Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

David C. Hayes

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Eric Hickey, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Scott Gfeller, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2023

Abstract

The Cultivation Effects of Serial and Mass Murder on Homicide Investigators

by

David C. Hayes

MFA, National University, 2007

MS, Walden University, 2012

BA, Michigan State University, 1994

BS, Grand Canyon University, 2011

BS, Purdue University Global, 2020

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November 2023

Abstract

Research has indicated over the course of decades that media has an effect on the perception of crime and criminality. Since Gerbner's inception of the cultivation theory, the effects of mass media have been studied and validated, causing viewers to be influenced in their perception of crime and criminality to believe it is more severe than it really is, more prevalent than it really is, and there are more instances of serial and mass murder than there really are. Within true crime presentations representations, the personality, modus operandi, motivations, and descriptions of serial and mass murderers is presented outside of known facts and, at least partially, fictionalized and indicate that the perception of serial and mass murder by viewers of true crime media is skewed. There is a distinct gap in the research as applied to the effects of true crime media on specific populations. The research questions addressed in this study centered around determining the misconceptions in a type of true crime media regarding serial and mass murderers and assessed a population of 41 homicide investigators and the cultivation effect on their approach to investigations through a series of surveys. The surveys were developed from the narrative analysis of media and the results were analyzed in regard to media misinformation. The proliferation of misinformation is of vital social significance, and the results of the study show that there is an effect on the perception of serial and mass murder due to true crime media wherein law enforcement professionals largely believe in the myths and stereotypes reinforced by the media presentations. Findings of this study may be used by law enforcement administration to better educate professionals and the public as to the effect that true crime media could have on homicide investigation.

The Cultivation Effects of Serial and Mass Murder on Homicide Investigators

by

David C. Hayes

MFA, National University, 2007

MS, Walden University, 2012

BA, Michigan State University, 1994

BS, Grand Canyon University, 2011

BS, Purdue University Global, 2020

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November 2023

Dedication

This is dedicated to my wife, Sandy, whose unwavering dedication to me has made everything possible.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not be possible without the conviction and mentorship from Dr. Eric Hickey, serving as the chair of the committee, and Dr. Scott Gfeller, the second committee member. Without the assistance of LaTasha Ellis of Cleary University, Dr. Emily Barnes of Lindenwood University, Dr. Sara Barnwell of Cleary University, Michael Barnes, Justine Defever of Cleary University, and Trico Lutkins of Jackson College, as both motivational figures and conduits to necessary data sources, the process would have taken much longer. Thank you to my various employers, including the Livingston Educational Services Association, for their support. In addition, my associations with the Michigan Department of Corrections and the Lansing Police Department have proved invaluable.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The topic of this study is the effects of media cultivation on homicide investigators in terms of their perceptions of serial and mass murderers and, as a consequence, whether they are operating with misconceptions in the execution of their jobs. Whether or not professional investigators are influenced by mass media portrayals of crime and criminality like other populations is of direct interest to researchers. The implications of this research could prove to be very important if homicide investigators' perceptions of serial and mass murder fall in line with the misconceptions that are portrayed in true crime media. This would indicate that there may be an undue influence on homicide investigations through cultivation effects.

A great deal of research in terms of cultivation theory has been conducted over the past 30 years, but not in terms of very specific populations, including homicide investigators. In reviewing the research on the cultivation effects in terms of crime and criminality, audiences believe that there is more violent crime, they will be more affected by violent crime, and that the proliferation of serial and mass murder is greater than it really is (Aarnodt et al., 2020; Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.; Yaksic, 2022). These misconceptions are reinforced through the popular genre of true crime media, wherein the focus is more on serial and mass murder than mundane crimes, therefore giving the impression that it is a far bigger and more present problem than would otherwise be noted (Wiley et al., 2016; Yaksic, 2022). This research was necessary to determine whether or not this proliferation of true crime content has had cultivation effects on homicide investigators. While most homicide investigators will never be involved in a serial or

mass murder case due to their relative rarity, a cultivation effect can be established that will confirm that the affected population is being influenced by true crime media.

Background of the Study

There is ample evidence of the effects of cultivation on the populace in general, but not in terms of criminal investigators. Audience cultivation within media, according to the work of influential communication researcher Gerbner and others, results in an unrealistic perception of crime and criminality by the public (Alitivoli & Kaveh, 2018). I based the theoretical framework of this study on Gerbner's cultivation theory and agenda setting, which still have modern day applications (Morgan et al., 2015). From a basic idea of moral expectation of the world, Bilandzic et. al. (2019) concluded that viewer engagement with narratives and moral expectations of the world are intertwined and mutually dependent. Hefner and Kretz (2021) applied the pervasive beliefs regarding large constructs like relationships and romantic attitudes as a perceptive component of Disney films and reported that relationship-contingent self-esteem, courting behaviors, and the like were driven by media representation, essentially delivering social cues to viewers. Dolliver et al. (2018) broadened the idea of the relationship between media consumption and fear of crime in the general populace noting that there was a correlation, and that correlation usually resulted in a view that supported more punitive measures for criminals and measures designed to defend one's person (e.g., stand your ground, open carry, etc.) even though the likelihood of violent criminal interaction was very low. This was a national study in which researchers used various metrics that showed there was a continued effect on those consuming media in general. Ray and Kort-Butler (2020)

looked at the dearth of qualitative survey data on viewership and crime reporting and, again focusing on news media, used that existing survey data over the course of 4 different years to see what type of media (print, broadcast, etc.) and where it was most effective. This is notable in the sense that it not only reiterated the presence of media-cultivated perceptions of crime that were inaccurate, but it also established that it was more prevalent when high-profile crime and crime associated with political debates were in the news cycle. Distilling this, and applying it to fictional narrative media, Selepak and Cain (2015) surveyed viewers of *Law and Order* and found that White people were disproportionately portrayed as criminals 5 to 8 times more than actual statistics (and it should be noted that these were sophisticated, narratively engaging stories). Additionally, they found that the exposure to these dramas validated Gerbner's extension of cultivation theory into the mean world syndrome and led to the elevated perception of White criminality and personal safety concerns for non-Whites. The modern era of true crime, a synthesis of news media and narrative fiction, is apt for this type of analysis.

Ladewig (2020) looked at the conceptual idea of cultivation and the news reporting of murder through the lens of how it affects political rhetoric and voting. Ladewig (2020) argued that the increased reliance on violent crime reporting has had real world political effects and manifested in the election of more conservative representatives. Although not necessarily germane to the discussion at hand, it did indicate that there was a definite applicative aspect of Gerbner's work that could be measured within specific industries.

Current literature deals, overall, with crime presented in the media, but there is significant work on how the perceptions of notorious criminals are presented. Those perceptions fall outside of the actual facts, much like overall perceptions of crime are skewed from a consumption standpoint. As an example, Hier (2020) examined the crimes of Canadian serial murderer Peter Woodcock and reported that the subsequent reporting of Woodcock's crimes was without the melodrama of modern true crime reporting. Hier (2020) stated that, because of the timeframe of his crimes, Woodcock was not a "celebrity monster" like modern serial predators, who have been presented in that way (p. 392). Hassan and Mukhtar (2020) indicated that there was a belief among investigators that crime shows have an effect on criminals and potential criminals in terms of broadening skill sets, but there was no effort made to determine if there was an effect on the investigators themselves.

Problem Statement

I conducted this study to determine the effects of media cultivation, specifically from true crime programming across modalities, on the perceptions of crime and criminality among law enforcement and citizens. This social problem has long-reaching effects ranging from a basic lack of knowledge through the creation of laws and statutes by members of the viewing and reading public who hold political office and are operating under misperceptions. In this study, I determined whether or not cultivation has affected professional investigators perception of notorious crime and, in turn, their investigative process. The specific research problem that I addressed in this study was that it is not known whether or not the established effects of audience cultivation in terms of skewed

criminal perceptions due to the proliferation of true crime media have had an effect on professional homicide investigations and the perceptions of crime and criminals that the professional investigators hold.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the cultivation effects, if any, that the fictionalized representation of serial and mass murder in the media have on the investigative process of homicide investigators in Southeastern Michigan police departments. Serial and mass murder were the preferred type of crimes to examined, even though most departments do not have a chance to investigate them, because the trend in media production in this genre has focused on this type of crime over the past 4 decades. In that regard, a hypothetical mass murder in New York City that was broadcast worldwide via media outlets, including streaming outlets, would also be seen in Michigan. The effects of the media portrayal of a class of offender, a serial murderer or mass murderer, was so consistent that those consistencies coalesce, inform the opinion of the viewer, and influence popular culture. Lesser crimes do not have the saturation in the media, but they are also accessible to departments on a regular basis. These do not fall under the idea of cultivation because media representations substituted for a lack of real-world experiences.

