the session had to be terminated when the subject indicated he smelled “rotting flesh—Something stinks in here!” This was taken as an indication of the kind of olfactory hallucinations he had come to associate with his killings, and which, by his own account, seemed to act as a trigger for his violence. Notably, the “odor” was perceived by the subject shortly after I had asked him to recall the day of his first murder. I immediately called for assistance. The subject complied with the correctional officer as he was escorted to his cell and medicated. We resumed the following morning without further incident.

Family and Childhood.

SUBJECT #4 has four sisters, one brother (another brother was murdered in crime-related activities in 1986), one stepsister, one stepbrother, and one half-sister. In terms of birth order, SUBJECT #4 has two older sisters and a twin sister. His biological father was, by SUBJECT #4's description a pedophile, convicted of raping and molesting three of his sisters and sentenced to prison when SUBJECT #4 was 4 or 5 years old. SUBJECT #4's recollections of his father are limited to the beatings he received from him. Both biological parents were alcoholics. His mother divorced his father and then had a series of boyfriends. SUBJECT #4's memories of that time are of:

. . . drinking and drinking and my mother getting beat up by her boyfriends. My sister got clobbered by one of the boyfriends. And when I

got older I told her . . . I wanted to punch him out, eh? But she thought he was the greatest guy, you know. My mother was weird. Kids were in the house and she'd go into the bedroom with the guy. And you could hear them. Like two rutting, rutting animals. I said 'that's not right.' Then they'd put up a dresser up against the door, with all of us listening at the door, all the kids. That's not right. And then he'd cuss at her, and drink, and beat the shit out of her, and tell her he'd spatter her guts all over the lawn. And we're all standing there looking at him. . . . I wasn't old enough to do anything. But my sister was old enough and she got slapped across the floor for it. My mother stuck up for him. The abuse. Again, the abuse. Because she's seeking that affection.

Apart from the usual childhood illnesses, SUBJECT #4 reports that he was told he almost died with pneumonia before he was 2 years old. At 10 he was hit by a car and rendered unconscious for several days. He does not recall either situation to elaborate upon with any detail.

SUBJECT #4 was placed in special education classes "because of his delinquency" and quit school in the ninth grade. He was in a foster home at the time. (He presently has less than 10 credits to complete high school as the result of taking courses while in prison).

SUBJECT #4 believes that he has his mother's intelligence and stubbornness. He expresses conflicting feelings about her. But there is no ambiguity regarding his biological father.

I've got nothing of him. I'm not like him. My real father is shit as far as I'm concerned. Can't stand him. I hated him. I cried when he died. Not because he died. I cried because I couldn't kill him. I wanted to kill him so bad. It was whoa—I dreamed about it. Because of what he did to our family. Destroyed our family. You know? Sick man. Sick man.

He was always talking bad about my mother. Calling her a slut and a tramp and all this stuff. She'd do the same thing to me about him. And uh, you know, sometimes I hated her. I love her with all my heart. But it's a love-hate relationship I guess. It's always natural.

When asked if he considers himself to have been an abused child, SUBJECT #4 responded,

Yep. Emotionally. Not sexually. Emotionally. Physically abused by my real father. Emotionally abused by my mother and my father and stepfather. . . . I could never understand that 7 of us kids, 10 kids with theirs, which they had, they reject *me* and kick *me* into a boys' home. And the government takes me away. Why? You know, I'm 42 and I still can't understand that.

SUBJECT #4's mother remarried and has now remained with this man 28 or 29 years. Both drank heavily into the early 1970s, at which time SUBJECT #4's mother insisted they stop. SUBJECT #4's father is now deceased; his mother is alive but, except for one telephone call SUBJECT #4 made to her, there has been no contact between them for many years. Only one sister writes periodically, "and that's because she's not too stable and she needs my support—it's not for me."

It really hurts. If they were in my shoes, I would be here every month, or every 2 months, or whenever I could afford to, eh? Or even a letter a month or every 2 weeks. Seven years of silence—whew. Yeah. . . . Bitterness. Sometimes I fantasize that I wish I did kill them all. You know, it's a love-hate thing, you know?

Adult Adjustment.

As a juvenile SUBJECT #4 claims he drank heavily and in his early twenties “did the drugs scene—from small drugs to heroin.” He denies “problems” with alcohol or drugs as an adult but he admits to taking valium, L.S.D., M.D.A. and other illicit drugs in prison. Additionally, psychotropic drugs (phenothiazines) have been prescribed for him at times.

SUBJECT #4 worked as a truck hauler off and on for 2 years. He enjoyed “being away. Isolation. By yourself. . . . I just loved it. I’d go for hours and days. I’d go all over the place. . . like I’ve got a wanderlust.” He had a number of jobs at various times over the 7-year stretch that he was not incarcerated as an adult.

Overall, SUBJECT #4 sees himself as being and believes he is seen as being “pretty normal.” He says, he is a “nice guy. Everyday guy. No one could believe I was a killer. Me? Never. Couldn’t believe it at all. Couldn’t believe it.”

Sexual History

SUBJECT #4 learned about sex from his mother, but not by what she told him. In an obvious reference to her sexual activities, “She never told us. But it’s what is seen. What you see all the time at home, eh?”

I was real shy on dates. I wouldn’t touch her at all. Always got that thing, maybe because of my father. You know, always living in that shadow of that, eh? I’m gonna be a sex offender, eh? And dirty. Sex is dirty. Always dirty, dirty. My mother. Sex is dirty. Yet she’s sure indulging herself!

SUBJECT #4 recalls his first experience with intercourse at 10 years old at the skating rink with a neighborhood girl of about the same age, taking turns with

her with a friend. "I got sick. I actually got physically sick. Yeah. Because I couldn't have an orgasm I guess. You know. Shooting blanks let's say—the old expression [laughs] shooting blanks. You know, it was like that. So I actually got sick. I was disgusted with it."

At 14, when he was on the street much of the time, he turned to homosexuality. He thinks he did so to get the male affection he was lacking. "So I gave my body, in a sense, to get the affection." SUBJECT #4 does not consider himself bisexual—although he jokingly referred to himself as "trisexual" in the sense that he would try anything. He has enjoyed sexual relations with males and females but claims that, unlike his relationships with women, he has never had a love relationship with another male—"affection but not love." His fear of AIDS has limited his more recent sexual activities in prison.

Marital History

SUBJECT #4 has two children; the first one, a boy, he fathered at 15 years of age. He was in jail when the child was born. They have never met although his son was named after him. SUBJECT #4 married his first wife at 27 or 28 years of age, after having lived together for almost 2 years. She brought an 18-month-old boy into the relationship who still considers SUBJECT #4 to be his father. The marriage produced a daughter and lasted 4 years. For a period during this relationship SUBJECT #4 claims he did not engage in crime. After they went on welfare, however, he told his wife, above her objections, "Listen, if there's an opportunity I'm gonna grab it and don't say nothing. Just keep your mouth shut." SUBJECT #4 stated that he did not want to be on welfare because, growing up, his family was always on welfare. At first his wife agreed to his criminal activity because "the money was nice." But she grew upset with his absences at

night; that it bothered her because she had an insatiable sexual appetite. "It got to a point where I felt like a machine. Yeah, I got turned off with it." SUBJECT #4 was convicted of theft before their marriage and spent 18 months in jail. She waited for him and they married a year after his release.

When asked what happened to lead the relationship toward divorce, SUBJECT #4 replied,

Well, I beat her up a few times. I got real violent with her. I tried to kill her once. I was strangling her. Choking her to death. Then my son [who was about 4 or 5] walked in the door and said 'what are you doing daddy?' That's the only reason she's alive today.

He described the scene with his wife with little inflection in his voice:

She was purple in the face, or blue in the face, and her tongue was hanging out. She was near death, eh? Oh, another minute and she'd have been dead. . . I realized what I was doing, eh? I says, 'Get out. Pack your stuff. Get out. Take the kid with you and get out.'

SUBJECT #4's second marriage was to a woman whose preferred sexual activity was masturbation. While SUBJECT #4 stated that he does not find anything wrong with that,

. . . if that's her trip; But that was her trip *all* the time, and I wasn't into that. . . I used to cheat with my first wife on her. She didn't know. She would have dropped me like a hot potato if she did know. . . We lived just a few blocks away from my first wife. . . I could go over and visit the kids, hop in the sack with mama, [laughs], then go back to my mom—[corrects himself] my wife—you know. I guess I cheated because of my wife's sexual antics. It's not

an excuse, not a proper excuse, eh? But it happens. I had two or three girls going like that. [laughs]

The second marriage lasted about 3 years, ending when he was found guilty of the two murders.

Psychiatric History

SUBJECT #4 recalls that as a boy of about 13 or 14 years old he was referred to a psychiatrist by a juvenile court after being caught having sex with a 16-year-old girl and robbing her. While in prison SUBJECT #4 has been evaluated several times (for example, for 30-day psychiatric assessments) in different institutions. He has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and borderline personality disorder, and more recently with antisocial personality disorder. When I met with him, SUBJECT #4 had just been transferred to the psychiatric unit of the prison. He stated he was going to be used as a case study for psychopathy. He described psychopathy as follows: "Like some people can talk about their crimes and be emotional about it. Where a psychopath is cold, calculated, meticulous about it and it doesn't bother him. Just like eating a sandwich type of thing. You know?" When asked if that description fit him he responded, "Oh yeah."

Delinquent/Criminal History

SUBJECT #4 recalled stealing from about 10 years of age. He began committing what he termed petty crimes when he was 13 or 14 years of age. He was put into a boys' detention home and then later a foster home—"Cuz my parents couldn't handle me, so they say." He continued to be criminally active.

I did a lot of crime. . . . Break and enters—stuff like that. Property offenses mostly. Fraud, stuff like that. . . . I was a good booster. . . . I was an

opportunist. It was just petty opportunities I exploited. I stole chain saws, heroin, and even a boat once—and then would sell them. . . . And then I started doing armed robberies. The first violent offense was murder, unless they consider armed robbery as violent—because of the gun.

From the age of 16 or 17 when he first went into prison SUBJECT #4 aspired to be a career thief. His idol is John Dillinger. He was respected and protected by older inmates who saw him as eager to learn from them. SUBJECT #4 describes prison as “a very good school [to learn about crime], if you want to learn it.”

He was involved in his first of many fights at 15. When asked if there were any consequences for him hitting a classmate (whom he claimed had jumped him the previous day), SUBJECT #4 replied, “Oh nothing. I got suspended from school—for a week I think. Two days or something. It was nothing to it. But when I got older I fought. Real bad. Nowadays I don’t fight, not with my hands anymore. Baseball bats [laughs] or something.”

According to SUBJECT #4, in 1983 he had been transferred from Calgary to appear in an Edmonton court on bank robbery charges.

They let me go by mistake. They didn’t have my file in Edmonton and I went up on a traffic ticket. Guys got suspended from their jobs and everything. They let me go—a murderer! It took 4 days [before] they caught me. Still, I mean, I could have gone amok. Killed a lot more people. . . . I did kidnap a guy on the street while I was loose. I put him in the trunk of the car. I was going to kill him but I found out from his wallet that he was 70 years old. I could have killed him but I just didn’t want to. The age thing.

(v) **Subject #5**

SUBJECT #5 is an English-speaking 42-year-old male in prison since 1972 after being convicted for the non-capital murders of four women, aged 20 to 32 years, from 1969 to 1971 in two Canadian provinces. He is in his twentieth year of four life sentences. Even though his sentence includes the provision of parole eligibility after 10 years, biennial applications have been repeatedly denied.

SUBJECT #5 was 21 years old at the time of the first murder.⁵⁷ His first victim, a stranger, he strangled, raped, and mutilated. The second victim, killed approximately 7 weeks later, was a woman he had met 2 weeks before. She, too, was strangled, raped, and mutilated. Almost 7 weeks after this murder SUBJECT #5 strangled, raped, and mutilated a woman he had known for about a year. Then, after moving from Montreal to Calgary, 16 months later he committed his fourth homicide. The victim, with whom he was acquainted, had been strangled and raped and, like all the others, mutilated.

The interviews took place at the medium-security Warkworth Institution at Campbellford, Ontario. SUBJECT #5 is a remarkably neat individual who closely attends to matters and mannerisms of proper personal presentation. He is impressively articulate and readily engaged in the interview process.

Family and Childhood

⁵⁷Police suspect that SUBJECT #5 was also responsible for the murder of a Montreal woman in 1968—almost a year earlier than the first of the four murders for which he was convicted. The crime scene revealed what was later to be considered characteristic of the “Vampire” murders—victims found raped, strangled, and mutilated with severe bite wounds on the breasts and neck. Although SUBJECT #5 confessed to the other four murders he continues to deny his involvement in this killing.

SUBJECT #5 has two older sisters, one 10 years older and the other 18 months older. A third female between the two sisters apparently died at birth. SUBJECT #5 reports that when he was born part of his head “was attached somewhere” and had to be “scraped away” at delivery, but does not know any more about this. He says that as the youngest of the three children he was “pampered—outrageously.” He was his mother’s favorite—knew it and used it. Since she was the head of the household SUBJECT #5 never had any restrictions. “From the age of about 15, I ran my own life. I’d go out Friday night and return Sunday night and no one would say a word.” Although he states “I wanted for nothing, really,” he goes on to speak in very different terms. “I was unaccustomed to emotions in my family. I just didn’t get them. . . . I can remember two occasions when my mother either hugged or kissed me. . . . We were five people living under the same roof.”

I always felt rejected. A general feeling of rejection. I never felt loved or cared for at home. We were just a group of people sharing the same house. I never felt wanted, but I never felt unwanted. For years and years and years I resented what I perceived to be lack of caring on the part of my family. . . . I resented the fact that I never felt cared for. My parents did things or got me things but I needed a hug or a word. I didn’t perceive what they did was caring. . . . I never got pats on the back. If I didn’t do well, it wasn’t really a problem. So one way or the other, there was no real reaction.

Apart from getting his tonsils removed at 6 years of age, and surgery to his wrist following an injury at 14, he has never really been sick. Then he added, “I believe that I have a much greater tolerance for pain than most people.”

SUBJECT #5 reports that he failed kindergarten because he did not cooperate with other children. In grade school he did very badly, his reports saying that

he would do better if he applied himself. "I was always daydreaming." SUBJECT #5 reports that he was told by doctors that he was hyperactive as a child—always restless and moving. He recalls having trouble concentrating in elementary school. SUBJECT #5 adds that he should have failed the eighth grade but that he convinced the teacher that he was failing just because he was "a little lazy," not because he couldn't handle the work.

He claims that he did have a few close friends but recalls fighting a great deal. Although he was a small boy in terms of physical stature, "I entered into fights without thinking how hurt I could get. I always fought for someone who was getting picked on. I never lost a fight. It comes from the fact I was too stupid to know I could get hurt."

When asked to talk about high school SUBJECT #5 replied,

I got honors all through school. I never wrote a final exam. I enjoyed high school. I played a lot of sports—most were individual sports. I was good but never the best. I am an underachiever and I really don't mind that a bit. . . . I achieve what I want to achieve. When I have people expect things of me I don't like that.

SUBJECT #5 then changed the subject and went on to discuss his love of cars. When he was then asked how far he ended up going in school he responded "grade 10" and then was quick to add that his girlfriend became pregnant so he quit school to do the "noble" thing and get married. After a year together he claims they drifted apart. Thus, the impression that he had created regarding high school—of a successful tenure there—was diminished by his short time there, and the fact that he was not originally forthcoming about this.

SUBJECT #5 describes his parents as social drinkers. He saw his father intoxicated only twice and his mother on four or five occasions. "My father was a workaholic. He was always working, even at home. . . . I didn't know much about his life. I was a teenager and he was the father. That's the way it was."

When asked about his television viewing as a child, he singled out "Shock Theatre," a weekly horror program featuring Dracula, Frankenstein, and various other monsters of fiction. He was especially taken with the Wolfman character.⁵⁸ The possible significance of this—the fact that the subject singled out this one character—may be discerned in the "atavistic" manner of his killings: he savagely bit the breasts and neck of all four victims (as he strangled and raped them)—something akin to lycanthropic behavior.

Adult Adjustment

"I have always been fascinated with rifles and handguns." SUBJECT #5 owned several and listed them with obvious pride. He qualifies his interest as, "for target shooting only; I don't like hunting things. I don't like killing things [brief pause]—with guns."

Although there does not appear to be an adolescent or adult history of alcohol or drug-related problems, SUBJECT #5 indulges in both. He says that he generally has a drink not for its mind-altering effects but because he likes the taste of a particular drink. He takes drugs in prison, however, as a means of "getting

⁵⁸By way of most curious coincidence, this was a favorite program of the researcher and the one character that she recalls being terrified by as a child.

away” from the routine of the prison, since one “cannot take a break by going away for the weekend.”

SUBJECT #5 claims that as an adult, until recent years he was very much like he had been as a child. “I had an extremely sharp tongue—my main form of assault was verbal. . . . I was so egocentric and used and manipulated people all the time.” Yet, he notes, there were signs of insecurity that continue to the present day. “I still sleep with extra blankets even in summer because I like the feeling of security.”

Sexual History

SUBJECT #5 learned about sex “the hard way, on street corners.” He began masturbating at 10 or 11 years of age. He describes his first attempt at sexual intercourse as “disastrous—I felt embarrassed. I felt less than I should be although I didn’t know what I should be. I felt I was lacking. . . . I tried. I invested a personal part of myself and got slapped in the face.”

The subject recalls numerous sexual encounters after the relationship with his first girlfriend ended. He had “many girls going at once in various stages of sexual involvement.”

The sexual violation and mutilation of his series of victims, detailed in the next chapter, reveals a preference toward sexual sadism.

Marital History

SUBJECT #5 married for the first time at 18 years of age. The marriage lasted one and a half years. Two and a half years ago he married a now-former friend of

his sister's who began corresponding with him in prison 9 years ago. They have been refused trailer (i.e., conjugal) visits. SUBJECT #5 explains that he believes the prison administration fears he might kill his wife. When prompted for his thoughts about this he responded,

Except for the first one [victim], I was living with S. [his girlfriend] while I was killing other people and she was never in danger. My wife is not a potential victim. She is not a target. She doesn't remind me of anyone I'm out to get and even the people that—geez, I hate to say this—you sort of remind me of . . . [laughs] Where's the emergency button?⁵⁹ I could not see myself ever again killing people for the reason I committed murder before.

When SUBJECT #5 was asked how I reminded him of his victims he replied,

You have darker hair and you don't really have a dark complexion but you're not pasty; but you are a little on the trim side for my old girlfriends so you're safe, I guess. My wife whose hair is shorter than yours and is blonde, blonde . . . and has absolutely no similarity to your description.

What is particularly noteworthy about these comments is that up to this point in the interview SUBJECT #5 had been describing his victims using the past tense. His use of the present tense here—that I am more like his victims—suggests that he continues to fantasize about his killings in spite of many strong statements to the contrary.

Psychiatric History

⁵⁹It is interesting if not particularly noteworthy that Subject #5 was the only inmate for which the researcher was provided with a portable "panic button" should there arise any concern for her safety during the course of interview sessions.

Prior to the commission of the murders SUBJECT #5 was not assessed or treated for any mental health problems. His many psychiatric assessments since entering prison in 1972 have resulted in clinical impressions that include features of sociopathic personality, narcissism, and sexual sadism. Police summaries suggest he may also be a necrophile, although this is not conclusively substantiated by autopsy reports on the victims. SUBJECT #5 took part in a 14-month sex offender treatment program (at the Regional Psychiatric Centre at Abbotsford) for his deviance but terminated his participation in 1982. This treatment was considered by the therapists to be unsuccessful. He also had more than 200 hours of psychotherapy between 1978 and 1984, at the end of which a psychologist recommended that SUBJECT #5 begin a gradual release program with escorted temporary absences from prison. (This was granted although the subject absconded from his escort during his second absence and was apprehended the following day.)

Delinquent/Criminal History

At 6 years of age I remember stealing candy. Then at 13 I was with a friend who shoplifted a record. . . . When I was 16 years old, a friend and I stole a car from a showroom and put it back after using it for a weekend. It was a prank, a challenge, a lark. When I was 6 or 7 I ran away from home but mother caught up with me 2 blocks away and I couldn't sit for awhile.

SUBJECT #5 denies any untoward involvement in firesetting stating, "I have a respect for it [fire]." He also denies abusing animals when asked directly. "As a child I had much more control over my life than other kids. So I didn't feel so out of control or lack of control like other kids. And perhaps with some kids this

lack of control and lack of being able to have their way they may take it out on animals.”

SUBJECT #5 has no formal record of juvenile delinquency but he was arrested in Hamilton, Ontario, on charges of breaking and entering at 16 years of age, and breaking and entering and theft, as well as possession of an offensive weapon at 18 years of age, all of which were dismissed. Apart from speeding tickets, SUBJECT #5 has no history of criminal convictions prior to the murders. Thus, the four sadistic rape-murders of which he stands convicted and for which he is serving four concurrent life sentences are the sole convictions on his record.

SUBJECT #5 made national headlines in Canada when he absconded from his escort while eating in a restaurant during an escorted temporary absence from prison. It was learned that he had been granted a credit card while he was in prison, a scandal that came to be referred to as the “don’t leave jail without your American Express Card” incident. SUBJECT #5 was recaptured the following evening drinking in a bar. He claimed to a number of people, including this researcher, that he escaped planning to turn himself in after a week in order to prove that he would not hurt anybody. It should be noted, however, that the subject told his case management team at the time that he evaded his escort as a way to attract attention for his plight to get psychiatric treatment.

The unloved cannot love.

—William Blake

VI. FINDINGS: THE INTERVIEWS

This chapter presents excerpts from the interview sessions wherein subjects focused upon their killings. Actual information is presented about the murders along with related comments offered by each subject followed by a discussion of the primary themes that emerged from what subjects said about their experience of killing. Finally, the researcher discusses her own experience of these interviews.

A. SPEAKING MATTER OF FACTLY ABOUT UNSPEAKABLE ACTS

In all five cases, subjects were lucid as they recounted all manner of detail about their killings. What follows are verbatim descriptions of and comments relating to the murders as offered by the killers themselves.

Subject #1

SUBJECT #1 was 15 years old when he committed his first murder. The victim was a 13-year-old girl to whom he had been introduced the previous day by his cousin. When they saw each other again the next day he says that she asked him to go in the park with her.

For me it was exciting. I said, 'okay.' We went walking and then she made an advance. She put her hand in my pants, you know, and put it on her. At that moment I panicked. A lot of things went through my mind—it was wrong, you know. I see my parents—'Hey, that's dirty!' I was really excited but morally I was against it. So I got very violent with the girl. I pushed her back and then got crazy and ripped her clothes—and was very

excited doing it. She was surprised. I ripped her blouse and found that underneath she had a bathing suit top full of Kleenex, you know, and that made me angry. Today I know why she did that, but at that time it was an insult to me. It looked like she had nice ones, you know? But she was flat. I lost interest in that part. So I was interested in what's below. The vagina. I had an erection. I was angry and felt good being angry. I don't know. It's a strange feeling to have pleasure with that—it's like a sadist?

It happened too fast. I had a little problem finding the hole, but I penetrated her and in about a minute had an orgasm. When I came I killed her. I was still inside of her and killed her. I was feeling very angry—about my life, about sex. Like I wanted revenge on the world. The Kleenex was another insult and was maybe a trigger. I put my hand on her throat. It was very quick.

Following his apprehension SUBJECT #1 was incarcerated at Pinel for assessment and treatment for almost 4 years. It was there that he met the woman, L., who would later become his second victim. She was the sister of a co-inmate at the institution. When SUBJECT #1 was released the two of them began a relationship that would last 5 years. Over the final 3 years, however, SUBJECT #1 says that “only sex was left. Many times she went away for days without telling me where she went.” SUBJECT #1 claims that he never hit her during their relationship.

On the night of her murder the subject was drinking and had begun taking “coke.” He drank and took drugs to “numb the pain.” According to him, L. humiliated him in front of friends by telling him that she was going to go back to her previous boyfriend who would soon be released from prison.

It was like she put a knife in me, you know. . . . She spit in my face. But I said nothing and kept it inside. Later, when the children and the other woman went to bed, I went to L. in the living room and she started to play

with my head—brought up my family, telling me that they did not care about me. Then she said she was going to get a new guy and she was going to think about me when they did it. I got so angry at her for this—and at me for staying with her and suffering. And I strangled her. Then I went to the bedroom and woke up the other one. I told her what happened and told her it was her turn now. She was going to pay, because she was always laughing at me, you know? And she was always with L.. That always made me angry.

The only thing she asked me was not to hurt the children. While I raped her I told her how they had hurt me and now it was her turn. Then, maybe 5 minutes later, I climaxed. She did not struggle—like she knew what was going to happen to her. I strangled her when I came out of her. And I was so afraid—or ashamed, I don't know—that she would come back that even though I knew she was dead I took a rope [a skipping rope that was in the room] and tightened it around her neck.

Then I put blankets over the two so the children would not see the bodies and I called a relative to come to the house before the children woke up. And I left. . . . I was arrested about 4 hours later after getting off a bus in Montreal.

SUBJECT #1 states that he continues to think about the murders, probably a couple of times a week. When he was asked what it is he thinks about, instead of mentioning any details about the murders or his victims he said, "Where I could be if I was not here in prison."

Subject #2

SUBJECT #2 began talking about his murders by saying he had four "stories" to relate. He was 20 years old when he attacked his first victim. It was after midnight on New Year's Eve, 1979. The subject was drinking heavily and his mother put him out of the house.

I'm walking down the street and I'm drunk and he comes from behind and passes me. And he touches my backside with his hand. I am sure he wants my body. I run. He runs. I'm sure that he wants my body. He catches up with me and asks where I am going. He wants to know where I live. Why? We pass the building where I live. He asks me if I wanted his body. I said I was going to see a friend. He said, 'Okay.' I entered my apartment. Ten minutes later I look out the window and see he is still there in front. He is just sitting there. In my head I am sure he has in his head all of the things he wants to do with my body. I went back out with a knife and said, 'You're still here.' And he said, 'Yeah. I don't want to walk alone.' I walked with him. On another street far from my apartment he said, 'I live there.' At those words I took out my knife and stabbed him once in the back. I took two steps back and then rapidly stabbed him again. It was dark. I left.

That night SUBJECT #2 took several showers. He finished the bottle of alcohol he had opened earlier in the evening and slept soundly. He awakened at about 1 o'clock the next afternoon, had a cup of coffee and a piece of toast, and went to work at 4 p.m.. "The next day I told myself that no one can say to me, 'You are a homosexual.' He deserved what he got." SUBJECT #2 was noticeably angry as he added, "I was showing my mother that I'm not like that."

Three months later, on a cold winter night, SUBJECT #2 attacked again.

I was drinking. I was going home to my apartment when I saw a man I had seen earlier at the hotel, now in front of my apartment building. I went in. I am afraid that he will come to my door. I don't want people like that around my home. So after I went back out, telling myself, 'Okay, I'll go out and if he continues to follow me I will change his ideas.' I took a knife and my coat. If he follows me I will stab him—that's my justice. I ran and he followed. I ran around the corner and when he passed I stabbed him twice. I stabbed him once in the shoulder and then again when he tried to run away. He said to me, 'Okay. Excuse me.' I watched in

the newspapers to see if it was reported. Nothing. I even called the hospital pretending that a friend of mine had got hurt on a broken window. Nothing. Until I was arrested the police didn't know. I told them. The victim never told nobody.

About 2 or 3 months later I was driving home after having a couple of beers, but I was okay to drive. I see an old man at the side of the road near the end of town. I stopped and asked if he wanted a ride. He gets in and after about a mile he put his hand inside my pants pocket. I asked if he wanted a match or something. He said, 'No, I want you to stop at my home.' At that time I pulled over and yelled, 'Out!' It was all so fast. He said, 'No!' I grabbed his coat. I know I have the knife in my hand. I pulled him out of the car and closed the car door. I turned around to get back in the car and put the knife on the front seat. I put my car in reverse. He climbed onto the back of my car. My new, special car. So I stopped. I opened again my fucking door and I said, 'Go!' Lots of swearing. 'Shit!' He doesn't get off. So I pushed him off and he came back again. I pushed him down and I stabbed him once. He stayed there. I ran to the car and put the knife in Kleenex under the seat. I went home and showered and burned my clothes and the knife in my fireplace.

Over the next few days the subject remembers being very nervous. Every time the door to the restaurant at work opened he expected the police. But nothing.

The fourth victim was attacked about a year later after SUBJECT #2 had moved to Alberta but was back in Quebec visiting his father. "It was like the first one. He followed me from the hotel I was working at. It was really a bad night for me. No women wanted to dance with me—I felt rejected. It was a winter night and my car did not start so I had to walk home from my job at the hotel." He takes a knife with him for safety because "there are lots of drugs on those streets." The subject was living in an undesirable neighborhood because the rent was affordable. On his walk home he recognized a man standing in front of a hotel he was passing.

When I passed he asked me if I was going that way. No more words. He then walked with me. We turned a corner and he put his hand on my shoulder. I asked him, 'What do you want?' Several times I told him he was upsetting me. Inside I was saying to myself, 'You want my body.' For me this meant the situation was getting dangerous. I don't want him to touch my body. I don't want him to come inside of me. I remembered I had the knife. I stopped at a bridge and I told him, 'I don't like you' and I stabbed him in the back.