I examined Ted Bundy murders, which had media saturation, and determined the most repeated misconceptions about the offender and the case. I compiled a brief survey to determine if professional investigators used these misconceptions in their belief systems and if cultivation had an effect on investigations.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What thematic patterns exist in docudramas of a notorious crime that perpetuates unrealistic perceptions of serial and mass murderers?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): To what extent are homicide investigator perceptions of serial and mass murderers affected by popular media depictions of serial and mass murderers?

Theoretical Foundation

I used Gerbner and Gross's (1976) expanded ideas of cultivation theory as the theoretical foundation for this study. I focused specifically on the concept that perceptions of the real world are inextricably linked to and informed by media consumption. Gerbner and Gross's work has been studied extensively in terms of mass media, media violence, and its effects on the general viewing audience in terms of news broadcasts. Further, subsequent research and application of the theory include an expansion on the evolving trends of media and the perception of crime and criminality on a general audience as well as the prevalence of true crime. I focused on the effect of true crime on professional homicide investigators to gauge cultivation effects on criminal investigations.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I examined the narrative media of a single, notorious crime and criminal. Using narrative analysis, I assessed 12 dramatized versions of the Ted Bundy case from 1986 to 2021. There have been 11 dramatized feature films featuring Ted Bundy as a character based on his real-life exploits, 11 true crime

documentaries that feature a dramatization of Ted Bundy, and one fictional feature film with the make-believe progeny of Ted Bundy. Based on my examination of notorious serial murder cases, I determined that the Ted Bundy case has received the most media attention.

I completed data collection in two phases. In Data Collection 1, I used stereotypes and misconceptions to create a deductive framework for coding. I also coded the thematic analysis of each piece of media to determine a pattern of perceptions that were prevalent to determine validity and misconceptions. In Data Collection 2, I administered a survey related to those misconceptions to homicide investigators to gauge the persistence of misconception or cultivation of information.

The analysis required multiple data points. In Data Analysis Step 1, I conducted a narrative analysis in which I viewed filmed media content multiple times and coded it. I collated and then analyzed the results. In Data Analysis Step 2, I used those perceptions to create the survey sent to homicide detectives. Those surveys indicated whether the participants were affected by popular media versions of this notorious case.

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that the proliferation of feature films and docudramas featuring Ted Bundy over the course of 30 years indicates a level of media saturation. I also assumed that the study population was at least peripherally aware of Ted Bundy and his crimes. I assumed that due to the nature of their work, that the study population believed that they knew the accurate definitions of the terms *serial killer, mass murder, psychopath,* and *psychopathy*, and had working knowledge of the term *sociopath*. I

assumed that most homicide investigators have never encountered a serial or mass murder case. I assumed that the majority of true crime media, specifically docudramas, focused on serial and mass murder cases, therefore, investigators would not have had firsthand knowledge of serial or mass murder, but had gained their information from media representations.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I examined the effects of true crime media on homicide investigations. I chose this focus because of the proliferation of true crime media and the relative ease of access to it by audiences in general. The established cultivation effects on general audiences were significant enough to warrant the study of the specific audience of homicide investigators. Regardless of region, most homicide investigators have not encountered a serial or mass murder case, which means their experiences of these events are limited to media representations. I chose the Ted Bundy case as a central reference point due to the media saturation of the case over the past 30 years. The following docudramas were included in this study because they include a significant dramatized portrayal of Ted Bundy: *The Deliberate Stranger* (1986), *Ted Bundy* (2002), *The Stranger Beside Me* (2003), *The Riverman* (2004), *Capture of The Green River Killer* (2008), *Bundy: Legacy of Evil* (2009), *Bundy: Reborn* (2012), *Serial Thriller: Angel of Decay* (2015), *Bundy and The Green River Killer* (2019), *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019), *No Man of God* (2021), and *Ted Bundy: American Boogeyman* (2021). That dramatized portrayal, outside of actual footage of Ted Bundy, is indicative of the lasting misconceptions inherent in true crime portrayals and subsequent cultivation

effects. I did not use the 11 produced feature-length documentaries or the innumerable true crime television episodes featuring actual footage of Ted Bundy in this study.

The study population for this study was homicide detectives from urban police departments in Southeastern Michigan whose job descriptions included but were not limited to homicide investigation. Because the Ted Bundy case and the proliferation of cultivation effects from true crime media are not limited by geographical constraints, I determined that the study location was appropriate. I used the cultivation theory as the theoretical framework for this study. Even though agenda-setting theory or other media-centric social psychology precepts may have been relevant, the influence of specific media on perception was more important in this study. By linking media and the perceptions of homicide among homicide detectives, I was able to assess the transferability of the concept within law enforcement and its effect on other areas of investigation.

Limitations

A potential barrier while conducting this study was my role as instructor with the university servicing the urban police departments in Southeastern Michigan. I ensured a clear separation of my role as instructor and researcher by ensuring that no participants were in my current sections. This study included several limitations, including the limited geographical area of the participants. The urban police departments are within 100 miles of one another. Urban police departments also differed in the number of homicides that they actually deal with in a given timeframe, so that difference could have influenced the survey. In addition, although the Ted Bundy series of crimes were well-known and had

media saturation, there was no guarantee that participants knew the name or were familiar with the media surrounding the crimes.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that I filled a gap in understanding by focusing specifically on whether or not media cultivation had an effect on investigations that have literal life and death consequences. The results of this study could be used by police departments and institutions of higher learning in examining the effects media cultivation, agenda-setting, and proliferation of misinformation may have as suspects are identified, dismissed, or indicted from an investigative standpoint. Although research existed on the effects of media cultivation in terms of crime and criminality as applied to the general populace, there has never been a study in which the researcher focused on whether or not the professional investigator population is specifically affected. This study may be used to improve training, which may increase the veracity and validity of homicide investigations. In this study, I addressed any investigative incongruities attributable to media cultivation effects and misperceptions of crime and criminality that could lead to more fair and equitable investigations.

Summary and Transition

Since the inception of Gerbner and Gross's (1976) concept of media cultivation, there has been a great deal of research on whether or not mass media has an effect on its viewing audience. A majority of that research has revolved around violence and crime, and there have been many studies indicating a correlation between the perception of crime and the reality of crime in the minds of audiences. There is a lack of research

regarding misconceptions or faulty perceptions of crime in specific audiences, especially audiences in the criminal justice sector. Researchers have focused on the prevalence of true crime media, a genre incredibly popular in modern America, where the misconceptions and faulty perceptions of crime are exacerbated due to a lack editorial or ethical oversight in portrayal. I investigated the exposure that homicide investigators have had to true crime media and the effect that exposure had on how they investigated homicides.

The majority of true crime docudramas and portrayals focus on lurid and notorious crimes, specifically serial and mass murder, even though those types of crimes make up a very small percentage of overall violent crime (Aarnodt et al., 2020; Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). In addition, the majority of homicide investigators have never encountered a serial or mass murder case, so their exposure to and perception of how these cases function and who may be at fault could be shaped by media representation. Ted Bundy's crimes have reached a media saturation point with 12 separate feature-length productions. I thematically analyzed these and assumed that all participants would have at least a peripheral knowledge of the case. I used the misinformation inherent in these productions to design the survey delivered to homicide investigators, which I used to determine their perceptions.

Cultivation theory and its effects on violence, crime, and criminality perceptions have been well documented. However, through this study, I am the first researcher to examine cultivation effects and misperceptions of crime and criminality on criminal justice-specific populations, especially populations that may be operating and performing

job duties using misinformation as a guide. In my review of the literature, I identified the

gaps in research and determined the need for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Although there has been some study in regard to the prevalence and popularity of true crime media, including the focus of the most popular areas being serial and mass murder representations, there was very little literature on the effects of that saturation on different viewing populations. There has been very little work done regarding the effect of the prevalence of true crime media about serial and mass murder on audiences who have worked or currently are working in law enforcement in investigative roles. Investigators have, more than likely, never encounter a serial or mass murderer in their work lives due to the relative scarcity of the phenomena (Aarnodt et al., 2020; Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). Gerbner and Gross's (1976) work in the cultivation theory perceptions due to media, was prescient regarding the popularity of the true crime genre with indicators that misconceptions and misperceptions are made manifest through media exposure.

As stated in Chapter 1, scarcity of research in exploring direct effects of true crime media in terms of specific audiences was the impetus for the study, specifically, law enforcement professionals who, without direct exposure, may have adopted media representations as a component of their worldview on crime and criminal behavior. There was a great deal of research on media cultivation and crime in terms of general audiences, broken up by large demographics and media genre, as detailed below, but there was very little on specific audiences and a scarcity of information directly involving law enforcement audiences.

In my literature review, I first looked at the conceptual framework that I used in this study, specifically Gerbner's cultivation theory and its prevalence in research outside of forensic audiences. Next, I examined the application of the cultivation theory to crime and its application to law enforcement audiences. Finally, I examined the saturation of mass media in terms of its focus on serial and mass murder and that relevancy led to the perceptions of serial and mass murder by general audiences including law enforcement professionals.