The police report indicates that SUBJECT #2 stabbed this victim a second time, in the stomach, after he had fallen into a snowbank.

"I was relieved when I confessed to the police. I couldn't stop myself. They were interrogating me for one murder and I told them about the other attacks." Two of the four victims police identified died from their wounds.

Subject #3

Subject #3 was 40 years old⁶⁰ when he murdered 11 youths, male and female, over a period of 8 months—from November, 1980 to July, 1981. His modus operandi involved the use of alcohol and drugs to overcome and confuse his victims. Often he presented them with a spurious offer of employment. He picked up his victims, who ranged in age from 10 to 18 years, either hitchhiking or at malls. He described his usual ruse: giving them money—sometimes \$100 or \$200—telling them he will take it off their pay after they begin work. Then he

⁶⁰SUBJECT #3 was significantly older when he began killing than were other subjects in this study and much older than serial murderers in general tend to be when they commit their first murder. This is explained by the fact that from the time he was 17 years old, SUBJECT #5 spent most of his adult life in prison. As such, even if he had been inclined to murder as a younger adult the opportunity to do so would have been very limited.

would ask them if they would like a drink. "Hey. I'm going out to the job site. Would you like to come along and see it and have a drink?"

SUBJECT #3 described the 11 murders as a group:

We would always drink Canadian Club mixed with some chloral hydrate. I would drink the C.C., too. The chloral hydrate is a knockout drug. I would give two capsules in a glass filled with C.C. and 7Up or vodka and orange juice. And it's odorless. . . . And then we would drink. But they wouldn't be passed out. We'd have sexual relations and then finally I would kill them. None of the children suffered in the sense that none of them knew they were being killed. The killings were blows to the back of the head when they were turned around, like we were walking somewhere, and I would hit 'em with a hammer. Instantly they would go down.

Where it could be determined autopsy reports revealed that the subject had also stabbed some victims. In fact, his first victim had been stabbed 19 times. When asked about this he replied, "The stabbings?—they were unconscious when they were stabbed and the stabbings were only the two of them, girls. I got a new knife everytime."

A funny thing was with the first victim, C.W., I knew I was gonna kill her after I had sex with her. And after that, I deliberately went out looking to have sex and I knew I was going to kill each and every one of them. I distinctly knew what I was doing at all times. . . . I enjoyed the killing after that first one—because I then went out looking to pick up kids for sex and to kill them. A couple of cases of beer and a couple of C.C.'s—that would start me out in the morning. And then I'd go trolling. I enjoyed the killings.

Among the mounds of papers SUBJECT #3 gave to the researcher (mostly copies of media accounts of his case and his lawsuits), he provided a copy of the “Coroner’s Report of Inquiry” which itemizes each murder and includes demographic information about each victim and the findings and conclusions of the coroner regarding each one. He said that he thought that giving me the report would “save time because the details of all the killings were all there. The answers to all of my questions were in the report.” The subject was thanked and reminded of the purpose of the interview—to come to know about his thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This seemed to be flattering to him and he immediately began to recount the day of his first murder.

I come home late that night and J. [his wife] wasn’t there. She was pregnant at the time. She had walked over to her mother’s. I couldn’t find her. . . . I saw a girl across the boulevard. I crossed over from our apartment block and called her over. . . . I asked her if she wanted to babysit and found out she lived in the motel up the block. . . . I gave her a joint and C.C. with 7Up. She passed out a couple of times on account of the chloral hydrate. She took four of them—and threw them up at a gas station. [The subject laughed as he recalled this.] Then we went out and we had sexual intercourse and she passed out. So I tried to choke her to death and her shoe laces broke on her—she had runners on and I tried strangling her with her laces and they broke. So I took her 60 or 70 yards to the river. She was gagging and coughing. I said, ‘Jesus. She’s not dead. I can save this girl still.’ So I brought her back to the car and put her in the car. I was gonna take her to the hospital and the son-of-a-bitchin’ car got stuck on me—in the sand where we were at. I couldn’t get that son-of-a-bitch out for nothing. I tried an hour. She’s still alive. So I took her out again and had sex with her while she was unconscious. Then I took her over to the bush and stabbed her all those times.

While there is no reason to believe that the victim willingly drank the alcohol provided by the subject, his choice of wording suggests that this first victim

“took” the chloral hydrate voluntarily when, in fact, he dissolved the four capsules in her drinks. This manner of depicting the events surrounding the murder along with other comments he made about the victims (such as them not being virgins) seem designed to convey the impression that his victims were not “innocent” teenagers. And, if not innocent, then guilty—for their fate.

SUBJECT #3 singled out two other victims (the fourth and fifth ones) to talk about. Regarding the fourth one—whom he had killed 4 days after getting married—he reported

. . . that was the only one I had a problem with. I hit her with the hammer. But she came to. I said, ‘Son-of-a-bitch.’ As I swung the hammer on the left side of her temple she put her hand up and I hit her hand. She said, ‘You dirty fucking bastard.’ I hit her again and that killed her right then. That was her last words. Boy, that bothered me for a long time.

After having related that incident SUBJECT #3 said that he stripped the girl and “checked her god damn purse for the \$1000 she had told him she had. She didn’t have it. So she’s killed and she was killed for the money. That was sad. That was a bad killing. That was the only one.” The implication here is that he would not have killed this girl had there been no possibility of a large sum of money involved. Since the subject had already killed and sexually violated four youths in the same manner by this point in time, his assertion that he killed this victim only because of money he thought she had lacks credibility.

SUBJECT #3 also initiated discussion about the fifth victim and said how he had had sex with her like the others, and then killed her with many hammer blows to the head. But in this case about half an hour later he says he returned to the

site where he had left her “to make sure she was dead. Just to check on her. I thought maybe I could save her but I couldn’t.” Again, this is not a credible statement given his insistence that he was killing the children in order that they not be able to identify him (“for having sex with them”).

“I would have kept killing if I hadn’t been caught.”

Subject #4

SUBJECT #4’s first murder occurred on December 4, 1982, when he was 34 years old. He recalled waking up that morning with his wife in Hinton, Alberta—as he said, “an ordinary day.”

I woke up that day in bed with my wife. . . . I drove her to work, as usual. Or she went to work. One of the two. Ordinary day. I went to work, driving cab. And I went to the poolhall later that evening. Through the day was nothing. Just a usual day, supper and dinner and all that stuff. Went to the poolhall. I had time off and the guy happened to be there. I had planned to kill him. It was premeditated a week before. He called me a ‘fat goof.’ The pleasureable thing was it was his own gun I killed him with. It was a .32 Browning. I went to work with his gun in my pocket.

I got him to walk out of the poolhall with me and into the bushes. Then I shot him like a dog. I thought I shot him in the heart, but I got him in the guts and he spun around and fell down. And I walked over and he went haaaaa [expelling air sound] and I put the gun behind his left ear and [gun sound].

The adrenaline rush was really high. Really excited. I knew I was never going to back out of it. I was going to do it finally. Kill, kill, kill. That’s when I started jumping up and down and everything. Excited. I’m a contract killer and all that stuff.

I worked all night long, right straight through to 6:00 in the morning, and that was from working 7:00 in the morning before. I went home and had sex with my wife. It was really neat. I was so cool and calm.

I loathed him, I hated him. He was a womanizer, alcoholic—just like my real father, see. I hated him. I despised him. He was arrogant. And he was a stool pigeon on top of it. A police informant.

SUBJECT #4 recalled the date of the second killing, March 4th, 1983, and that it was a Friday “—cuz my sister’s birthday was Sunday” and he had taken her out Saturday night—the day after the murder—to celebrate the birthday.

I kidnapped [the woman] in Alberta. I had my cab. I was living in Red Deer. Moved away from Hinton to Red Deer and I took her in my cab. I found her bank account in her purse and I was using her Chargex [credit card]. Driving all over the place. I went to Edmonton, everywhere. So opportunity knocks—checkbook, the whole thing. So I signed checks. I flew some people out from Vancouver, a guy and a couple of hookers, and I hired a couple of other people. And they all hit the bank at one time with checks I wrote and signed her name, because I can forge really good, because I’m an artist, eh? And it was \$8000 in 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes it was all over. So I planned on killing her. My buddy didn’t want to. I said, ‘Too bad.’

[I killed her] because she was a drunk. And she knew our faces and everything. I didn’t want to go to jail for fraud. I would have got time for that, eh. So if I kill her and they can’t find her, they can’t do nothing, eh.

I picked this woman up as a cab fare. I took her to Calgary. To a motel with all my friends and that. Kept her drunk. All the time. Just a sniff of the bottle. She was an alcoholic. She had a year to live. She had emphysema.

After 3 days, SUBJECT #4 took the woman from the motel and drove her to the site where he killed her.

I took a shovel to dig the grave. [The grave] was shallow. Probably 3 feet. It was hard ground, eh? I worked hard. Hours. Hours. I dug the grave

while she was passed out in the car. I dragged her out of the car and she came out of it. I whacked her with the shovel. I hit her on the head with it because I was angry. I was mad and I was smashing her, eh? She was saying, 'Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?' I'd whack her. An alcoholic you can't hurt too much eh? At least with her anyways. Tough old bird. She was 60 years old. That was the sad part, eh. That's why my family was pretty choked, eh? My sister says, 'You killed your mother'—type thing. My mother was 60 at the time, eh.

I think there is something to it. She was an alcoholic. An abuser and all this stuff. Hearing all this stuff in the back seat—I think that's why it built up and built up. I knew I was going to kill her. I put her in the grave. She was alive. Watched her die. She was kicking. It took probably a couple of hours for her to die. Suffocation, eh. The amazing thing was, she turned over in the grave. When I buried her she was on her stomach. The next day I returned to the murder site and dug up the body to move it. When I dug her up she was on her side. So she must have really struggled. I dragged her like a side of beef by the leg and over to another place and dug another little grave. It was a few feet away—10 to 15 feet. I moved her because the trucks drive over that spot and they might expose her. So the way I had her the second time I didn't think they'd find her. And the cold part of it, not just the beating of her with the shovel, was that I sat in the truck and I ate a box of chicken and drank a C-Plus [while she was dying].

When asked if he had been drinking or using any drugs during or near the time of the killing he responded, "Neither one of them. Neither crime. Cold, cold sober. I had nothing at all."

Regarding his third murder victim SUBJECT #4 had this to say:

He was a homosexual pedophile. Before I killed him, I thought about what I wanted to do to him. Torture him. Hurt him real bad for the punishment that he did to those little kids—two little boys. I did a little bit but not much. I called him in, him thinking that I was going to be his lover. And

I told him I don't mind about pedophiles and all this—a con job. I've never told this to anybody. Honest to God. Cops or nobody. I told him that we'd have sex in the washroom, in the shower. So he gave me oral sex the first day he was there. I did it to encourage him. He performed oral sex on me; I didn't touch him at all. . . . So he was comfortable—I've got a new dad kind of thing, you know. He's 23 years old, and he's got a new lover who'll protect him while he's there. In the meantime he was a walking dead man, eh.

And so I told him the next night, 'I want to tie you up and I'll have sex with you, cuz that's my thing.' It wasn't, but that was just to get an excuse to tie him up. Then when he came in the shower, we were naked, and I closed the door. Nobody was there. . . . (It was about 10 minutes to 10 at night.) . . . I had two guys keeping six—no, no, lie, lie, lie. That was part of the fantasy. No I never had nobody keep six. I'm being truthful. I've never told anybody, I mean anybody about this part. As far as everybody's concerned I knocked the guy out and I had guys keeping six and all this bullshit. That's bullshit. The truth is exactly what I'm saying. He came in there. I tied him up, gagged him with bed sheets. And I had a shoelace and I wet it. I told him I had a necklace for him. And I took his head and I smashed it against the wall about three or four times. Anger—so much anger I felt at him for what he did. I was talking to him all the time I was doing it. Watching his face and everything. His facial expression. I was calling him all kinds of gross things—piece of shit, diddler, mother-fucker and all kinds of disparaties [*sic*] like that you know. And I said, 'This is for those little boys you piece of shit.' And I tied him up; sat on him.

I had him by the neck like this [demonstrates] while I was talking. Real cold. And I just held him until he, uh, til he died. I tied the shoelace twice. He was already dead, eh. . . . I seen how he died. It's just give one big heave and it was over. He was finished. I knew he was dead. Then I tied the shoelace two more times in knots, turned the shower off. No, got out of the shower. Turned the shower on, hard, and got out of the shower. I turned the shower on, and crawled underneath the door where there was this crawlspace. Washed my face. And then I walked out. . . . I felt good.

"I think about the murders all the time. Sometimes a smell will happen. Or, I'd just be sitting around thinking. But quite a frequent thing. It's always there. . . . Oh. The images. They're very precise. Everything."

SUBJECT #4 was asked how he felt when he imagined the scenes of his murders.

Nothing. Just like a clinical psychologist looking at something. You know you take yourself away. You detach yourself from the feelings of it. I don't relive the feelings of it. Nothing like that. It's just a clinical study. Just look at it abstractly. Maybe I could improve this or . . . [laughs] I am very meticulous in my criminal fortes. Very meticulous. I plan all the time. Planning takes away the tension and helps you get down to business. Like building a building. Same thing. You've got to know how to plan it the proper way. So if you're going to kill somebody you should do the same thing.

"After I kill, I can smell the death. Can't describe it. It's really, maybe rotten. I don't know. Stinky, and uh, pretty smelly." SUBJECT #4 was asked if he had to shower afterward—whether the smell got on him in any way. "No. Well, it's like a hallucination I guess. Something like that. Cause even today, at odd times, I can still smell it." When asked if anything triggers that smell he responded that he did not know. "Maybe. I don't know. It just happens. Maybe a thought. Maybe thinking about her [the woman he buried alive and returned the next day to dig up and move]." When he moved the body to another shallow grave he recalls,

. . . the alcohol, and the smell like that, and the stink. You know, when you got gas. Oh, she just reeked. She just stunk. Probably shit herself or something. Did a bowel movement or something, you know? But the alcohol and farting—pfff—pretty stinky smell. That's part of it, why I killed her, too. She, to me, was just a wasted person. Reminded me of my

mother or father or something, when they were doing the alcohol. Maybe that triggered it too, eh? Plus the fantasies I had.

SUBJECT #4 was very clear that he did not kill for sexual reasons. For him, the killing itself was the thing. "Like some guys are killers but they kill children and I don't hang out with them. Some are rapist killers and some are just plain homicidal people—like myself, eh?"

Subject #5

In October, 1969, when SUBJECT #5 was 21 years old he committed what he claims was his first murder. The 21-year-old victim had apparently approached him in front of his building as he was returning from a fast-food restaurant with food. She asked if he had change for the telephone. The subject explained that he lived there and she could use his phone. She made her call and he set his food out on a plate. The murder happened when it was time for her to leave.

I was walking her down the hall to the door to the apartment and she passed me. I just reached out and grabbed her by the throat and started strangling her. And I tore her clothes off. I sexually assaulted her. I knew what I was doing but I could not stop myself. The impulse at that point was I just wanted to destroy. I wanted to hurt. I wanted to humiliate. It was such a strong need. . . . When she was dead, when I was finished, I was petrified at what I'd just done. I didn't want to get caught. I was frightened. So I dressed the body and moved it outside between the two apartment buildings. I left it there to be discovered the next day.

SUBJECT #5 says that he refused to think about the crime afterward. "I realized what I had done was wrong. I said, 'I don't know why it happened. I don't want to think about it. But I will make sure it never happens again. I will get better control of myself.' And control was the problem in the first place." He said he

was not letting the things out that were bothering him. "I just said I'd get better control of my feelings. It didn't help."

SUBJECT #5 goes on to say that the other three murders were basically identical, but they occurred after he had moved in with his girlfriend, S.. "They would happen at unexplained times. At that point I saw no rhyme nor reason to it. I would go for weeks with the same problem and then for some reason in a situation would kill someone. And it was scaring the hell out of me. But I still refused to think about it. I didn't want to deal with it."

In November, 1969, he killed a 22-year-old woman whom he had met 2 weeks earlier. SUBJECT #5 related how they had had a few drinks together but noted that he was not drunk or impaired when he killed her.

The final murder that he would commit in Montreal occurred in January, 1970. (During the interview sessions, this woman was the only one of his four victims whose name he could recall.) Although they had gone out on a couple of what he called "fun dates," they did not engage in sexual relations. "She was such a nice girl." On the day of the murder, the subject had left his girlfriend's place to go home to change for a date with her later that evening.

As I was going down the street I bumped into a woman I'd known since I moved to Montreal—more than a year earlier. She was carrying bags from shopping and I offered to carry them for her. I walked her home. . . . She asked if I'd like a glass of wine. We talked. She spoke with one of her roommates on the phone from work and I knew her and said, 'Hi.' It was getting late and we both had dates that night. So I got up to leave—was just about to leave. We're at the door and she turned, sort of moved toward the door to open it and I grabbed her and started strangling her. I tore

her clothes off and I did sexually assault her. The rest of it is pretty well the same scenario and recovery period. The hiding of evidence. While I was still in the apartment her date arrived and knocked on the door. I could not remember if the door was locked or unlocked. It was unnerving. He eventually left. A short while later I went home, got ready for the date with S. and made it look like a normal evening with her. I used to be very good at compartmentizing [sic]. I had the night to get through.

It is significant that SUBJECT #5 had made his presence in the victim's apartment known (by passing on his greetings to the victim's roommate while the victim spoke with her on the telephone). Also, the fact that he could not remember whether the door to the apartment was locked when the victim's date arrived suggests that the subject did not plan this attack. SUBJECT #5 was actually questioned by police as a suspect because he was identified as an acquaintance of the victim but he was released. It seemed that no one took note that the three murders had occurred within an 8-block radius of one another and SUBJECT #5's residence.

Finally, in February, 1971, SUBJECT #5 raped and murdered (—it is not known whether he raped then killed or killed then raped) and mutilated a 33-year-old high school teacher in Calgary, Alberta, where he and his girlfriend had moved the summer before.⁶¹ The victim was a recent casual acquaintance of the subject's, the two having met out of town when SUBJECT #5 was in Banff on a work-related weekend. A few weeks after their meeting, on a night when the subject claims his girlfriend was "out with the girls," he invited "whatever her

⁶¹SUBJECT #5 related that he and his girlfriend moved to Calgary from Montreal because she was becoming afraid of all of the violence—the murders—in their neighborhood. He remarked, "Little did she know she was taking the violence with her."

name was” out for a drink. He says that he went up to her apartment before they went out and that they had sexual intercourse. (He adds that he does not recall having sex with anyone that year other than his girlfriend and the woman who became his last victim. At this revelation he said, “My God, I was relatively faithful wasn’t I? For my standards.”) Then, after going out for drinks, he took her back to her apartment, where they chatted for about 15 or 20 minutes. “When I was about to leave—again—I grabbed her and strangled her.” He elaborates, “I was just at the door, about to say goodbye, and the hands just came up again. When my hands went up there was a very brief but intense struggle in me: No! No! But then it was too late. I knew when my hands started to move there was no stopping it. I just slid right off control.” At other points in the interview SUBJECT #5 described his killings as a “compulsion.”

SUBJECT #5 asserts that he did not sexually assault this last victim. “I strangled her. I tore her clothing. I bit her. Oh, yeah, by the way, I bit all the victims—on the breast and neck area.⁶² But I did not sexually assault her during the murder. I felt no compulsion to. Perhaps it was because earlier in the evening we had sex.” The police summary of the case, however, cites the autopsy report in which the cause of death is listed as strangulation with the notation that the victim had been raped just prior to her death or just afterward. It is not clear why SUBJECT #5 would not be forthcoming about this particular sexual assault.

Following the murders SUBJECT #5 describes how he felt: “There’s a sort of aftershock, a nervousness, a trembling. More like the nerves relaxing. Tension

⁶²Before SUBJECT #5 was apprehended, and after it was apparent that the same perpetrator was likely responsible for the attacks, the media dubbed the offender “the Vampire Rapist” to reflect his modus operandi regarding the series of what was reported as “sex stranglings.”

Relaxing. I always trembled after the crimes. Almost like a body shudder. If I'd had a glass of milk I'd have made a milkshake I'm sure." He then went about doing what he had done following each of the previous murders, checking for signs of life in the victim and then running around trying to remove any evidence linking him to the scene of the crime. "The next day I went through a normal day's going to work, trying to keep everything calm."

SUBJECT #5 described his assaults as follows:

I strangled them while I was sexually assaulting them. The biting came along with the strangling and the sexual assault. It was very frenzied. . . . I remember their faces clearly. I saw fear in their eyes. Dismay. Sometimes a look of pleading—that was my impression. . . . I had caught all of the victims off-guard. None of them had any reason to be afraid of me prior to that moment. No reason to suspect there was any animosity, any anger, or hostility whatsoever.

The subject maintains that he does not like to think about the crimes but on occasion the memories still, 20 years later, intrude upon his mind. "The images I have today are of a still image—of me overtop of a victim with my hands around the throat. It's frozen. I don't look at her. There's a look of rage on my face and he's looking at the victim—but I get the sense that he's not really seeing her."

SUBJECT #5 was asked if he said anything to any of the victims while he was assaulting them. "I never spoke a word while making love—maybe that would make it more intimate. I was not talking to my victims while I was killing them." The subject's use of the term "making love" instead of raping (and mutilating) is so inappropriate here as to make it curious if not arrogant. Either way, the use of such a euphemism would serve to "sanitize" the sexual aspect of

the crime by normalizing it, and thereby diminishing his culpability—since making love is something people normally do, hence something normal people do.

He says that looking back on the murders over his years in prison have “brought things into focus. The victims all had a physical description that very closely matched my first girlfriend—the only girl who had actually hurt me. They were all dark-haired, medium-build. All around her age. I didn’t realize at the time I was trying to do away with my first girlfriend, C..” Over the course of the 3 days with this subject, he brought up this observation many times, each time suggesting afterward that because he now has the insight as to why he did what he did 20 years earlier, he is no longer a danger to anyone.

What he actually did to his victims is not known with certainty—whether SUBJECT #5 raped and then killed his victims, or killed them before sexually assaulting them. Autopsy reports are inconclusive, indicating that the sexual assaults and the death of victims occurred close in time relative to each other. SUBJECT #5 asserts that as he was strangling his victims he was sexually assaulting and biting them. He is adamant that he did not sexually violate them after they were dead—that he is not a necrophile. SUBJECT #5 also strenuously objected to reports in his files which indicated he had sodomized victims. Either these assertions are indeed truthful, or this is another example of serial murderers revealing an unusual kind of logic whereby they freely admit to committing certain reprehensible acts yet deny others that, by all other accounts, would be considerably less damaging to their image.⁶³

⁶³For example, after his arrest for the murders of 33 young males in Chicago, John Wayne Gacy announced that he was bisexual—not homosexual. It was apparently all right—in his way of thinking—for us to think that he had sexually

B. DOMINANT THEMES

As the five subjects talked about their killings there emerged three dominant themes that evidently reflect powerful intrapsychic forces in their acts of murder. In fact, threads of these themes permeated virtually all matters they discussed. The three themes are not, on the surface at least, such as would distinguish these serial murderers from other people. What is striking, however, is the degree to which or the manner in which subjects relate to these dimensions. In recounting their killings, each subject revealed extreme if not oblique leanings in the areas of entitlement, empowerment, and vitality. The following discussion lays out and analyzes these themes whose dynamics appear to organize their killing experiences, and indeed, the lived meanings of their lives.

(i) Entitlement

As they recalled their murders, the predominant theme across all subjects was that of entitlement. In general, each subject appeared to maintain a distorted place for himself vis-à-vis the rest of the world in that whatever he did was essentially justified by virtue of the fact that it was he who did it. Even when a subject recalled a situation and would himself remark upon how reprehensible his actions were, his vocal tone if not his actual words to a frequently startling degree revealed a sense of righteous indignation on his part. While he could acknowledge his wrongdoing on a cognitive level—in that he knows that there are social and legal rules proscribing what he did—underlying this awareness appears to be a personal conviction that his actions were justified.

tortured and murdered young males, but it seemed he could not tolerate us thinking that he was homosexual.

There appears to be a dysjunction between the cognitive awareness he has of the wrongfulness of his conduct and the emotional meaning he attaches to his behavior. Such a disposition is not unlike that of the narcissistic individual who dismisses outright or does actual harm to someone who has rejected him or diminished his image in some way, and then loses patience with those of us who cannot understand that even though he is “technically” the perpetrator of the harmful deed, he is really the victim doling out due punishment.

In all five cases, many times and in many ways, subjects reported they did not feel they were loved. As discussed in Chapter 3, whether or not their perception matches the objective reality is irrelevant. If their experience of their parents was that they were not loved by them, this “reality” could go far toward explaining the failure to develop a secure and integrated self with the capacity to experience emotional empathy. The feeling of rejection can cause intense hostilities—a cause set in motion. All five subjects appear to experience themselves, first and foremost, as victims. That they victimized others is not only secondary but, moreover, a consequence of what they perceive to be unwarranted ill-treatment toward them by particular people in their lives. In this aspect, they are angry victims.

In all cases their murder victims were being punished for something they did or something they represented to their killer. The following excerpts illustrate how subjects’ depictions of themselves as victims essentially serve—in their own minds—to exculpate them. Blaming others for their misdeeds is one of the dynamics which shapes their experience of entitlement. Perhaps most telling is the failure on the part of all subjects to truly sense the horror of what they

have done to other people. That they felt entitled to do what they did may largely explain the absence of remorse in these murderers.

In a general discussion about his experiences in prison with other inmates, SUBJECT #1 stated that he does not judge pedophiles. "I don't get angry because I can understand why he's doing that. He has been abused. When you have been abused, you abuse. That's the only thing he knows. So I don't judge him. He probably judges himself most. So my judgment would not help that guy." When asked if he is talking about himself here he acknowledges he is. He clearly identifies his own suffering and, using a kind of perverse logic, projects blame away from himself. "Life has been too hard on me. I was not born with the intentions to kill. Something made me that way."

At another point in the interview this subject explained that he thought that what happened to him could happen to anyone.

The line is very fine. I am not different from other people. It just depends on people in your life. If you are born and not cared about—rejected by everyone, not wanted—you can do what I did. When I got angry I would do something bad. To get back. I was hurt—in my gut—and I was hurting back. . . . Like everybody else I'm human—meaning I'm nothing because the view of the world is like that.

When asked directly if he is a victim SUBJECT #1 responded, "Society does not think so, but I do. The girls I killed were victims, too. We are all victims of a world that is too much concerned with money and papers." What he is essentially saying here is that the females he killed were really victims of society—not him. What SUBJECT #1 goes further to say suggests that he also attaches blame to the victims themselves. In talking about sex he contends that

he has no control over his sexual arousal, that instead it is a biological reflex to seeing a woman. Yet, when he talks about the effect that seeing a woman has on him he also implicates himself—that there is an element under his willful control.

Sometimes I wake up in the morning with the taste of sex in my mouth. . . . I can be walking with someone and not even be thinking about sex and have an erection. They think I am a pervert. But it's not my fault. . . . When I see something arousing, it's like a reflex. I see a girl and she is smiling. I sense some *complicity* with her. [emphasis added]

SUBJECT #2 was asked to describe how he felt when he stabbed his victims—the men whom he feared wanted to have sexual relations with him. He likened the experience to the tension of a balloon filled with “angry” air. “Now, with all the air you have inside, it comes out. It's ahhh vengeance. It's ahhh like a victory. They deserved it for trying to get inside me.”

SUBJECT #3 explains his 11 murders in a manner that attributes complicity if not actual blame to his victims. They were, to him, willing participants.

I killed my victims because I thought they would tell on me for having sex with them. I couldn't get caught. It was all consensual sex anyway. Not only were they awake while we had sexual intercourse, they all enjoyed it. They thought I was great. I thought they were great. None of them was a virgin—except the 10 year-old boy—and he was passed out when I had sex with him. He was unconscious from the beer. He sure wanted that beer, too, eh. He didn't know what was going on. And then I strangled him to death.

SUBJECT #3 became even more direct, to the point of negating personal responsibility. “Really, I blame the Correctional Service of Canada for the killings. Because there is no treatment program. We get no psychiatric help—and I needed it now, didn’t it?” Here he was referring to the many years of incarceration prior to the murders. At another point he remarked, “Being locked up, segregated like I had been for so long, I developed into a serial murderer. . . . I don’t claim insanity. The drinking released my inhibitions of all the hatred for being locked up for 20 years in an institution. So my faculties [sic]⁶⁴ couldn’t work properly to know I was doing wrong.” (The subject said this, however, less than an hour after having asserted that he knew “exactly” what he was doing when he killed all of the children.)

SUBJECT #4 revealed his thoughts regarding his culpability:

I don’t think that I victimized anyone. I don’t go out of my way picking a victim. Circumstances pick the victim. Like that third guy was a pedophile. I am an offender—someone who commits a crime. And I am a victim of my own life, or a victim of my own depraved [sic] childhood, and stuff like that, that precipitated all of this.