Literature Search Strategy

In this literature review, I accessed various different databases housing scholarly material, internet search engines, the usage of print media found within libraries and online bookstores as well as reviews of established textbooks on the broad subject areas found direct from the publishers. I used the following databases most frequently: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, SAGE Premier, LexisNexis Academic, and ProQuest for academically peer-reviewed material. Google Scholar and Google were the primary search engines used for internet searches with Google being the most prominent for information on popular media. I accessed VitalSource, via instructor privileges, to directly request textbook material from publishers. I used the following search terms, both singly and in conjunction with one another, the most frequently: *cultivation theory, cultivation, true crime, serial murder stereotypes, crime programming, mean world syndrome, crime and media, agenda setting, true crime effects, true crime genre, genre conventions, dramatization, perception of crime,* and *perception of criminality*. Through the search, what emerged was a distinct literature gap in regard to the effect of cultivation

on the perception of crime for specific audiences. I determined that the case of Ted Bundy was the most repeated within the areas of popular media and, therefore, he was most representative of the saturation and will be discussed below in detail.

The majority of resources, including the usage of popular media, fell in the 2009 through 2020 date range. I used research prior to 2009 to inform the underpinning of the conceptual framework and the iterations of research that had taken place in terms of changing media landscapes. For the most part, I used peer-reviewed journals accessed through the relevant scholarly databases. My usage of books, both print and digital, provided additional resources and areas of research consideration in terms of popular media effects and saturation that tied into the areas of cultivation, true crime media, and its possible effect on law enforcement audiences.

Conceptual Framework

Gerbner and Gross (1976) published the results of a longitudinal study on television violence, developing the Violence Index in terms of television programming. This was built upon the work of Gerbner (1970; 1972; 1980) and their development of the cultivation theory indicating that the general public's awareness of the world around them, specifically in terms of violent imagery, is, in part, shaped by dramatized television programming and news media coverage of violent crimes. The level of effect was dependent on the amount of time spent viewing categorized between heavy, moderate, and light viewership. Gerbner et al. (1980) developed a nomenclature for the phenomenon that resulted from an inordinate belief in a more violent world, despite the relative safety of viewers' daily lives, calling it the mean world syndrome. In the mean

world syndrome, researchers postulated that violent programming did not cause violence, as was the popular thought of the time, but that the violent programming, caused anxiety and fear of the world around the viewers. This resulted in perception of a dangerous and dark world populated with criminal activity. This was echoed a decade later as Signorielli (1990) continued the work on cultural indicators and violence. This is exacerbated by viewers' acceptance of television or filmed entertainment as facts with life decisions being based in them. This aspect of cultivation, termed by Hawkins and Pingree (1981) as a cultivation of value systems, was vital to understanding the effects of cultivation on beliefs. Hawkins and Pingree's work was germane to the overall concept of how one develops a world view based on the facts of what some researchers call *infotainment*, a realistic representation of the outside world created for entertainment purposes but presented as information. Hughes (1980) argued that the research and conclusions Gerbner and others made in terms of cultivation may be valid but could be construed to be an oversimplification of the phenomena. Through the ensuing years, research has taken the basic tenets of cultivation theory and applied them to specific areas of research. Weiss and Singer (1988) pointed out that when social science items are presented through the media, like journalistic efforts and crime reporting, the journalistic endeavor, especially one centered around entertainment, has a different norm, serves a different purpose, and is converted information for a different initial audience. Greek (1994) addressed the difficulty of the emerging landscape of what they called a media criminologist as the expansion of television and the popularity of crime reporting increased with new avenues in need of content. Greek echoed the concerns of Weiss and

Singer, among others, in that the conveyance of information may be difficult. Gerbner (1998) summarized the approach to the study of media and cultivation as a complement to studies related to media and reinforced the idea of creating a social reality with television as the product of a "common symbolic environment that interacts with most of the things we think and do" (p. 192).

Morgan et al. (2009) pointed out that there is the opinion that broadening the avenues of access for viewers would not produce a fragmentation of the large social ideas but will further the integration and deeper penetration of dominant patterns and images as a part of creating a social reality. Morgan also predicted that new technologies would result in broadcast network audience share dwindling with competition across new modalities. Although Morgan touched on high-speed internet, their future-telling did not envision the ability for viewers to construct 'bubbles' of programming in a pick-and-choose manner resulting in an even deeper penetration of worldview-affirming programming.

This is not to say that the application of cultivation theory was designed to claim that viewers could not tell the difference between factual and fictional narratives, whether dramatized or reality, but that social reality was built from the absorption of all the stories and experiences that were collated to form a worldview. Whether or not the media presentations are fictionalized dramas or ostensibly factual documentaries is a debate of stylistic approaches and genre conventions.

As researchers approached cultivation, the idea of programming as a system of messages prepared for viewers along very strict and defined genre guidelines designed to

create a specific emotional reaction was the focus. There was a veneer of differences in genre, type of programming, and the way a program was consumed, and, through repetition, reinforced part of a complex worldview in conjunction with other messaging. On one hand, as Gerbner and contemporaries contended, there was a difference between asserting that cultivation was primarily concerned with the idea that researchers can determine when the public cannot discern fact from fiction in terms of dates, statistics, and individual experiences. Hawkins and Pingree (1981) indicated in their discussions on value systems, cultivation could result in the application of ideas into assumptions about the world in general, which informed decision-making.

Different types and modalities of media have been studied since Gerbner and his contemporaries released their findings. Arendt (2010) studied worldview alignment in students who read a particular local newspaper. Prior to reading, 453 students were tested in terms of many elements, but there were questions revolving around the criminality of foreign nationals and attitudes toward the European Union. The students then read the newspaper for 4 months. That newspaper had an identified bias toward the criminality of foreign nationals and a negative bias toward the European Union. In a post-test, after the 4 months, the students reading the local newspaper reported an inflated idea of the number of foreign nationals as criminals and had higher negative attitudes toward the European Union as opposed to students who read a less-biased control newspaper. Even in the earliest cultivation analyses where Gerbner and others determined heavy, moderate, or light viewers, researchers noted that time of exposure, including length of viewing and reading, was important. Arendt's study was only over the course of 4

months. This would indicate that the media exposure and the shifting values of the dependent group happened in a relatively short span of time.

Televised news media was a point of research as well. De Zuniga et al. (2012) used data from a University of Texas Austin survey conducted between 2008 and 2009. Those researchers analyzed the responses of approximately 1,100 participants in terms of their political affiliations, their exposure to news broadcasts, and whether or not they supported Mexican immigration. In the survey, republicans reported that they were more likely to watch Fox News, with a negative bias in their portrayal of Mexican immigration and supported more restrictive immigration policies. In the study, though, democrats who were more supportive of Mexican immigration, in general, in turn became more supportive of the restrictive immigration policies as the result of Fox News exposure.

In looking at a basic precept of the American justice system, Ruva and Guenther (2015) indicated that court officials of jury trials attempted to limit pre-trial publicity in an effort to mitigate the effect that news media may have on juror perceptions and attitudes toward trial participants and processes, but the court itself, in modern applications, often only directed juries to exposure to news media, regardless of modality. However, the court still allowed dramatized media exposure which may be equally detrimental. Blurring that line between fiction and reality media has become more prevalent.

Lull and Dickinson (2018) conducted a survey that detailed television viewing preferences among 565 college students. In addition, those students were also asked to take the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). Those students who preferred sports,

reality television, political talk, and programming falling in the suspense and horror genres predicated higher scores on the NPI whereas news media preferences predicted lower NPI scores.

Johnson et al. (2009) conducted two separate experiments in terms of media exposure and worldview creation in terms of racial stereotyping. In one study, an all-White sample of participants were shown pictures of African Americans looting stores after Hurricane Katrina. A control group was not shown the images. Participants were then asked to gauge their support for public policies designed to assist Katrina evacuees showing significantly less support for the policies that benefitted Black evacuees while, at the same time, support for policies that would benefit White evacuees were unchanged. Like Arendt's research above, the amount of time and exposure to the media was not a real factor. Much like other analyses of cultivation, it is important to indicate, again, that the exposure to media in and of itself was not the sole determinant in a person's worldview, but contributory and complementary.

Moving from the Black criminal stereotype, Johnson et al. (2009) then conducted a study utilizing rap music. One all-White group of participants listened to rap music that portrayed a stereotype of promiscuous women, the other group did not. The two groups were then surveyed on their support for social welfare policies that supported pregnant women in need. Like the previous experiment, the treatment group responded with support for Black women in need was significantly less than White women in need. Again, these were brief media exposures but, to some degree, affected decision-making processes of affected populations.

As Johnson et al. (2009) shared research across a cross-section of different types and genres of media, both dramatized and reality, leading to viewers creating assumptions and perceptions about real-world issues that do not comport with actual social reality. In another example, Chung (2014) applied the idea of cultivation to dramatized medical dramas noting that three of them, *Grey's Anatomy, Chicago Hope*, and *ER*, had mortality rates of patients within their narratives nine times higher than what happened in real hospitals. In the study, survey data from 11,000 participants indicated that more frequent viewers of medical dramas, like the ones mentioned, underestimated the import of chronic illnesses but also had a more fatalistic view of cancer than audience members who did not watch medical dramas as frequently.

Reizer and Hestroni (2014) gave students at an Israeli university who indicated they were in a committed relationship a survey inquiring about levels of commitment and media viewing habits. Interestingly, higher television viewing resulted in lower levels of commitment. The genre of media was also a determining factor. Those who engaged in romance-focused programming reported lower levels of satisfaction in relationships and a greater predilection for partner conflict. In another study, Hefner and Kretz (2021), in looking at the effects of Disney princess films on audiences, indicated that the films positively affected the viewers' romantically contingent self-esteem (RCSE) indicating that life with a partner is preferable and desirable and one's self-esteem is dependent on having a romantic partnership. On the surface, this was not a case of fact versus fiction, but it was an example of world view and social reality creation. Both of these studies, focused specifically on genre, conveyed results where media representations portrayed a

template for a functional relationship and eroded the ability for individuals to objectively determine the importance or health of romantic relationships.

This effect can be linked to attitudes and perception within professional communities as well. Returning to dramatized medical programming, Shapiro and Rucker (2004), after it was determined that fictional films featuring characters with critical illnesses elicited greater sympathy than given to real patients with critical illnesses, exposed medical students to feel-good films featuring characters who had illnesses similar to the illnesses of their patients. They determined that empathy toward the real patients rose after the film exposure but did indicate that they did not believe that it would be a permanent or long-lasting effect. Interestingly, they dubbed the phenomenon the Don Quixote effect. This was done to play off of the feelings of empathy that the side character, Sancho Panza, had for the hallucinatory Don Quixote as the two grew closer in Cervantes' novel and multiple film and stage adaptations. The irony of naming the real-life effect after fictional characters was not lost.

A great deal of research has revolved around social acceptance of body image and other conventions. Xiao (2010) conducted a mail-based survey with over 500 participants indicating that, among women, their ideas and beliefs in regard to body image were influenced by exposure to fashion, entertainment, health, and sports magazines. Men reported that their ideas and beliefs on body image were derived from sports and health magazines. Bissell and Hayes (2011) focused on sixth graders' attitudes in regard to obesity utilizing exposure to television programming. The students were given measures of implicit and explicit anti-fat bias with interesting results. When exposed to an image of

an overweight child, it resulted in being a strong predictor of anti-fat bias. Bissell and

Hayes' hypothesis that television exposure would result in higher anti-fat bias due to a

preponderance of thin characters was refuted, though. Those participants with higher

television viewing reported a marked favorable attitude toward obese child imagery.

What the researchers determined was that children's programming was more in-line with

real-world body types than primetime broadcasts and, therefore, might explain the

favorability responses toward the imagery.

As a final example, Calzo and Ward (2009) measured beliefs and attitudes of

homosexuality after surveying approximately 1,700 participants in regard to their

television viewing habits. Programming that featured more exposure to modern attitudes

about homosexuality, especially programming that featured a main character that actually

was homosexual, was predictive of favorable attitudes toward homosexuality.

The preceding examples, indicative of the process and analysis of cultivation

across genres, were also indicative of the effect that phenomenon has on attitudes and

beliefs. This became even more prescient as it was applied specifically to the broadcast,

reporting, and representation of crime and criminal activity. Altivoli and Kaveh (2018)

expanded on the effects of cultivation indicating that the process of putting importance in

the broadcast of crime fell in line with another model of communication in the form of

the agenda-setting theory wherein the importance of a concept, in this case criminal

behavior, was enhanced. This allowed viewers, after the consumed media, to not only

determine the topic of discussion, but, through repetition, reinforce the importance of it

resulting in a public's fear of crime counter to the actual crime statistics as the recursive

result of cultivation and agenda setting. The positive interrelation and recursive nature of cultivation and agenda-setting when applied to third person effects was noted by Jeffres et al. (2008) indicating that the concept has been present in communicational research for some time. The problem was a pervasive one, showing that, in some instances, the idea of agenda-setting and cultivation could reach as far as influencing individuals to adopt beliefs, including those about the effect crime and criminality could have in their lives, that undermine their own interests (De Zuniga et al., 2012). Crichlow and Fulcher (2017) echoed this indicating that those viewers who relied on media, regardless of programming, were heavily influenced by the programming they chose to consume. When dealing with crime and criminality, this phenomenon has exacerbated belief systems related to crime in a number of ways and through a number of different modalities.

Application to Law Enforcement Audiences

Even though there was a great deal of research on the effect of cultivation, narrative persuasion, agenda setting, and perceived reality on overall perceptions of crime, fear of crime and victimization, and prevalence of crime, there was very little work done on applications in the world of law enforcement. Perceptions of crime victims (Arriaga et al., 2015; Darnell & Crook, 2009) and media effects on jurors (Mancini, 2013; Ruva & Guenther, 2015) included relevant forensic populations, but the effect on law enforcement was understudied.

Abul Hassan and Mukhtar (2020) asked Pakistani criminal investigators about the effect they believed that crime dramas had on criminality. The investigators thought that

the programming had caused a marked increase in the overall crime rate, especially in youthful criminality with the idea that young people, through repeated exposure, act out the criminal techniques they have witnessed. This was in direct contrast to Andreas and Baranowski (2017) who surveyed convicted criminals and found no predictors that involved watching criminal dramas and criminal activity. The Abul and Mukhtar (2020) article is notable, though, for being one of only a few that actually utilized criminal investigators as a population, choosing career law enforcement participants in Pakistan that had, for the most part, 10 to 15 years of investigative experience.

Conversely, Trainum (2019) explored the effects of crime programming on investigation, but the article was anecdotal in nature, detailing the author's work in forensics and cold cases, invoking the *CSI* effect, that took the application from jurors to investigations. In a section of the article titled 5. Misconceptions of Investigators, Trainum bemoaned the effect that investigator exposure to crime programming, both narrative and documentary, "may warp their perception of the reality of forensic sciences," and the "training they receive does little to correct that perception" (2019, p. 458).

Anderson et al. (2009) examined the effect that media programming, specifically docudramas of true crime, had on the role of teaching criminal justice, criminology, and student expectations. Anderson contented that Hollywood productions have both contributed to the growth of post-secondary education in criminal justice but also presented a distorted view of the profession as sexy and adventurous. In addition, researchers indicated that the presentation of criminology is equally as distorted since

infotainment programming producers rarely provided the context of criminal behavior leading to skewed perceptions, and educators within the field had difficulties in bridging the understanding gaps (Anderson et al., 2009).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Cultivation Theory and Real True Crime

Media in general has been shown to affect how people develop a worldview, create beliefs, and process perceptions of the world around them. This came in the form of racial stereotyping (Arendt et al., 2015; Johnson, 2009), and distorted the accurate estimation of reality through reiteration of bias (Arendt, 2010) even in the face of conflicting factual evidence. Morgan et al. (2015) indicated that there has been a lack of study on the effects of media in terms of differing genres. Therefore, it was relevant to have applied those concepts to the broadcast, both dramatized and documentary style, of crime and criminality. Kort-Butler and Habecker (2018) found that increased feelings of support for the criminal justice system overall and outrage at the prevalence and problem of crime is associated with viewers who relied on media reports indicating crime levels. Predictably, those viewers who had not relied on media reporting did not report the same levels of support or outrage. This is echoed by Donald (2019) who indicated that consumers who relied on media programming to get information about criminal activity would be influenced in one manner or another, possibly impacting their overall approach to, among other things, crime and fear of crime.

Oliver and Armstrong (1995) found that viewers who consumed programming that was perceived as more realistic like *Cops, America's Most Wanted*, etc. predicted

increased levels of racial prejudice, authoritarianism, and held punitive attitudes toward criminals which differed with viewers of fictional counterparts like *Law and Order* and *Matlock*. The viewers also indicated that the reality-based programming appeared more realistic in comparison to their dramatized counterparts. It must be noted that Oliver and Armstrong's work took place at the cusp of a changing landscape wherein reality-based programming served as a template for modern true crime consumption and still focused on non-standard criminals and crimes falling outside of the majority of instances of real, reported criminal activity.

Garcia-Castro and Perez-Sanchez (2018) indicated that the cultivation effect alone would not be responsible for the fear of crime, but it happened in conjunction with narrative transportation, a phenomenon when watching media that lowered critical analysis by increasing the viewers' emotional connection with the media content. The application here was in terms of news reporting, but the goal and intent of narrative entertainment was to create those emotional connections, hence driving narrative transportation. This was not relegated solely to fear of crime and criminality.