In SUBJECT #4’s mind at the time of his first killing, the man deserved to be killed because he had recently called the subject a “fat goof” and had been making advances toward his wife. “You know, the guy was that stupid. Maybe what I did wasn’t right. But he was *that* stupid.”

⁶⁴Numerous times SUBJECT #3 used malapropisms. Another such example was when he was describing his keen ability to retain details and said he had a “photostatic memory.”

He attached blame for his second murder to his growing preoccupation with the fantasy of being a contract killer as well as to the police. According to SUBJECT #4 the police were working undercover to catch him as a murderer-for-hire.

They already knew about the first murder. "They're responsible in a sense. I'd probably have done it anyway. Okay? But they were feeding my fantasy. They helped it, eh? I had to have another body to prove I was a contract killer."

When asked why he chose the woman he did his response was, "The old woman made me relive the pain and suffering of an alcoholic family. So she suffered because of it." She was blamed for arousing painful memories of his childhood by virtue of what she represented to him.

SUBJECT #4's third victim was a convicted pedophile. The subject was asked if on some level when he was strangling his fellow inmate he was strangling his biological father, the man—also a pedophile—he expressed so much disdain for throughout the interview sessions.

I don't know. I really don't know. Understand at that time I knew who I was strangling. In that sense I knew I wasn't saying he was my dad. But maybe subconsciously I was. Okay, it was a conscious reaction; it was a subconscious desire. Maybe that was it, eh? I sure wanted to do more to him. Boy, I wanted to torture the bastard. [pause] About the other [regarding his father] I guess maybe it was, too. Now that I think of it, maybe it was back there somewhere, eh? I don't know. Never thought about it. I know I was angry, I was really angry. Oh yeah. . . . I knew he was dead. I spit on him. I crawled out. And that was it. . . . I killed him because I wanted to kill him. He deserved more. Because he was a despicable individual—yeah, just like my father, the son-of-a-bitch!

When SUBJECT #4 talks about this third murder he also extends blame to the prison psychologist whom he feels should have known what was going to happen.

I got life-25⁶⁵ on each one [of the first two murders]. I've been inside since March '83 til July 22, 1986—when I killed the other guy. I killed the third person on the inside. . . . We were having problems with a child molester who was saying 6-year-old girls are sexually mature. And I told him I was gonna kill him if he didn't shut his mouth. But he went to security and security moved him out instead of me. The same day they moved another one in. And I went to my doctor and told him, listen, I feel bad. I couldn't tell him I was going to kill him, eh? I could now. But I couldn't then. And I told him, listen, put me on medication or something. This is no good. I feel bad. He says, 'We'll talk about it in a meeting.' But I planned on killing him. He was dead. He was dead, as soon as I walked out of that office.

SUBJECT #4 continues to hold prison psychologists responsible for his behavior in the sense that they are supposed to prevent him from killing.

The psychologist here better be prepared to help me. I mean, God help you. I'll pfff. I know when I feel it inside me and I feel it. And they'll have a reason to lock me up. I mean really good reason. I mean, they have a reason now, but I mean, huh, they'll have physical reason to lock me up. And I know it. I can taste it. I can smell it. It builds up yet it comes out of nowhere. I just hope that this psychiatrist is gonna see it. Is he wise enough to appreciate what I'm gonna tell him, eh?

This subject disclosed that he often has fantasies of killing correctional officers.

⁶⁵A "life-25" sentence, the penalty for first-degree murder, is the maximum prison term possible under Canadian law.

I fantasize about killing guards lots. Stringing them up, deballing them, gutting them, doing all kinds of weird things. Cutting their heads off. Any guards. . . . Not cops. I was never mistreated by them. I like beating them at their game—you know, I'm a criminal so it's a game. But the guards treat you like shit. And a person can only take so much, you know.

Again, this is the principle of "they deserve what they get."

SUBJECT #4 was asked what kind of people commit murder. He replied, "I think ordinary men kill. Just circumstances. Each case merits considering its own circumstances. Like the guy who'll get mad at his neighbor, a farmer, and blow him away or something like that. Crimes of passion, eh? Like me. Somethin's gotta drive you to it." The subject was not prompted in any way but proceeded directly to talk about aspects of his childhood once more. Even when the topic at hand had nothing to do with family or childhood, frequently SUBJECT #4 brought his early experiences into the discussion. The message was generally the same, that out of 10 children in the home he was the only one to be put into a foster home and later a boys' home by his parents. "Not fair. Not right." The rejection that he says he felt as a boy "continues to plague him even today. . . . I just don't understand it. I can't stand it." SUBJECT #4 goes on to describe the conflict he has over wishing that he did not want to kill and the feelings of anger he has—and his inability to overcome them.

I'm at a point in my life where I don't want to kill any more. I know that in my heart. It's not that I don't feel that rage. I just don't want to be that way. I feel the rage. Oh, you wouldn't believe. I'd just like a gun and go around wasting people. Oh I'd love to do that. I have such a desire to do that. And it's not right at all. I don't want to be like that but that's the way I am. . . . I feel the rage. I feel that rage. But I just don't want to be

that way. It's good I got caught. After I killed the first time it was so easy. Just like changing socks.

Similarly, SUBJECT #5 repeatedly alluded to his childhood pain at not being shown affection by his parents. "I was unaccustomed to emotions in my family. We just didn't get them. . . . I can remember two occasions when my mother either hugged or kissed me." So it was, he said, that his first relationship—with C.—was "especially intense" for him. He was not used to dealing on an emotional level with anyone. And when it ended abruptly with no inkling on his part that she found someone else he was "extremely upset by it." C. was the young woman he had had his first—and "failed"—attempt at sexual intercourse with. He recalls, still with some animosity, that she got pregnant 3 months into her new relationship. This meant to him at the time that he was "exposed—inferior" because it meant C. and her new boyfriend were having sex—what he had been unable to do with her.

SUBJECT #5 then went on to say that as a result of his experience with C. he believed that no relationship could be trusted, that none would last. "Enjoy them while they're there but don't invest anything emotional because it's going to hurt when it ends—and it *will* end." For the next year after the break-up SUBJECT #5 says he "was on a revenge trip," going out with girls until he knew they really liked him, then he would drop them. "I saw nothing wrong with using them." SUBJECT #5 explains his series of murders as displaced attempts to kill his first girlfriend—who jilted him. For this subject the murders were the result of his anger at his first girlfriend for having "dumped him—and humiliating him. . . . They were paying for her sins."

It should be noted that it is not that subjects lack a basic moral code, for each of them provided many instances of situations in which they believed someone else had acted wrongly toward someone (not necessarily themselves). Subjects do appear to have a set of values regarding appropriate and acceptable behaviors. In each case, however, subjects appear to apply these rules differentially to themselves. To illustrate this observation, SUBJECT #4 spoke about experiences he had while living in a foster home after his parents had relinquished their responsibility for him, telling him that they could no longer “handle” him. He was sent to a home in which the male head of the household was molesting one of the female foster children. SUBJECT #4 relates:

I was put in a boys' home. Then I was placed in a foster home because my parents couldn't handle me—so they said—and the foster parents were pillars of society and all this stuff, but I caught the step-father having sex with the stepdaughter. I was really religious and it really turned me right off because these people would sit in the front pew of the Lutheran church with the Assistant Mayor and the Police Chief. And these people would come home and do this to their kids. So it really turned me off of religion—and everything.

Then, incredibly, SUBJECT #4 ends the discussion on this matter with the calm disclosure—in fact boasting about it—“I blackmailed him for \$20 a day—to go to the [fair].” He seems to have no sense that while he has picked up on the fact that what the foster father did was wrong, his own behavior—taking opportunistic advantage of the situation by blackmailing the foster father—attaches culpability to him, too. On the contrary, it is as if what he does is not subject to the same kinds of rules or judgments that he is applying to others.

SUBJECT #4 has a definite code of values and believes in adhering to it. His own crimes are acceptable to him. "I am a murderer *but not a pedophile*." When asked if he was acquainted with an inmate at Kingston Penitentiary notorious for his sex-killings of youths (and who is SUBJECT #3 in this study), SUBJECT #4 responded that he knows who he is and immediately added that they are as different as "night and day." He is adamant that there are no ways in which they might be similar. SUBJECT #4 can relate to the misdeeds of others as wrong but is either able to justify or excuse his own wrongful behavior by some rationalization; or, more simply, he does not see it as wrong.

This kind of thinking revealed itself over and over again with all five subjects. It is reminiscent of Yochelson and Samenow's "thinking errors." It is not that these men fail to understand that what they did was wrong in the eyes of society. Nor is it that they lack any personal moral code. It is rather that what they do is evaluated according to an individuated—and bifurcated—set of rules: one for them and one for everyone else. SUBJECT #5 actually stated, "I have very clear rules, but there is a set of rules for me and another set for everybody else." SUBJECT #4 was asked what he thinks of the fact that he has killed three people. In a similar vein, he responded, "It's not right—as far as society, the norms of society. . . . But as far as my norms go, I don't have any. As far as that goes. I've got my own rules."

The fact that subjects believe they have an "acceptable" motive for some misdeed—meaning it is something they want to do or something they need to do for themselves—serves as its justification. Such a "biased" personal code of values facilitates the experience of entitlement, enabling them to engage in behaviors that they do not tolerate in others.

As an example, when he was 10 years old SUBJECT #4 stole money from milk bottles. He says, "I could never understand why I got punished. I'd go and buy my mother some flowers and some chocolates, or something. Then she beat the piss out of me! [laughs]. I never understood that. I was doing good, why should I get beat up?" It was apparent that the subject really does not appreciate the fact of his misdeed. In another example SUBJECT #4 related how his brother and wife provided information that aided prosecutors in his prosecution. He says about his second wife that she was hurt "because of the charge of murder and everything. Destroyed her whole life. I destroyed a lot of lives. . . . But why do that to me? You know, really."

Not one of the five subjects expressed anything approaching feelings of guilt about the fact of their having killed people or about their victims in particular. SUBJECT #1 feels sorry about being in prison. On the one occasion in which he alluded to feeling sorry for his crimes it was to point out that he misses his girlfriend—not a word about the fact that he took her life away. SUBJECT #2 accepts the fact of his life sentences because of what he did yet seems detached from any emotional understanding of the meaning of his behavior to his victims (or their families). It is not that he is cold about it, but more like "something is missing"—as if he lacks the capacity to experience guilt.

SUBJECT #3 professed remorse for his 11 murders but this "remorse" was abruptly dispatched by the "fact" of his "finding God." He explained, "There's nothing I can say to the parents of those children. I'm a Christian. Those children are my brothers and sisters. As far as I'm concerned they are with God today. I've been forgiven and that's the end of it."

SUBJECT #4 recognizes, intellectually, that the manner of his killings was callous but his words are not accompanied by due affect. He stated that he does not feel guilt about his murders but added that the closest he has come to feeling remorse was when he killed the 60-year-old woman who resembled his mother. He used the word "shame" in relation to that murder, perhaps mimicking the word "shameful" that his sister had used to describe this particular killing. When pressed to describe his feelings of shame his response was intellectual, "It was wrong to kill such an old lady."

As SUBJECT #5 talked about his four murders nothing that he said demonstrated that he feels any guilt or remorse. When directly asked how he felt about his crimes he replied, "I do not know for certain if I feel remorse. I'm not sure what that means." This, in fact, may represent the best "insight" among the five serial murderers on the subject of remorse—and, indeed, may apply to all of them.

The sense of entitlement each killer revealed regarding his murders—feeling justified in killing people whom he experiences as deserving punishment—would preclude the experience of guilt. The mechanism by which this entitlement is enabled appears to be two-fold: (1) the fact that they see themselves as victims, as illustrated above; and (2) their apparent inability to emotionally empathize with their victims. The person who lacks emotional empathy is disconnected from the impact of his acts as they are experienced by other people. For the subjects under study—who believe they are victims and who are motivated to exact some form of justice—the lack of emotional empathy may be a key component facilitating their murders.

In relating the killings each subject manifested an ability to cognitively empathize with his victims, but appeared to lack any degree of emotional empathy. Typical in this regard was SUBJECT #4 who was asked about his victims' "state" when they were being killed. Regarding the second victim he related, "Don't think about her. Never have. Never had any regrets at all. She was in an alcoholic stupor anyway. I don't think she'd be rational anyway. I knew she was aware she was getting hurt. I knew that." He goes on to say,

I killed an old lady. Come on. A helpless old lady. For \$8000. Phhhh. Life's pretty cheap. You know. That's pretty sad. I don't have no feelings towards what I did—in that sense. But in another sense I have an appreciation of what I did—because of the age of the lady, eh?

SUBJECT #4, like each of the other subjects, knows on one level that he is hurting his victim—indeed he is motivated by that knowledge. He does not, however, appear to attach any emotional meaning to that fact. Thus, the entitlement he feels as a victim is unencumbered by emotionally identifying with those he harms. Perhaps SUBJECT #1 said it best: "I had too much anger. There was no room for any feelings for her."

(ii) Control/Empowerment

As subjects discussed their series of murders a second theme emerged which appeared to be a critical factor in the way they experienced their crimes. All five serial murderers related that the killings empowered them—gave them an undeniable sense of control, albeit fleeting. The theme of empowerment was also expressed in their fantasies. Each subject talked about the major role fantasy has played throughout his life—before and since his incarceration.

Fantasy involves the creation of an “other” reality. Its predominance throughout the lives of these subjects may be accounted for by the nature of any fantasy: It confers the experience of complete control—over others and over one’s own destiny. Desired outcomes are virtually assured. Real-world exigencies do not intrude upon the experience of success and personal gratification, making fantasies especially seductive. As one subject (#4) remarked, however,

A lot of time you were just satisfied with the fantasy of killing. So you didn’t need to go through with killing. That will carry you, sustain you. But sometimes the urge gets so strong that the fantasy isn’t enough. And after you kill your fantasy is even better—until it isn’t good enough again. Like a vicious circle or something.

Fantasies enabled subjects to experience themselves as “more than they were.” It seems, however, that the actual image they had of themselves as powerless and inconsequential remained within the peripheral vision of their mind’s eye and threatened to expose their insecurity. Enacting the fantasy—actualization of the fantasied self—challenges the credibility, and therefore authenticity, of the image of the self as powerless. Hence the potency of enacting the fantasy. Doing so transforms him into a person of consequence, thereby empowering him.

SUBJECT #1’s fantasies center around himself as sexually dominant, “in control of the woman.” In his killings he experienced his victims as exercising power over him—the power to humiliate him. “They made me feel impotent, you know. Not sexually. But as a person.” When he killed the last two women he told them as he was killing them “now it was their turn.” They had, in his experiences

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with them, hurt and humiliated him many times in the past. They had had the power to hurt him. Now he was “going to make them pay.” In killing them he became more powerful than they were.