The forensic population of jurors that was briefly touched upon noted that the attitudes and perceptions of crime can be influenced via the media, and the American court systems have taken precautions in that regard as a point of standard process (Ruva & Guenther, 2015). This was explored more fully by Mancini (2013) who investigated the phenomenon dubbed the *CSI* effect through studying jurors. In this, researchers found that those jurors who regularly viewed forensic crime programming, programming functioning as infotainment, manifested unrealistic expectations of and a skewed sense of

the reliance on scientific forensic evidence including the speed with which testing can be

conducted. This predicted a higher likelihood of acquittal. Mancini then commented on

the concept of cultivation in terms of genre-specific crime shows indicating that most of

the research had been grouped together as if all programming pertaining to crime were

equitable when, in reality, there were sub-genre differences that helped form different

worldview patterns. Kappeler and Potter (2018) noted that producers of modern

programming continued to utilize investigation methods and advanced technology as

readily available to law enforcement, while Levan and Stevenson (2019) indicated that

producers of modern crime programming presented law enforcement rarely making

mistakes or actually engaged in the duties associated with crime prevention, which

affected viewer perception. Conversely, Lee and McGovern (2014) indicated that the

reality, or documentary-based programming, routinely displayed law enforcement

engaged in normal, routine crime prevention duties. Both Kappeler and Potter (2018) and

Lee and McGovern (2014) asserted that programming influenced individual perceptions

of crime and criminality, amount of crime, fear, etc. These perceptions could also

manifest in terms of law enforcement competency. Escholz et al. (2003) studied the effect

of television programming on fear of crime and noted that demographic make-up of

viewer neighborhoods and type of programming were significant with the type of

programming across local news, tabloid-style news, reality television, and dramas. Most

notably, Escholz et al. (2003) derived from the study that overall cultivation effects from

media in general were not significant. The fear that was associated with crime dramas

may have something to do with the frequency of violence in the programming that had

more impact on viewers than the lack of realism. The lack of overall effects on the fear of crime based solely on sub-genre of television was echoed by Grabe and Drew (2007) but there was evidence of attitude-shaping by viewers in regard to crime, not solely fear or worry, dependent on the genre type of programming.

Although focused on the ghost story as a genre, Edwards (2020) asserted that the viewing public's natural morbid curiosity is piqued when consuming folklore. The allure of the genre allows audiences to use the media they have viewed as an explanation, exploration, or validation of the dark phenomena. Vicary and Fraley (2010) determined that women, more than men, were likely to participate in reading gruesome and lurid true crime books which was the antithesis of popular thought in terms of gender and capacity for violence. These media consumers were possibly looking for that validation that Edwards intimated.

The attitudes and belief systems developed in regard to victims of crime is of concern as well. As a forensic population, victims of violent crime were among the largest and the most ill-represented. Parrott and Parrott (2015) as well as the FBI (2012) indicated that creators of fiction-based crime media inordinately portray White, or Caucasian, women as disproportionately attacked, including rape or murder, by a stranger when real crime statisticians support the notion that men, of all races, were in the majority in terms of violent crimes and those crimes were more likely to be committed by friends, family, or known associates.

This then continued to blur the line between reality and drama. Although researcher time and effort focused on news media, there were parallels with dramatized

entertainment media as indicated earlier. Arriaga et al. (2015) looked at aggression and attitudes toward victims of violence in a study that utilized players of violent and non-violent video games where researchers measured the pupillary dilation responses of 135 participants. After randomly being assigned and playing a violent video game or a non-violent video game, the participants were shown violent imagery in a negative, neutral, or positive context. The researchers indicated that, after the gaming session, the violent gamers increased aggressive responses and had a decrease in pupillary dilation responses indicating sympathy for the victims of violence in the imagery shown to them in the negative context. The participants were not solely limited to skewing victim representation or empathy negatively; it was just the most predominant in the current media landscape. Conversely, being examined at a micro level, Darnell and Crook (2009) studied men's attitudes in terms of the street harassment of women. After viewing the film *War Zone* (1998), director Maggie Hadliegh-West's documentary wherein women with video cameras turn the table on men who harass and ogle them, participants who did not already have a strong opinion on the behavior of the men conveyed a greater feeling of empathy for female victims in similar situations.

These researchers, of course, did not focus on law enforcement personnel but did have a forensic application and looked to be determinant factors of crime beliefs and application of those beliefs. As media producers advanced narratives, the presentation also advanced. Oliver and Armstrong (1995) indicated that programming like *Law and Order* was reported to be 'less realistic' by viewers, but the subsequent years have focused on blurring that line. Cavender and Deutsch (2007) indicated that the use of more

realistic imagery, settings, and sounds related to actual police work in police dramas has been in an effort to increase that realism. Continuing on from Oliver and Armstrong (1995) and into that new landscape, Selepak and Cain (2013) applied these precepts to a dramatized piece of film content, like Armstrong, using the *Law and Order* crime procedural drama, where screenwriters portrayed White criminals as more prevalent than actual crime statistics resulting in White viewers who believed that they would be more likely to be the victim of a crime than non-viewers while non-White viewers believed that there are greater incidences of White criminality than were actual. The researchers in this study found an outsized perception of criminality, mainly from non-White viewers.

Ray and Kort-Butler (2019) studied the effects of current sociopolitical climates on the attitudes toward justice and crime and found that local news media had a great effect on public opinion, but media consumption outside of news media still had an effect on larger, more unusual crimes due to repetition. Noting that the landscape of true crime has changed since their earlier work, the presentation of crime programming still functioned as infotainment but presented the information theatrically and distorted the reality of the crime giving the unusual, sensationalized reporting an outsized prevalence of occurrence since this is echoed in both local and national reporting as well as in the infotainment programming. This indicated that, in the term of the study, the consumption of programming by viewers possibly exacerbated the misperceptions of crime. In a complementary study, Till et al. (2021) found that Austrian audiences who watched U.S.-based crime shows that featured a prevalence of references to the death penalty, at the time not used in Austria, would come under the mistaken belief that the death penalty

was used in their home country. Researchers called these notions *television facts* saved by the viewing audience. In this instance, it planted a false impression taken as a fact of Austrian law. The perceived realism of the content, whether fictional or reality-based, could have been a contributing factor.

Perceived Realism

The perceived realism of the content was germane to the discussion as the line between reality and fictional presentations blur. Busselle (2009) saw links between the perceived realism of television content and responses to social judgment questionnaires while Pouliot and Cowen (2007) found that when viewing documentary-style or fictional films, the documentary films were found to be more factual by participants; the memory of information and emotional elements were stronger in participants who viewed the fictional films compared with the participants who viewed the films that echoed larger societal elements and followed genre conventions. Brechman and Purvis (2015), focused on narrative storytelling and found that narrative usage had a higher degree of receptivity and was effective in eliciting an attitude change. Bilandzic et al. (2019) found that narrative engageability and the moral expectations of the real world were not only intertwined but deemed mutually dependent in a study of German viewers of crime dramas, medical dramas, and sitcoms. They further commented on the results and indicated that these viewers would sometimes develop a willingness to believe in unrealistic events. Green (2004) signified that familiarity with themes that commonly appear in media helped in that narrative transfer into the story and was a predictor of the perceived realism of the content. This then returns to the sheer number of media devoted

to crime indicating that there will be a high level of familiarity. Chadee and Ferguson (2019) in a recent study noted that the fear of crime due to mere exposure to media may be overstated but did indicate that there was a measurable fear of victimization in some part, still reinforcing the concept that worldview could be, in part, shaped by these concepts. It is notable, too, that the researchers also indicated that the 'real' news media had more of an effect than the fictional programming, but researchers did not account for fictional programming presented with 'real' elements.

Gray (2020) pointed out that there has been a delineation between non-fiction and fiction narratives utilized by filmmakers to directly affect audience expectations with a litany of examples where high production values, voice overs, and re-enactments of dubious veracity are presented side by side with actual participant interviews. These elements, according to Gray, are presented in the recent *Mindhunter* (2017-2019) series utilizing John Douglas and Mark Olshaker's book of the same name as source material that has also come into question by social scientists (Seymour, 2019). As Gray maintained, that series, and ostensibly other programming akin to it, "re-appropriates a reconstruction address from documentary, back to a semi-fictional, semi-factual narrative" (2020, p. 186). Douglas and Olshaker (1995) themselves have said that "our antecedents actually do go back to crime fiction more than crime fact" (p. 20).