Ostensibly, SUBJECT #2’s motive in killing his victims was that he sought to disable them from having control (sexually) over him. His killings provided him with a sense of empowerment relative to his mother since in killing these men he was “proving” that she was wrong in her assertions that he was homosexual. He recalls saying to himself after one of the attacks, “So, she is wrong!” He had otherwise experienced himself as impotent around his mother, and yet dependent upon her. “I was like the little bird in the nest too afraid to jump. I was too weak to leave home before I did. . . . In a way, the killings showed me her thinking did not control who I was. I took the control away from her. Nobody could make me what they wanted me to be.”

Regarding SUBJECT #3, it seems significant that he is not large in physical stature [approximately 5 ft 6 in (1.68 m) tall], yet is very big on himself. In interviewing him it was not difficult to imagine that while he would not have had much trouble conning youths, he would not command much authority with adults. It is easy to see how this man could be so alluring to youths, being an adult showing an interest in them—and an adult who had a car, money, alcohol, and drugs. They would be impressed by the wad of money he would flash and by his offer of a job. And, likely, they were flattered by his attention. Their deference to him as an adult would have made him feel powerful. He would not have had the same effect on adults.⁶⁶ Certainly his use of a mixture of alcohol

⁶⁶As this is being written, the researcher is reflecting back upon the 3 days spent with SUBJECT #3. A strong and distinct image of him—while he would have been picking up his victims and getting them to go along with him—comes to

and a sedative drug rendered his victims helpless, giving him complete control over them. SUBJECT #3 acknowledges he could do what he wanted with them, although he also attempts to put a different face on it by contending the sex was consensual. "Sure I *had* them—but they wanted me."

In the eyes of society he had failed to succeed in life. Neither was he successful in the estimations of his criminal peers since he spent most of his life behind bars. But with children he had the power to impress and ultimately control—to be able to take what he wanted. This subject understands his murders in very concrete terms: "It was for survival—my survival. I killed them so they couldn't tell on me." (He would later add that after his first murder he began to enjoy the actual killing, but he demonstrated no insight as to why.)

Fantasies played a major role in SUBJECT #4's homicidal behavior. He recalls having his first violent fantasies when he was about 28 years of age on the occasion of a visit to his mother's house. She was preparing food at the stove and "I fantasized about smashing her head in with a rock. That scared the shit out of me. I got up and said, 'I got to go.'" Before that, his fantasies were

. . . fantasies of grandeur. Of being the mob guy. . . . I think the fantasy progressed to where I wasn't satisfied pulling armed robberies. . . . Then I got obsessed with death. I used to buy *True Detective* [magazine]. I was fascinated with murder. I was fascinated with contract killings and all this. The elite is the contract killer. You see, that's the elite. You see, to me it was *the* thing. You're the master of control. You see, anybody can

mind: that of a "big little man." A small man by adult male standards, but someone who, as he puffed himself up with himself, would look big in the naïve eyes of a child.

kill, but a contract killer has control. He doesn't kill because he loses it. No. He kills because he *has* control. Over everyone.

Just like the old adage: People grow shells to protect themselves, but only too often those shells become them. And I guess that's what happened to me—and I became my fantasy.

SUBJECT #4 explains that there is not only a physical "high" in killing, but also a mental "high." As an example of what goes on in his mind he related the following, "Hey you're nothing. If I want you to be nothing—you are nothing.' I look around me and I do that all the time. You know. 'You think you're something, you think you're the smartest man in the world.' And I'm saying to myself, 'But I've got the power to kill you. Dead. Right now.'" He goes on, "If they're smart guys like psychiatrists and lawyers and doctors and cops and whatever—anybody—I say to myself, 'Yeah, you think you're so big—pfff. I may be in jail but I've got the power, more power than you'll ever have in your life.' You know? Nothing else like it."

SUBJECT #4 left his first victim in the bush where he had shot him. Then he got into his truck. Driving back after the first murder he describes how he felt: "The adrenaline rush was—the *power* I felt—it was like the first time you pick up a gun—that power. Yet more. It was a power trip like you wouldn't believe." It was evident that the subject was reliving the experience as he recalled it—his face flushed.

Killing has left this subject with a sense of personal accomplishment and achievement in his life. "Besides being out of prison for 7 years—which is a long time for a criminal—to kill somebody makes me feel I really done

something. I mean it's like becoming, uh, president of Chrysler America. Not everyone can do what I did."

SUBJECT #5 said that he "became supreme when he dumped on someone"—that he "generally felt so inferior otherwise." In discussing his fears regarding losing his girlfriend, S., he said, "I felt I had no power to control losing her." He says that he believes his biggest problem was with control—needing to have it but not being able to manage it.

I was so afraid of losing control. The tensions, the pressure, didn't go away. I would push it down and down until I couldn't push it down anymore—it blew up. It came out. The only reason I realized it was because of the lack of pressure I felt right after the murders. A complete feeling of drain. I realized how much I got out to empty all of that, so how much I must have been carrying. And for a few days afterward I would still feel more relaxed and normal. But that was a short-lived feeling. Very quickly the feeling of the pressure was there again—which was actually the more normal state for me. So while I thought that I was becoming more normalized, I was actually becoming dangerous again.

SUBJECT #5 was afraid to get involved with anyone because he believed it meant he would get hurt. To him, love is something that is part of you and is taken from you without your control.

Relationships are frightening. They compromise you. You do not have control. One does not give love. Love is taken away. You do not give it. You have no control over that at all. You don't have a choice. You either love or you don't. . . . Around the times that I was killing I was considering my relationship with S. and could only think about how much pain I was going to feel when it ended. So I did not want it to end. I would have been alone. I needed to control that situation but really couldn't. So I took control in other situations.

After SUBJECT #5 detailed his four murders and explained that with “the sex, there was a definite feeling of using the person. Physically using—and abusing—her. My penis was a weapon. The rape part of the assault was part of the effort to degrade and humiliate. It wasn’t like sexual gratification. It was diminishing her by taking what I wanted. It was domination.” Since the sexual violation of his victims included biting their breasts, the subject’s choice of the word “domination” here—in the context of his descriptions of “destroying” his victims—suggests that what he experiences as “domination” would be understood as “abomination” by other people.

Like the other subjects, SUBJECT #5 felt excited by the power he had over his victims as he killed them, taking away from them any control he felt they (or what they represented to him) had over him—over his emotions. As subjects recalled their murders another aspect of the killing experience emerged—not unrelated to control but also not the same. Killing made them feel alive.

(iii) Vitality

All subjects spoke of feeling excited during the act of killing followed by a kind of release. For different subjects the excitement was experienced as a euphoric “high” or as a violent anger which they acted out giving them great pleasure. The release was experienced as a welcome state of calm or as a clear sense of relief. They all described being unable to sustain the feelings of release after a murder and explained that they found themselves getting increasingly restless or anxious—feelings that were numbed with alcohol, displaced by fantasies, and ultimately (temporarily) dispatched by killing again.

Some subjects (#1 and #2) claimed that they numbed themselves with alcohol as a way of coping with the depressed and destructive feelings they had regarding their lives. When their very sense of self was directly threatened, however, they needed to protect themselves from their “assailants.” The result was that in SUBJECT #1’s case he killed females who had “reduced him to nothing,” and for SUBJECT #2 the need was to guard against being homosexual at all costs. In both cases subjects reported that the killings temporarily relieved them of their burden of “being nothing” (SUBJECT #1) or of “losing himself” (SUBJECT #2). For the remaining three subjects killing seems to have provided a kind of excitement that transcended anything they had previously experienced in their lives—essentially elevating them to an experience of themselves as omnipotent—in contrast with an otherwise “powerless” existence. For all five subjects killing either preserved or heightened their experience of vitality.

SUBJECT #1 reflected on his childhood. “The way I was raised I felt I was nothing. If I would meet someone I always felt like I was two steps behind him. . . . When I was young I was at war with the world and with myself. Because I was nobody—to everybody, even myself.” He remembers feeling like he wanted to die.

It was about my life. I was miserable. No matter what I would do in school or anywhere there was always someone to bang me on the head. If it wasn’t my parents it would be the other kids. Saying my parents didn’t like me—‘You’re adopted.’ Things like that. I always felt like I was with a suitcase, ready to go somewhere else. I was never wanted. Never belonging.

When the police arrested SUBJECT #1 at the bus station in Montreal he confessed right away. “It’s like I had a wish to die. I was fighting a wish to die, you know.

Something like that. When I killed it was like I was killing a part of myself, too. Or maybe saving myself? I can't explain it." When he was asked to try he proceeded to describe how he felt when he killed his girlfriend (his second victim). "I was destroying the thing that was draining me—I had to do something. In my case it was violence—strangling. It's like I saw death coming after me. I had to defend myself from death." He "explained" his need to kill his girlfriend's friend by saying, "There was something unfinished in me. I was not whole until she was dead, too." It is as if SUBJECT #1 was preventing his own death by killing those whose humiliations threatened to reduce him to "nothing."

SUBJECT #2 killed his victims in an apparent homophobic-panic. He was "terrified of being taken over—to have myself taken by a man." The subject voiced that the killing was a fight to protect himself from his mother's "bad" image of him as a homosexual. "To live I had to kill these men. They were trying to take who I am. I had to do it." Thus, for this subject, there was a self-preservational imperative that even in his apparently deluded thinking he could identify.

In contrast, SUBJECT #3's understanding of his killings is very concrete in that he stated he initially killed to disable victims from identifying him—"to survive." After the first murder, however, he spoke of "enjoying killing—that it was really exciting." This subject does not seem to experience anxiety around his killings—either when he committed them or when he recounts the details of the murders. It is evident, however, that he has an overwhelming need to feel important. And the killings made him feel very important—someone to be taken seriously. In his own words, "They made me famous." His murders established

him in society—and in history—albeit in infamy. The need for celebrity, an equivalent of vitality, was also apparent in SUBJECT #4 as he explained with obvious pride why he confessed to his second murder:

After I got nailed for the first one I told them about the second one. They said they knew I did it but they couldn't prove it. . . . They caught me for one. May as well get me for two. Lots more publicity and everything. You should have seen the headlines. Big. My picture and everything. In *The Sun* and everything. When they captured me, real big headlines, too. I kidnapped a cab driver, I did all kinds of . . . ohhh. Very crazy. Oh yeah. I was on national T.V.. Autographs and stuff like that. Everybody was saying, phewwww [drawn into a whistle]. I was really wrapped up in it. Got to survive!

The need to be “somebody” was only one aspect of the theme of vitality for SUBJECT #4. When he was asked about his employment history he described being a battery operator in the oil fields as the best job he had ever had. When asked what was so good about it he replied:

Knowledge. Learning about oil, sour gas, and things that kill you. Really neat. I used to be real ballsy. You never gauge the tank without an air mask. But I would take it off. Go up and gauge the tank. And if you get caught, you're fired instantly. Because guys have died, eh? . . . I'd go right up there, no mask. Gauge it. I don't know why. I'd flaunt myself. Always. I always did it. I never wore a mask, ever. Flaunting myself with death, just challenging it. A Russian roulette type-thing. I don't know. I don't think it was any kind of death wish. I enjoy life too much. I enjoy life now, even in jail. But you know I've always thought a lot about death. It's always been part of my life.

On some level the killings appeared to provide each of the subjects with a sense of being somebody of consequence—in marked contrast with the way each of

them generally experienced himself, certainly in childhood but also as an adult. Killing transformed them into individuals with the power of life over death—an experience that was life-affirming.

Subjects also offered evidence indicating that the act of killing itself made them feel more alive. SUBJECT #4 seemed to be revitalized by his criminal exploits. “Crime is exciting. You know you crossed that line.” He said that killing made him “feel good” afterwards. “Right after the killings I went about my business, but I was pretty high. Adrenaline rush, you know. You’re so aware of everything. So alive.”

Since sex as a life-equivalent is generally associated with vitality, the sexualization of aggression is frequently observed in fantasies of serial murderers. It is noteworthy, therefore, that SUBJECT #4 steadfastly asserts that none of his fantasies of violence involve sex.

I've thought about [snuff films].⁶⁷ I don't know why somebody gets into that. To satisfy an ego or show somebody, see what they can do. It isn't for me but I've thought of leaving my mark in a sense when I kill somebody. But I've killed people, so far, in three different ways. Buried one alive. Shot one. Strangled one. Maybe I'm indulging my fantasy in different ways to kill 'em. I've thought about stabbing somebody. I've never done that. I've stabbed somebody in the leg or something but I've never killed somebody with one. I've never beat anybody with a baseball bat—I've thought of that. Poison. I've thought of that. Different things. I'd like to mutilate somebody sometime. Chop them all up. I have some pretty violent fantasies; pretty weird ones as far as homicide is

⁶⁷SUBJECT #4 was talking here about a recent genre of violent pornography in which an actor or actress in a pornographic film is actually murdered on camera.

concerned. Some pretty deadly ones. There's no sexual thing at all. . . . With me, I can't see myself, uh, getting excited, enjoying sexually, a woman I'm gonna kill. The violence would be good, but as far as sex, I don't get turned on at all with violence. Not at all.

Yet as SUBJECT #4 continues to talk about sex and how he enjoys giving pleasure to his partner, he then talks about his own enjoyment and relates to it as the same experience he enjoys when he is killing.

I especially like oral sex. . . . A lot of guys won't indulge in that with a woman, you know. Not me, I'd rather do that than have sexual intercourse sometimes. Whoa, I can last longer there than the other way [laughs], than having sex. . . . And of course, a woman loves that—longer, eh? I really enjoy it. I don't know why. I don't know what I think it is—I'm murdering something. [laughs] I don't know. I don't understand it, but there it is.

Although he did not derive sexual gratification from his killings, the feeling SUBJECT #4 did get he likened to a tremendous orgasm: "BOOM! I was power crazed in the sense of life and death—killing somebody. That's power. I think of that. That's so powerful to have the courage to snuff out a life. That's power. That's more power than any court in the world." When asked what it feels like to know you have that kind of power, at the moment you have taken someone's life, SUBJECT #4 responded,

Great. Okay. Now we'll get a little intimate here. It's more power than your most powerful orgasm. To me it's better. Like some guys are sexual psychopaths or something. They get an erection and have an orgasm that way when they're beating a woman up or something. Well, I don't get sexually aroused, but I can relate to that—there is a difference but it's almost the same. It's so powerful. A real high. It's like the first true

orgasm, not one of these little poop [laughs] ones. One of those boom! kind. You know, it's like that. Yeah, like whoa—you know you've gotta do that again!

In recalling his murders SUBJECT #5 had distinct memories of his feelings of anger and his sexual arousal as he was killing his victims. "I feel most alive when I'm angry. And if I'm more uptight my sex drive gets stronger. Both these feelings [anger and sexual arousal] were there when I killed. I felt more alive when I was destroying and humiliating my victims."