True Crime Dramatization and Genre Conventions

Therein lay the inherent confusion with true-crime dramatizations or, as many researchers indicated, infotainment. This differed from the fictional crime dramas (*Law and Order*, *CSI*, *NCIS*) and reality-based true crime (*The First 48*, *Snapped*, etc.),

although beholden to the same genre conventions of traditional filmed entertainment with the veneer of 'based on a true story.' Even the name of the genre, 'true crime,' could be construed by the viewer that what they were watching was factual. Unlike the *CSI* effect, discussed above, utilizing mostly documentary-style film precepts, and documenting real people and their narratives, the dramatization of true crime with casts, productions, and budgets as narrative films blurred the line even further. Nama (2003) noted that dramas are presented as true-life portrayals that represent reality with producers of those dramas focused on that more than reality-based programming. The connection between the dramatic representation of real life and real life itself was a tangential one with Scharrer (2001) asserting that it was far from accurate, but the content was symbolic of actual real-life phenomena within the research of hypermasculinity and aggression inside crime dramas. The acceptance of that symbolism and actuation of it went to the core concept of whether or not the audience believed it. As Gerbner (1998) reminded us, the depiction within the programming has to be within the bounds of what audiences would accept as realistic. This acceptance, as has been discussed through theatrical presentation, echoing common themes, attending to the conventions of genre or a combination of each, was critical to the success of the programming and its continuance. Holbrook and Hill (2005) then argued that entertainment media producers, through their look at crime media effects on politics, was equally as adept in agenda setting for audiences than the more routinely addressed news media and had a far larger audience base. Grant (2016) has applied those concepts of narrative filmmaking, including the use of the authoritative voice, the presentation of based on a true story as reflective of documentary authenticity which

signified a reflection of societal concerns. Grant also asserted that the truth within the industry that the documentarian was not beholden to any worldview but their own resulted in the presentation of true crime programming that further highlighted the blurred line. For example, producers of three different films, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Psycho* (1960), and *Ed Gein: The Real Psycho* (2021) have utilized 'based on a true story' in the marketing of the films (Mendelsohn, 2020). Only one of these was a documentary using archival footage in combination with re-enactments, yet each of the marketing teams claimed to come from the same source material: the crimes of Ed Gein in the 1950s. The tone, effect, and level of lurid or horrific imagery were all dependent on the goals of the production and worldview of the director.

Kort-Butler and Sittner Hartshorn (2011) indicated that, after viewing this programming, viewers are affected in the general support for and acceptance of the criminal justice system. Fear of crime was then indicative of the lack of support that viewers could show for the institution believing that there is a lack of control of crime since a portion of the programming is devoted to difficulties that the criminal justice practitioners have encountered. As an entertainment function, this would then 'feel' important to viewers since they would then believe there were real-world ramifications.

Kennedy (2018) took a qualitative approach to assessing the viewer response to Netflix's *Making a Murderer* (2016) documentary limited series noting that through the narrative presented, responses from audiences culled from Reddit indicated that there was the idea that law enforcement was incompetent and could not be trusted. More importantly, some viewers also indicated that the belief in law enforcement's lack of

trustworthiness was not a new convention and that they have 'always' felt that way. Peelo (2006) explored this in examining newspaper reports of crime where journalists utilized the precepts of human-interest stories to create a sense of 'virtual victimhood' for the reader. This framed public narratives in a manner that placed media consumers as 'mediated witnesses' to the horrific but safely ensconced in their own worlds. This was akin to Aristotle's idea of catharsis, from *Poetics*, a metaphor where the philosopher looked at tragic dramatic works and the emotions of pity and fear that those works were intended to arouse in the viewer and then purge them ostensibly due to the fictional nature of the presentation (in this case, actors on stage) (Aristotle, trans. 1996, IV).

This recalls Edwards' (2020) assertion regarding the thanatourism and morbid curiosity of audiences coupled with the notion that even though the presentation had been *ripped from today's headlines*, the filmmakers have had actual carte blanche in the presentation of the narrative and were not beholden to anything outside of audience expectations and artistic license, one need only review the life of Abraham Lincoln as supernatural hero in *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012) as an example. Although extreme, the Lincoln film was just an example of the malleability of historical figures, places, and events; at the same time both ridiculous and indicative of the lack of oversight involved in narrative truth.

Gregoriou (2011) distilled some of the genre conventions of true crime writing that have parallels in filmed media programming, especially in the areas of re-enactment that included lurid descriptions of the crimes themselves, many times utilizing both perpetrator and victim points of view that could not be corroborated. Either the murderer

had not divulged these instances, or the victim could not, yet the descriptions were

presented as fact. This came on the heels of Seltzer (2007) who contended that the genre

conventions of true crime, akin to crime fiction, were created by authors from a series of

clichés, were hyper conventional, and formulaic in its presentation going on to state that

these conventions were instantly recognizable. This is where Grant (2016) became even

more salient noting that documentarians, even using based on a true story, made an

implicit promise that the programming was truthful and that it could simply be a narrative

"masking subjectivity behind a veil of objectivity" (p. 112). Schilt (2000) examined that

blurred line where documentary film and tabloid television intersect in her examination

of Director Broomfield's *Aileen Wornous: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1994) where the

filmmaker documented the Wornous story in relation to the law enforcement and media

personalities that sold their involvement in her crimes, including Broomfield, as a

performative player in the drama.

Seltzer (2007) wrote in regard to the appeal of the genre, "Along the same lines,

the pages of true crime and of pulp fiction perfect the voice-over of an indirect discourse,

a yielding of first person to third person, in the mass idiom and medium of the

personalized cliché" (p. 46).

Saturation of Media and Focus on Serial and Mass Murder

Recalling Altivoli and Kaveh (2018) and their assertion that cultivation and

agenda-setting contributed to media crime narrative through repetition, the repeated

notion of the importance of serial and mass murder as media topics cannot be ignored.

Researchers of current data on violent crime indicated that murder is the least common of

all standard criminal activity noting that in 2019 only 5 in 100,000 people were a victim

of murder with larceny the most common crime at 1,549.5 in 100, 000 people in the

United States (Gramlich, 2020). The perception of instances of violent crime has

increased, more nationally than locally, too, yet violent crime has been on a steady

decrease since the 1990s (Gramlich, 2020). The perception of rising crime was salient,

though, as discussed earlier, as a common theme in media programming and reflected in

audience perception overall. This was not a new notion even as early as the 1980s; Ditton

and Duffy (1983) have suggested that the media had reported on rare and unusual crimes,

most of the time focusing on female victims, more often than more common crimes.

Surette (1994) indicated that the themes introduced by producers have gained

more of a foothold in modern media representations asserting that the representation of

the strange and unusual crimes, for the most part murder, featured the criminal

perpetrator as an apex predator, violent and monolithic, with a criminal justice

department that was unable to contain their menace. Producers perpetuated a stereotype

that persisted in the current landscape of true crime media and, as Surette (1994) argued,

that representation has, in part, increased the public interest in that type of criminal and

crime. Again, this harkens back to Edwards (2020) and the proliferation of morbid

curiosity. This also resonated with Anderson et al. (2009) and the belief that Hollywood,

as a term for overall filmed entertainment, has propagated erroneous and glamorous

perceptions of criminal justice and investigation. Rafter (2007) believed that the study of

academic criminology must also include the crime film, and popular criminology, as a

combined study of criminology since the crime film is as prevalent as ever noting that the legal industry had recently done the same thing.

Call (2019) applied that proliferation of serial murder in entertainment media to fictional films produced between 1980 and 2015 noting that these films were fiction but surmised that audience members may believe that the portrayal of these fictional murderers was, indeed, an accurate representation of real life. The proliferation of feature films about serial killers has increased at a dramatic rate over the years with Hickey (2016) noting that from the year 2000 to 2015, there were over 500 productions. In returning to Call (2019), the author's content analysis of 50 of those films from 1980 through 2015 resulted in further perpetuation of stereotype and myth as will be discussed in the section upcoming entitled Perception and Myth of Serial and Mass Murder.

McCabe (2022) distilled that notion of apex predator in a discussion on Director Berlinger's *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (2019), one of the many documentaries, without dramatization, on the life and crimes of Ted Bundy told through interviews. In this discussion, the author indicated that the documentarian, like many others, attempted to imbue the character of Bundy with a mystique that he did not possess while still relying on the tropes associated with him (e.g., genius intellect, charm, etc.) all while juxtaposing those elements with the horrifying aspects of his series of crimes. Conversely, Berlinger did do something differently than the vast majority of other Bundy programming; he introduced the concept of male privilege as partial reasoning for the murderer's criminal successes. As McCabe (2022) intimated, though, that approach to the Bundy story ran counter to the dozens of productions over the past four decades.

Berlinger then directed a completely dramatized version of the Ted Bundy story with a full budget, crew, and named talent told from the perspective of a former Bundy girlfriend entitled *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2021). Barcella (2019) in a discussion with Berlinger for *Rolling Stone* magazine reported on the director's genesis for the two simultaneous projects as a result of the idea that "there is a lot of serial killing in this country," and "the name Ted Bundy always floats to the top" (p. 3).

Jarvis (2007) brought the media saturation of serial murder into focus examining the parallels of serial murder and the banal normalcy of consumerism noting that they go hand in hand, quoting Robert Conrath from 1996, that upon the discovery of the horrors in the Dahmer apartment in 1991, the broadcast rights were being negotiated within the hour. He correctly asserted that the inclusion of serial murder in media had a direct reflection on consumerism in the literal sense as there are Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and John Wayne Gacy action figures, puzzles, trading card sets, comic books, etc. much like there are comparable merchandise for fictional serial murders (Jarvis focused on Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho* (2000) and Hannibal Lecter from *The Silence of the Lambs* (1994), two award-winning and commercially successful films). The blurred the line between fictional and non-fictional serial murder content could easily be seen in that context. Hafdahl and Florence (2021) indicated, in the introduction to their volume *The Science of Serial Killers: The Truth Behind Ted Bundy, Lizzie Borden, Jack the Ripper, and Other Notorious Murderers of Cinematic Legend*, "This book is filled with dark deeds; many real, and others pure fiction. Tread cautiously, as this hazy border may trip you up" (p. i). The two authors themselves were horror film critics and podcasters for

the most part and, along with the dichotomous title, served to again blur the line of fact and fiction.

Perception and Myth of Serial and Mass Murder

The perceptions the public has regarding serial and mass murder, as well as the persistence of myths regarding the same, could be garnered from the sheer volume of serial and mass murder representation in all facets of media. McCabe (2022) referencing Berlinger's *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (2019) and Berlinger's comments in Barcella (2019) both reported on the misperception that there is a plague of serial and mass murder that must be addressed. Hier (2020) believed that the media attention given to unsolved American murders in the 1970s and activism in regard to serial murder in the 1980s presented the problem of the phenomenon as a social construct in the 1990s. This, combined with the relative scarcity of academic research, allowed the following decades to be filled with a proliferation of media not beholden to reality. Hier (2020) looked at the case of Peter Woodcock, a serial murderer from the 1950s in Canada, and noted that representation of Woodcock changed from insane maniac to undeserving victim of an unfortunate upbringing. The journalist framing, or setting the agenda, of the Woodcock narrative in the 1950s failed to produce a modern narrative of serial murder but the single murder Woodcock committed in 1991 then presented Woodcock, historically, as a maniac. That then painted serial murderers, due to that framing for the public, as "celebrity monsters" (Hier, 2020, p. 391).

Hodgkinson et al. (2017) contended that the current researcher findings have not lent themselves to an accurate representation of who and what are serial murderers. and

that agents formerly with the F.B.I. slipped serial murderers into large buckets or categories echoed by producers of media and literature. This, again according to Hodgkinson et al. (2017), validated the fear of the public due to the persistence of a significant risk and the capacity of law enforcement to mitigate that risk. That risk mitigation was also dependent on the type of media being consumed. Segura (2014) detailed the *but for* causes of serial murder are centered by writers and producers around those individuals and organizations with authority and their lack of proper preparation as a root cause of the pervasive problem. That juxtaposition between Segura and Hodgkinson in terms of law enforcement's role within the media representations was a common one and dependent on the narrative aims of the particular programming production team. The problem of serial murder was either exacerbated by law enforcement's inability to stop the monster, or law enforcement was the only line of defense against the monster.

The persistence of these concepts circling the pervasiveness of serial murder was refuted by the work of Aarondt et al. (2020) and the release of the Radford/FGCU Annual Report on Serial Killer Statistics noting that serial murder has been on a steady decline since the peak era of the 1980s for a variety of reasons. Aarnodt et al. (2020) also broke down actual serial murder demographics including age, race, gender, IQ, method of killing and others. Yaksic (2022) noted in an overview of relevant literature presenting a series of misconceptions and myths that the notion that all serial murderers experienced childhood abuse, began careers by killing animals, engaged with investigations into their crimes, targeted victims based on appearance, were White men, could not stop killing

after beginning a career, were criminal geniuses, etc., persisted. These were just a sampling of persistent myths or stereotypes that Yaksic (2022) has presented, but many of them echoed those myths from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (n.d.) *Serial Murder: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives for Investigators* as well as contemporaries like Call (2019), Hodgkinson (2017) and Walters et al. (2015). These specific areas of misconception were utilized in the discussion on instrument creation in Chapter 3: Methodology. Despite, again, the relative rarity of the phenomenon, the topic was still prolific within media programming. Yaksic (2022) also contended that the persistence of myth was, in part, due to the overuse of information from a small sub-set of infamous serial murderers that made up the majority of publications and shows that Ted Bundy, in looking at 15 different true crime publications dealing with serial murder from 1986 to 2020, received the most mentions (10) even though Bundy's active murder years were between 1974 and 1978. McCann (2021) discussed this proliferation of Ted Bundy materials in the wake of the 30th anniversary of Bundy's execution in 1989 as well as a belief in the 'depraved uncanny,' a term describing encounters with the perceived duality of Bundy's nature which furthered the mainstream attention still given to Bundy. Arguably, that mainstream attention started within the pages of *The Stranger Beside Me*, Ann Rule's (2018) book written about Bundy from her perspective as a former law enforcement officer and friend to the serial murderer. In the initial 1980 printing of *The Stranger Beside Me*, Rule, a writer for *True Detective* and *True Confessions*, two popular true crime magazines, indicated that the predator Ted Bundy was "an insanely brilliant killer" (p. 76). In the 2009 update of the same book, Rule writes that Bundy was

"intelligent but not brilliant" (p. 586). That dichotomy, both passages present in the current digital edition, equally confounded readers as the other misperceptions of Bundy specifically and serial murder in general. Rule's book, by her own admission in an interview prior to her death in 2015, was in its 40th printing (Dellasaga, n.d.). In a testament to the longevity of Rule's initial composition, *The Stranger Beside Me* was filmed for television in 2003, one of the dozens of iterations of the Bundy story but the first produced from her source material and point of view. As the most prevalent celebrity monster, the study of the persistence of this myth should have reasonably focused on Bundy materials and distilled those perceptions. Hodgkinson (2017) crystallized these thoughts coherently by contending that beliefs about serial murder are perpetuated by the media and the domination of true crime utilizing pop psychology, but also mentioned that law enforcement itself is part of the cycle of misinformation with Seltzer (2007) believing that the dearth of true crime publications and media appearances from former FBI profilers created a "gothic sub-genre" in and of itself of true crime (p. 37).

Notably, Swart (2016) pointed at sensationalism and market share as driving forces of misconception centered around the representation of psychopathy, specifically criminal psychopathy, in filmed entertainment. The prevalence of fictional psychopath depiction abated in the late 1980s as the sensationalized reporting of real-life serial murderers (Bundy, Gacy, Bianchi, etc.) rose. That served as a template for fictional serial murderers labelled as psychopathic to roar back into vogue. Liestadt and Linkowski (2014) in an examination of 126 fictional psychopaths in film noted that, although improving, realistic portrayals of psychopathy were in the minority. Regardless that the

criminal psychopaths were rare, media representation in programming was still ever present, again leading Swart (2016) to have noted that the promotion of erroneous psychopathic characters was beneficial to the programmers, creating an idea of the criminal other and creating positive images of one's own groups. This recalled Aristotle's ancient ideas regarding catharsis, the intentionality of evoking fear and pity, and the feeling of relief when the audience is safe inside the narrative within *Poetics* (Aristotle, trans. 1996, IV).

Summary and Conclusions

The representation by writers, filmmakers, and media producers of serial and mass murder in both reality-based and fictionalized true crime presentations has been a pervasive and popular form of entertainment, but not indicative of actual crime statistics (Aarnodt et al., 2020; Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.; Yaksic, 2022). Still, the perception of the serial murderer or mass murderer as prolific and a problem for law enforcement and, by extension, the average citizen was one that persisted through consistent media repetition. That repetition is at the core of Gerbner and Gross' (1978) theory of media cultivation, at that time specifically television, and the resultant fear of crime. The pervasive violent programming in Gerbner et. al. (1980) resulted in the creation of the mean world syndrome, or, succinctly, the belief by audiences in a dangerous, crime-filled world that could cause them harm. This concept was broadened by various researchers linking the media representations as, in part, responsible for a viewer's worldview or social reality (Crichlow & Fulcher, 2017; De Zuniga et al., 2012; Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; Morgan et al; Signorielli, 1990). In addition, the application of

that through different types of media has fortified the notion of worldview influence (Arendt, 2010; De Zuniga et al., 2012). The application to different types of audiences also reinforced that worldview influence (Johnson et al., 2009; Lull & Dickinson, 2018; Ruva & Guenther, 2015). The effects of media representations have had effects on overall health perception (Chung, 2014), romantic relationships (Hefner & Kertz, 2021; Reizer & Hestroni, 2014), and body image (Bissell & Hayes, 2011; Xiao, 2010), among others. Jeffres et al. (2008) also indicated that the process of this cultivation of worldview also tied into agenda setting, essentially reinforcing the importance of the topic.