SUBJECT #5's revelation that destroying (by killing) made him feel complete suggests that he otherwise had a sense of himself as diminished or not intact. Like the other subjects his impulse to destroy seems predicated on a need to preserve his self. He presents what he thinks was the main driving force behind his murders:

The feeling I've always had is to destroy. Destroy in the sense of totally obliterate—more than kill. Destroy involves, to me, much more than just killing—which is very quick. . . . There's something in me that wanted to end up with the victim dead—and beyond that—to destroy her. . . . The urge to destroy was the key drive. . . . I learned what to do to get a release, like an addiction. I needed to destroy to feel complete.

SUBJECT #5 describes himself as feeling "fragmented" during the commission of his crimes. His description suggestive of a dissociative phenomenon, he related that it was as if one part of him acted while his consciousness looked on, powerless to exert control. He discusses his panic and confusion immediately after he killed.

That period of time is the reintegration, I suppose. Not only checking out that physically I could move everything, but the mental reintegration of the part of me that knows what's going on but can't do a damn thing to seem to stop it and the part that's in control and the rational part sort of regaining control, reintegrating—a phasing back that part of me. I remember while strangling the victims telling myself to open my hands—to stop doing this. It's like having a ball thrown at you and it hits you. I could not move. A very large part of me wanted to destroy and the rational side of me could not stop it. It was overpowering. My emotional side was in charge.

Immediately after killing SUBJECT #5 recalls “just sitting there.”

I was empty—relieved of something. It was strange. Maybe not relief. It was like something in me was put back. Or restored. It was like I killed all of my problems. It eased all the pain. . . . Before that I was feeling my life was ruined—with my parents and school. I was running but something was always following me. But the good feeling I got when I killed did not last.

Nor did it last for any of the five subjects. Hence the repeated killings.

The three themes that so dominated subjects' discussion of their murders—entitlement, empowerment, and vitality—appear to structure their experience of killing in the sense that they are what make the repeated killings meaningful to them. This research suggests that serial murderers can be distinguished from others by the way they experience entitlement, empowerment, and vitality. The importance of these themes in the murders derives from the emotional meaning these men attach to their lived experiences with these themes in other aspects of their lives. Emotional meaning is rooted in the experiences an individual has and need not be processed by cognitive interpretation or rationalization,

although these tend to be superimposed *ad hoc*. The five subjects in this study presented formative histories in which they experienced themselves as essentially impotent: as victims of other people and circumstance; as individuals without control in their own lives; and as individuals lacking an inherent sense of vitality. It appears that subsequent situations in their lives trigger emotional memories of earlier experiences of the self. The feelings associated with their formative experiences seem to provide an emotional blueprint to which later life experiences are compared. It is the emotional meaning of these experiences that motivates specific behaviors.

The interviews also served to reveal a striking trait apparent in all five subjects. It is as if these men essentially perceive the world in terms of “black or white” and are lacking in the capacity to “see” (i.e., experience) the world in color.⁶⁸ They seem unable to discern complexity and instead reduce the world to dimensional polarities. For example, things tend to be good or bad. One is right or wrong. Such a restricted “vision” of the world narrows one’s experiences, facilitating the kind of skewed emotional meanings that these subjects seem to attach to their experiences. The emotional component of subjects’ experiences seems to delineate and, indeed, determine their meaning and constitute a powerful motivating force in their killings.

⁶⁸Each subject revealed this “black or white” perspective of the world in many ways. Examples are numerous. SUBJECT #4 related, “If people love me I love them back with all I got. But when I hate, I hate with a ferocity of Satan. And, you can either be my friend or my enemy—there’s no inbetween.” SUBJECT #5 talked about power as the most important aspect of a person’s life: “You either have it or you don’t.” SUBJECT #1 spoke of people as “either hurtful or hurt.” Such examples reflect a rigidity on the part of these subjects in terms of the personal model of the world they construct for themselves. While they appear to organize their experience of the world in accordance with the same dimensions that other people use (e.g., being powerful—being impotent; being loved—being unloved; being a victim—being a victimizer) the manner in which they apply these dimensions appears to be decidedly polarized.

C. HOW THE RESEARCHER EXPERIENCED THE INTERVIEWS

Before approving my proposal for this research, the Committee on Protection of Human Subjects of The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York from their deliberations expressed concern for my safety during the course of conducting the interviews. I recall thinking at the time that I was likely at much greater risk of coming to some harm living in Manhattan (as I then was) than I would be interviewing serial killers in prison. I knew that I was going to be interviewing men who, although they had been convicted of multiple homicides, nonetheless had the possibility of being paroled under Canadian law as provided for by the policy of judicial review after serving 15 years of incarceration. But the Committee's point was not lost on me. I thought of that Committee each time I entered the room to sit with a subject. It was as I had learned working with police in Calgary a decade earlier: While you are effectively useless in a situation if you allow yourself to imagine all of the possibilities for harm, at the same time you can never become complacent and let your guard down. Never. The Committee's words were a reminder of that practical wisdom.

During the course of interviewing all five subjects, there was only one instance when I sensed that, personally, I could have been in danger. It was with SUBJECT #5. While he was explaining why his wife was not in any danger of being killed because she does not match his type of victim, he stopped mid-sentence and noted that *I* was like his victims—in terms of my physical features (hair and skin color, apparent age relative to him, and the like). I had the momentary realization that he had shifted from talking in the past tense about his crimes and his fantasies (as he had been doing the first day and a half), to the present tense. On some level I “felt” I knew that he was still having

fantasies of killing and mutilating, and that I fit the profile of the kind of woman he targeted. I remember reminding myself that I had the “panic button” on my person and I had already noted that a corrections officer was passing by the room about every 10 minutes. So, on the one hand, I felt a kind of terror—albeit short-lived—that I was sitting within 3 feet of a man who was thinking of me, at least at that moment, as one of his victims. But I was also aware of the reality of my safety—the “panic button,” the nearby officers, and the fact that I knew this inmate was seeking to be paroled. It was with that last thought that I knew I was safe. He was not going to do anything to me that might jeopardize his chances of being paroled.

I often reflect on that moment when I realized what this subject was really saying. I think about how it felt to know that I was, to him, then and there, one of his victims and that in other circumstances I could have been in imminent danger. And when I do, I am prompted to think of the people I have interviewed who have been attacked by serial murderers (Dean Phillip Carter and Richard Ramirez) but survived their attacks—I try to imagine their horror; their nightmares. And then I think about all of the victims who were less fortunate, who never survived. How far away they must have thought they were from such a fate, if they thought of it at all. It makes me know that none of us is immune. The victims are never far away from me.

But there is something else I learned: that I have to leave the victims at the door before I enter the room to conduct the interviews with the murderers. While working with police in Calgary, my Staff Sergeant, Joseph Hautzinger, known as a crackerjack interrogator of criminal suspects, taught me that the key was to never forget that even the most despicable criminal is a human being, and on

that level, if on no other, deserves our unconditional regard. It was a valuable lesson, allowing me to be genuinely respectful of the person I am interviewing. I found a place in myself for them that does not judge.

This is not to say that I did not and do not experience strong feelings of revulsion at what these men did. I seem to have managed these feelings at the time of the interviews by compartmentalizing them—securing a place for them that I did not permit myself to experience until a later date; in fact a much later date—fully 6 months after conducting the interviews. Perhaps it is because I was truly “safe” then, being hundreds of miles away from the subjects. I was also in a position of not needing to be the clinician—as the chartered psychologist that I am—or the researcher, leaving only “my-self” to resurrect and examine the feelings I had about these men. When I was able to look at how I personally experienced them what I found was tremendous anger. I could not detach myself from the horror of what they did. The terrible injustice to their victims. I do not know that I can ever feel emotionally safe from the knowledge of their crimes. Nor, perhaps, should I.

Certainly anger is a powerful motivating factor: for serial murderers in their killings, just as it is for me in studying them. While I am not unlike most people who find serial murderers fascinating to learn about—indeed, most of us are at once fearful of and fascinated by their “business” of death—I am aware that I am drawn to the study of violence by my own ghosts. The anger I felt towards these men and what they did most certainly connects with rage I have felt over the traumas and injustices of my own life. Anger, however, must know some boundaries. To angrily objectify serial killers as monsters is to be like the murderers themselves—who objectified their victims. For me to do so may make

me feel better in the moment, but moves us no closer to understanding serial murderers. So while anger motivates me to study serial murder, it is my academic passions that sustain me. I truly want to come to a better understanding of these men and their violence.

I believe that for those subjects who are capable of sensing and appreciating this, they know that I have a genuine interest in understanding who they are as persons. For those subjects who will seek to use this knowledge of me to manipulate the situation for personal gain, or for those subjects who have a sincere desire of their own to understand themselves, the result is at least compliance and more often a productive session. But when the interview is over and I leave the room, I always find that the victims have been waiting patiently for me. It is then my task to somehow reconcile the emotional empathy I experienced for both the offenders and their victims.

SUBJECT #4 presents an especially difficult challenge for me in this regard. I found him to be a warm human being, but a person who is never likely to be released from prison—nor should he be—given an apparent schizophrenic illness and his continuing fantasies of murder. I think of him and am struck by the tragedy of his life. On one level he wants to be free and to love and be loved—“to live in a cabin by a lake;” on another he is fully aware—and agrees—that he cannot be free because he will kill again, because he wants to—even though he wishes he did not want to. I am equally struck by what must have been the horror for his victims, one of whom was buried alive. It is then, with the victims in my mind’s eye and my own experience of their offenders as human beings—untainted by my own rage at what they did to their victims—that

I feel I am afforded a kind of perspective that permits passionate but objective understanding.

The line between victim and victimizer is not as clear as it once was. During the time I had with these five men, many times I found myself readily able to identify with them and their feelings, relating to their experiences and aspects of their world view. As well as with their victims. If I did not know it before, I certainly know it now: "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Anne: *Villain, thou know'st no law of God nor man:
 No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.*

Richard: *But I know none, and therefore am no beast.*

—Shakespeare, *Richard III* (Act I, Scene II)

VII. CONCLUSIONS

A. MAJOR FINDINGS

And so it may be for the serial murderer. Results of this study suggest he applies a logic similar to Shakespeare's Richard of Gloucester. The concrete meanings that the serial killers in this study seem to attach to themselves and their world would similarly prevent them from truly comprehending their "monstrosity." That they do not view themselves as "beasts" seems the result of an apparently skewed process of creating meaning from experience.

The three themes that dominated descriptions of the killing experiences of the five subjects are not themes that would distinguish these men as serial killers. Most people have feelings of entitlement that can motivate them to behave assertively if not aggressively when they believe they have been denied what is their due. Most people will tend to behave in ways that give them a greater sense of control in their lives. And most people have a need to feel they have potency in the world—that they are of some consequence. This research suggests, however, that while serial murderers are motivated by the same kinds of forces that motivate the rest of us, for them these same forces are exaggerated and distorted. The extent to which aspects of the three themes permeate the experiences of their lives—not only their killings—suggests that they are

instrumental—if not fundamental—to the process by which they experience themselves and organize their lives.

Subjects exhibited a pronounced and distorted sense of entitlement which related to their view of themselves not as victimizers but rather as victims. In all five cases these men experienced themselves as unloved (yet believed they were lovable) and felt rage at being powerless to get what they needed. Certainly many children grow up in homes with parents whom they experience as emotionally neglectful or abusive and the vast majority do not become serial murderers. As much as is possible, how are we to understand that these five men did? From this research one of the keys to understanding this appears to relate to the way they emotionally process the experiences of their lives. The anger each felt at having been denied love or recognition motivated him to punish—to kill—those who had diminished him, directly or symbolically, in this way.

With regard to the second major theme, empowerment, subjects described numerous situations in which they were not able to negotiate power in their day-to-day relations with others. While this is not different from what many people experience in their dealings with others, in these subjects it appears to have led to the need to assert total control over others. In all cases having that control was experienced as a kind of transcendence—from helpless victim to omnipotent killer.

Thirdly, subjects appeared to have a strong and ongoing relationship with death and its equivalents. For some subjects this meant directly challenging their mortality by engaging in high-risk behaviors. In some it meant needing to feel

they were alive by virtue of “being somebody.” In all five subjects the murders appear to have represented a strategy to defeat death through their own experiences of vitality. It was not enough, for example, to “only” rape a victim. Two of the subjects needed to “destroy” them as well. In contrast with most people whose experience of vitality as it relates to sex derives from the sense of “I come therefore I am,” for these serial murderers affirmation of their being required that they kill.

All subjects experienced their killings as a way to sustain themselves—literally by disabling victims from identifying them, or by taking away the power that their victims were perceived to have over them. It is as if the killings were a way to reconstitute or preserve themselves in the face of an impending doom. For each subject the series of murders seemed to be a way to reconstitute a fragmenting self into a more integrated whole. The threat of “being nobody,” experienced in different ways by different subjects—and coupled with the rage they felt at this—not only enabled them to kill but impelled them to do what they did. While there is not a single indication that any of the victims of these men presented an actual threat to their physical being—all but one of them killed when they felt threatened by people or circumstances they feared had the power to diminish them. And in the remaining case the killing made him feel like he was “somebody”—which may speak to the same threat but on a more superficial level.

In killing, the serial murderer is moved from the experience of himself as reactive object to proactive agent—victim becoming victimizer. The one without power overcomes that which will otherwise diminish him. Killing is a matter of

controlling the threat, controlling the source of power that threatens his own. In the end what appears outwardly to be offensive behavior is essentially defensive. And the violence itself is reinforced, indelibly linked to his experience of vitality. On some level for all subjects, killing meant living—it became the means to experience a viable sense of themselves in the world.

The results of this study indicate that serial murder is more than the mere product of a particular psychopathology in which the individual is so lacking in moral faculty that, like the psychopath, he can without hesitation satisfy personal desires at the expense of the well-being of others. The narratives from all five subjects suggest instead that serial murder is more fundamentally a pathology of self process which is revealed in terms of the murderer's personal construction of meaning regarding himself and his experiences. It may be that the pathology relates to how he develops boundaries for himself in his struggle to experience himself as someone of consequence. Considering the self as a process helps us to understand how untoward factors in his formative development may not only shape him but can also revisit him in adulthood in the form of emotional memories with tremendous motive power.

The prominence of the theme of entitlement in these serial murderers may have particular significance relative to our experience with the broader phenomenon. The important fact that the majority of serial murders in the United States are perpetrated by white males may be explained by an entitlement to social esteem and personal gratification that they may feel is their due—solely by virtue of being white and male in this society—so that when an individual (white male) is denied he feels justified in punishing those who would withhold

that which he feels is his basic entitlement. The fact that the punishment takes the form of murder suggests the assault to his image is extreme. It may be as Patricia Pearson⁶⁹ intuitively, “Expose me for what I am and I will destroy you.” Or, it is a matter of, “Expose me for what I am *not* and I will destroy you.” In either case the individual is saving himself by destroying those who threaten him by revealing his failure to command what should be his due. Killing is a way to relieve oneself of the burden of the “knowledge” (read, experience) of one’s own impotence.

When these men felt emotional pain or anger or fear they generally did one of two things: they numbed or displaced these feelings with drugs or alcohol, or they expressed them with an intensity far exceeding acceptable boundaries. Once these men killed they learned they could alleviate their dis-ease through acts of murder. It appears to be as Lifton (1993) observes, “Violence always has an absolute quality: behavior is reduced to a single, narrow focus; and in that sense, violence is a dead end.” (p. 11) After killing for the first time and experiencing the release from their discomfoting feelings—temporarily replaced by experiencing themselves as powerful and alive, reinforcing their sense of entitlement—killing became the way to feel better. More than merely making the bad feelings go away, killing became the way to make these men feel good, and in so doing, limited—if not precluded—their personal growth and transformation. Individually, each murder sustained them in the moment; collectively, the series of murders fashioned a purpose for their lives. They became, as it were, “stuck” in their violence. Each one of them stated that he would not have stopped killing had he not been caught.

⁶⁹Patricia Pearson. [in press]. When She Was Bad.... New York: Viking.

We feel entitled to kill when we—our “selves”—are threatened. If a person experiences particular people or circumstances as acutely threatening, the resulting feelings of fear or anger may be dispatched by the deaths of those to whom the threat is instrumentally or symbolically linked. Repeated killings can be similarly understood as acts of self-preservation. A single murder will not protect the perpetrator from others who come along afterward posing similar threat. This is perhaps how the serial murderer comes into being. In each instance the killer responds to the “threat” contained in his experience with that victim.

What is most apparent from this research is that subjects appear to attach emotional meanings to their experiences that are exaggerated or skewed as compared with the way other people experience similar situations. This was immediately apparent when subjects used words that suggested common experiences but upon further probing were found to have substantially different meanings to them than is generally connoted by those particular words. It is as if these subjects use “emotional homonyms”—words that sound the same but have different emotional meanings for them, recalling, as an example, the use of the word “angry” by one subject to describe his experience of “being empty.” This observation points to the particular value of the phenomenological method, aimed as it is at revealing an individual’s lived-meaning of the world, it does not assume an understanding but rather works at developing it—using the terms of meaning constructed by the subject.

Are serial killers different from the rest of us? The results of this study suggest that the outward fact of their killings may serve to mask more substantive,

underlying similarities between us. We are not, it seems, distinguished by the nature of our being but rather by the meanings we create from our respective lived-experiences.

B. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Few would dispute that serial murder represents deviance in extreme form. This study is in keeping with the social science tradition of understanding the human condition through the study of extreme forms. The study of aberrant behaviors can provide useful insights regarding “normal” functioning since extremes define the center. If serial murder is to be understood it must be grounded in the realization that it is part of human capability. Indeed, the successful execution of a series of murders bears witness to the ingenuity and self-serving interests of man. Learning about the serial killer is thus learning about human potentialities.

When we focus upon the carnage of serial murder we are easily disposed to see the crimes as those of a madman. When we look more closely at the serial murderer himself, however, the image is a remarkable likeness of ourselves. This research suggests that serial murderers are linked to us by virtue of their very humanness—not detached from us by their inhumanity. The kinds of experiences that define us as human—that make us feel vulnerable—generate powerful motive forces in these subjects, as they do in the rest of us. Where we differ appears to be a function of emotional meanings that become linked to the events and circumstances of our respective lives, suggesting a direction for future research: to explore the mechanism by which emotional meaning becomes attached to personal experience.

Perhaps not unlike Yochelson and Samenow (1976) the experience of doing this research would have me, too, describe myself as a “reluctant convert.” They “were persuaded by emerging facts to discard sociologic and psychologic theories of causation in favor of a careful probe into the criminal’s thinking and action patterns.” (p. vii) This research has demonstrated for me that there is a definite—and needed—place for phenomenological psychology in the study of serial murderers.

One is always mindful of the questions regarding reliability of self-reported information. In this study, however, it is not the details of particular experiences that are critical but rather the meanings they hold for the individual who is relating the experiences. Even if subjects fabricate details and include them in their personal narratives, it is assumed it is *because* they represent something meaningful to them. While the fact of his mendacity is not without importance, he is speaking a form of truth—his own truth—constructed according to what is meaningful to him.

As a qualitative study, this research does not claim generalizability of results to other serial murderers. It is nonetheless significant that three themes emerged with such pervasiveness in the narratives of all five subjects so as to indicate specific direction for further research. In so doing, this study has satisfied one of the primary objectives of phenomenological research as it relates to the greater goal of finding “truths” about a particular phenomenon: What is learned can be combined with other approaches to knowing, in this case suggesting specific hypotheses to be tested in larger samples of serial murderers using more traditional methods.

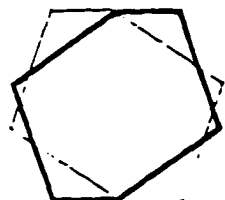
We have, without a doubt, much more work to do if we are to understand serial murder—not only in terms of what we think about, but, I would suggest even more importantly, *how* we think about it. The present research and, therefore, our understanding of serial murder could be extended by future phenomenological study of serial murderers using a hermeneutic approach. This would involve more active dialogue between researcher and subject with an eye to interpreting the lived-meaning of that subject's experiences in the broader context of the historical, political, and sociocultural context of those experiences. This would enable a more comprehensive understanding of serial murder since it would be explored relative to the matrix of violence—the individual's world—in which it resides.

Allowing different ways of thinking about serial murder reflects a scientific humility which will move us toward a better understanding not only of serial murderers, but of our very selves. Perhaps it is as the French writer, Bataille (1986) would have us believe: “those things which repel us most violently are part of our own nature.” (p. 196) In coming to a better understanding of the serial killer we go further in the understanding we seek of our very selves.

This research arose from the observation that in our desire to understand serial murder we had not yet really heard from the murderers themselves. The phenomenological method used provided the opportunity for five serial murderers to speak to us about themselves and their views of the world in a manner that opened a window for us to examine the motive forces that led them to repeatedly kill, and from which the meaning of the murders could be inferred. This study was

intended to give them that voice and what they have said convinces we need to hear more.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM FOR SUBJECTS

**The Graduate School and University Center
of The City University of New York**

Ph.D. Program in Criminal Justice

John Jay College of Criminal Justice: 899 Tenth Avenue, Suite 411, New York, N.Y. 10019

212 237-8422, 8419

Office of Sponsored Research: 212 642-2059

**DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT
PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Candice Skrapec, a doctoral candidate of The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York, is conducting dissertation research on serial murder. As a subject in this study, I understand that concern for and protection of my welfare will be of prime importance at all times.

I have been informed of the purpose and nature of the research. I further understand that I consent to these sessions, knowing that what is discussed will not be considered confidential in nature.

I have been told that I am free to ask any questions regarding the study, and to withdraw my consent and to discontinue my participation at any time.

I have fully understood the explanations and fully and freely consent to my voluntary participation in this research project.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
FOR SERIAL MURDERER SUBJECTS

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased that you have agreed to talk with me about some of your experiences and ideas. As you know from the time that the arrangements were made for our meeting, I am doing research on serial murder. What you did was important, and very interesting. I'd like to know more about it.

I have some specific areas I'd like to explore with you. However, at any point should you wish to elaborate beyond them, please feel free to do so. In this way, you can help me to see the kinds of things that you see as important, from your own experience. Your insights, your feelings and understanding of things are particularly important to the study.

It is my custom to record sessions, so I will do that if it's all right with you. I find it helps to make the most of our time together. I use audiotapes so I won't be bound to a pen, taking notes during our sessions. That way I can concentrate on our conversation as it goes along. I assure you that the audiotapes will not be made available to anyone else. By signing this consent form you are indicating that you understand why I am interviewing you and others in this way. Your consent to be interviewed also indicates your compliance with the fact that information we discuss will not be considered confidential unless you specifically request that a remark you may make or particular information you bring forth, not be used in any form of public information. Is it also clear to you that our talks will have no bearing whatsoever on your case or status here?

Do you have any question before we begin?

Are there any limits for you as to what you and I can discuss, or do you think I can feel reasonably comfortable asking you about most things?

• FORMATIVE YEARS

I'd like to start with some basic information.

[Document a detailed history of the subject.]

Childhood: family and developmental history, educational history, presence of untoward factors (including accidents, medical problems) or deviant and delinquent behavioral patterns,

-When and where were you born?

-Who are your family?: parents; siblings; extended or others; pets. Birth order? Any pathology in the family (e.g., alcoholism; fighting; abuse; drug use;

legal problems; financial problems; divorce)? What of illness or death? How often did the family move while subject was living at home? How did he see the others? How were his relations with them? How did they see him?

How well did you know the members of your family?

How did other members of the family get along with each other?

Were you disfavored or picked on as a child? (?any abuse)

If you were or are a parent, how would you treat your kids differently from the way you were treated by your mother and father?

-Educational History.

How far did you go in school? Were you involved in any activities through the school? How did you do in school?

What kinds of problems did you have as a juvenile? Were they the same as those of other kids your age? (Did he tend to run away? Was he involved in fire-setting; torturing animals; fights; promiscuous sexual activity? Did he experience enuresis as a child?)

Did you daydream or fantasize much? What about?

-How did he present himself to others? How would he have described himself? How did you see yourself? How did you feel about yourself?

- ADULT ADJUSTMENT

-including higher educational and occupational history, drug/alcohol use, sexual history, marital history, psychiatric history, criminal history

Are your parents still alive? How old are they? Do you ever see anyone from your family? How about any friends from outside?)

-History of deviant patterns.

Are you enrolled in any educational programs now? Did you have any disciplinary problems while in school at any level?

-Employment History.

What jobs did you do before coming into prison? Did you ever have any particular vocational interest? Do you have any military experience? (- If so, what branch? When? Type of discharge? Rank at discharge? Any disciplinary measures taken?)

- Social History.

How did other people see you? How did females tend to see you? Did you every marry? (-If not, did you ever have any serious relationships? Did you ever date?) What was that like?(-If not, was it something you thought you were missing?)

(What are your thoughts/feelings about having a family of your own?)

-Is there a history of problems with: alcohol; drugs; hostility/fighting; impulsivity; authority—bosses; parents; teachers; treatment for mental problems; assertiveness; irresponsibility; gambling or credit problems; criminal arrest

What makes you angry now? What do you do when you get angry? How about [name of subject] as a child—what did he do when he got mad?

In what kinds of situations do you feel most together? When do you feel best about yourself?

-Sexual History.

How old were you when you learned about sex? What were your early experiences with sex? As you grew up, how did you feel about sex? What has been a favorite fantasy? What is the biggest turn-on for you? What about pornography? (violent?) Have your sexual tastes changed?

(Have you ever had sex with a child? What do you think of people who do?)

(There are probably men out there who enjoy violent sexual pornography and who would like to do the kinds of things you did—but they don't. What makes them different from you?)

Do you look at yourself as a sexually attractive man?

Did you ever rape someone but not murder (him/her)? Did you ever rape someone first and then kill (him/her)?

What do you think of serial rapists?

(What is the difference between you and a serial rapist?)

-Medical History.

Did you have any illnesses or conditions growing up? Any serious accidents? What about as an adult?

• THE MURDERS

-What can you tell me about why you are here?

[This question should lead the individual into discussion of his series of murders.]

Could you choose an example to talk with me about in more detail?

Would you think back to the day (he/she) was killed? Tell me, as much as you can recall about that day from start to finish. Where did you wake up that day? What was the day like from there?

What was going on in his life at the time? What was his mood through the day? Was anything carrying over from previous days? Were there any particular stressors? What is his affect like as he relates the information about the day? How detailed is he about various events of the day? How does this compare with detail about the crime scene? Does he disclose or imply information which might suggest "why" he killed, or what the killing meant to him? Is it clear he

felt he needed to kill? Is it clear he felt he needed to have a corpse? Or, was it a victim he needed? Does he allude to ownership of the victim/body in any way? A need for control? Is there evidence of personal ritual?

Are you able to try to think about that day from the viewpoint of the victim? To reconstruct that time he/she had with you from his/her perspective? (e.g., She is hitchhiking and you drive up along side her on the road. What is she seeing and feeling after she meets you? What does she think about this guy who has picked her up?)

Do you think about the offenses you are in here for much? How much? What images go through your mind? When you imagine the scenes what kinds of feelings or sensations do you get?

What kind of person were you when you weren't killing?

What did you feel like before you killed someone, while you were killing, and then afterward?

What was going through your mind at the time?

[These questions should get at particular behaviors involved in his killings.]

If he sexually violated the victims, what was the sex like?

What did you do right after a killing? Where was your "head" at then?

When was the last time you had the feelings to kill? Does being in here do much to change those feelings?

Was there something wrong with what you were doing? (How so?)

Was there something wrong or special about the person you killed? What was it about him/her that led you to choose him/her?

Was there something wrong with you? How do you feel about people who kill other people? Are you different from other people who kill? From other people who do not kill?

Looking back on things now, how would you say you developed into a person who could kill others?

Do ordinary men become serial murderers, or is there something extraordinary or different about them?

Did you ever hear from families of the victims?

Do you ever feel bad about what you did? Was killing in conflict with the way you wanted to feel about yourself? What did killing do for you?

Who is (name of subject)? Tell me about him.

For yourself, did you ever have any lifelong goals you would like to have achieved? Has religion ever played much of a role in your life? What do you think happens to us after we die? Have you ever come close to dying? Do you

think about your own death? What's that like? (Has anyone you've known well died? How old were you? What did that time feel like?

(What of life and death equivalents? - e.g., indications of an active lifestyle versus depressed)

What do you miss the most by being here?

Some people say that serial murderers tend to get caught because, subconsciously, they want to. Does this fit you?

After you killed the first time, how did you feel? Did anything change? What about after subsequent killings?

(Probe for perceptions, feelings, and behaviors as they were before and after the first killing.)

How much control did you have when you were killing? Would it be accurate to consider your killings like an addiction?

Did the need to kill develop over time? What course did it take?

When you consider your life, have things been stacked against your?

What do you think about treatment for serial murderers?

Do you know anyone else who has killed a number of people? I've learned of active correspondence between serial murderers. Have you been in touch with any, or any with you?

Why (do you suppose) the interest in this?

Is there anything you would like to add to what we have talked about over the time we have spent together? Anything that we have not touched on that you feel is important?

Our interview is now over. Your time, as well as your information, thoughts, and feelings have been greatly appreciated. Thank you very much.

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