The application of cultivation in terms of true crime programming or programming that was a realistic, yet fictional, representation having effects on the perception of crime and criminality, has been explored by researchers. These effects had not necessarily shown that cultivation resulted in a fear of crime, but they have shown that there were perceptions of crime and criminality that did not comport with reality (Garcia-Castro & Perez-Sanchez, 2018; Oliver & Armstrong, 1995). What was consistent in a majority of the research was that the incidences of criminal activity, especially unusual criminal activity, was perceived to be greater than it really was (Kappeler & Potter, 2018; Lee & McGovern, 2014; Ray & Kort-Butler, 2019) or that law enforcement had advanced technology and procedures that increased closure rates or mitigated error (Kappeler & Potter, 2018; Mancini, 2013). These effects also dipped into the attitudes and social reality that consumers have in regard to the types of victims of crime (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012; Parrott & Parrott, 2015), and the attitudes toward those victims (Arriaga et al., 2015; Darnell & Crook, 2009).

With the majority of the literature pointed toward the effects that cultivation and true crime have had on the perception of crime, there was very little research dedicated to that effect to viewers employed in law enforcement outside of a qualitative survey regarding police investigator opinions on the effect of true crime programming on the cases they receive (Abul & Mukhtar, 2020). Trainum (2019) provided an anecdotal essay on his experience in forensics working with law enforcement who had been cultivated in terms of the *CSI* effect, and Anderson et al. (2009) reported on the skewed expectations of criminal justice students as a result of distorted opinions derived from media representations.

The types of media presentation were germane to the discussion, as was the line between reality and fiction that has been blurred in the past thirty years in regard to true crime media. The perceived realism of the content, by the viewer, determined the magnitude of the effect of social reality or worldview creation (Busselle, 2009; Pouliot & Cowen, 2007) as did the emotional connection to themes, regardless of fictional content (Bilandzic et al. 2019; Brecham & Purvis; 2015; Green, 2004). The blurring of the line between documentary and fictional content, infotainment, or docudramas, brought into focus the use of narrative fictional media tropes with 'true' content when content creators were not beholden to the veracity of the stories told (Gray, 2020).

The true crime documentary and true crime dramatizations, or docudramas, were then taken at face value for their veracity even though these narratives, with casts, budgets, etc., further served to blur the line but perceived to be representative of real life (Gerbner, 1998; Nama, 2003; Scharrer, 2001). These productions had a larger audience

base (Holbrook and Hill, 2005) and the stories created by filmmakers reflected social concerns adeptly since they were presented professionally and in a manner that the viewing public found conducive to quality storytelling (Grant, 2016). The genre conventions in use were shared across true crime with narrative elements in documentary or the authoritative voice of realism in fiction serving to give the presentations the gravitas necessary to be taken as truth-telling (Edwards, 2020; Grant, 2016; Gregoriou, 2011; Kennedy, 2018; Peelo, 2006; Schilt, 2000; Seltzer, 2007). This led to media producers dictating and setting the agenda of what the viewing public should be looking for and that is the serial or mass murderer, stranger killings, and predominantly White, female victims, through sheer saturation and repetition (Ditton & Duffy, 1983, Surrette, 1994, Altivoli & Kaveh, 2018). Many researchers have noted the proliferation of media based on, inspired by, or marketed as reflective of real-world social issues and the serial killer problem (Call, 2019; Hickey, 2016; Hier, 2020; Jarvis, 2007; Yaksic, 2022).

The representation of serial and mass murder in media was not as egregious as the perpetuation of myths and stereotypes that could also factor into worldview and social reality creation (Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Segura, 2014; Walters et al., 2015; Yaksic, 2022). This was most notable, and digestible, by focusing on a single notorious criminal or series of crimes and the case of Ted Bundy has had the most media representation (McCann, 2021; Yaksic, 2022) and has reached a saturation point across modalities. A small subset of notorious serial murderers, with Bundy at the forefront, comprised the vast majority of media programming on the subject (Yaksic, 2022) with the potential to influence worldview and social reality creation for different audiences, including law

enforcement. That influence, unlike other audiences, could have a direct effect on criminal investigations.

In Chapter 3, I detail the role played as a qualitative researcher utilizing thematic analysis, including sample media selection, coding plan, and coding analysis procedure, verifying the information from said analysis. I then detail the role I played as a qualitative researcher to explain the process of instrument creation, participant selection, participant access, and any biases or ethical issues that may be apparent and the means for mitigating them. The data collection methods and plan of analysis were answered the specified research questions. In conclusion, Chapter 3 contains the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reliability of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to provide a broader understanding of the effects of true crime media programming that perpetuated the myths and stereotypes of serial and mass murder and the possible cultivation effects on professional homicide investigators. I examined 12 media exemplars of notorious serial murderer Ted Bundy's life and crimes selected due to their length, their presentation as a true story, and the dramatized representation using a professional actor to play the role of Bundy. Following that examination, I created a survey instrument that was distributed to homicide investigators in order to gauge whether or not their perceptions of serial and mass murder reflected the myths and stereotypes represented in mass media.

In this chapter, I restate the rationale for choosing the qualitative design of the study as well as reaffirming the role of the researcher as the primary instrument within qualitative work. I detail the rationale for utilizing thematic analysis, the process of coding, and the creation of the survey instrument. I explain that human participant selection and media selection was based on the research questions. I detail the methods of the process designed to mitigate bias and researcher presumption as well as the steps taken to ensure confirmability. This includes relating the iterative plans for viewing, coding, and re-coding the media exemplars and the subsequent survey results.

As indicated earlier, I chose the 12 media exemplars due to their content, length, and availability to the general public. I engaged in participant selection solely determined by past or present professional employment in investigating homicides. With the human participants, there were no ethical issues and the opportunity to mislead a participant or to

engage in an inappropriate power relationship with a participant as researcher was non-existent. As researcher, I was the initial data instrument and did not distribute the anonymous survey instruments with regard to RQ2.

I used the media exemplars, based on themes derived from prior research, to collect and code data to find which of the themes is predominant and repeated. I created the survey instrument and distributed it to assess the effect, if any, of the predominant themes on the participant population which satisfactorily answered both research questions.

Research Design and Rationale

My findings from this study answered the following research questions:

RQ1: What thematic patterns exist in docudramas of a notorious crime that perpetuates unrealistic perceptions of serial and mass murderers?

RQ2: To what extent are homicide investigator perceptions of serial and mass murderers affected by popular media depictions of serial and mass murderers?

The objective of this study was to determine if there is a media influence on the perceptions of homicide investigators in regard to serial and mass murder. I used a process and concepts used to assess, analyze, and determine that objective included the proliferation of true crime media focusing on serial and mass murder, the tropes and stereotypes reiterated in serial and mass murder media, and the overall effect that true crime media has had in influencing perceptions of crime and criminality. I explored the concepts via a brief survey designed for homicide investigators culled from the thematic analysis of selected true crime presentations around a specific theme.

A qualitative survey approach served as the analytical basis of RQ2. I designed this survey to gauge the perceptions of homicide investigators in terms of serial and mass murder despite the unlikelihood that this population will ever encounter a serial or mass murderer professionally. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated that survey usage in qualitative analysis is akin to using "words as data," and the purpose of this survey did just that as reflective of the participant's perspective on the topic (p. 7). Therefore, constructing the proper instrument was an imperative.

I constructed this instrument from the thematic analysis of 12 fictionalized narratives of the Ted Bundy series of murders dating from 1986 through 2022. I used thematic analysis while reviewing these productions and answered RQ1. At its core, thematic analysis is designed to search for and analyze dominant themes serving to inform and describe phenomenon (Braun et al, 2014). Jnanathapaswi (2021) indicated that thematic analysis was an effective solution to ordering and analyzing large amounts of narrative data. Patton (2015) called this process content analysis, also noting that there was no consensus to qualitative analysis nomenclature. Saldana (2016) called the process narrative coding and indicated that it employs the conventions of literary analysis as applied to stories, as these media exemplars obviously were. Even though Patton (2015) associated content analysis with text, the use of docudramas indicates that the media productions all spring from a text structure (a screenplay or teleplay), therefore the content analysis for thematic patterns does have an application. Creswell and Creswell (2018) listed several advantages and limitations in utilizing audiovisual data sources with the limitations listed as a difficulty in interpretation, a lack of accessibility, and the

presence of an observer skewing the responses. As filmed entertainment, there were no observer presence issues and accessibility had already been secured. In terms of the difficulty of interpretation, I am uniquely qualified to interpret this level of filmed entertainment due to documented-tested experience and credentialing from regionally accredited universities. My successful thematic analysis demonstrated rigor through the coding process by utilizing inductive and deductive processes like the two processes of this study in accordance with the findings of Fereday and Muir-Chochrane (2006). The coding process was the standardized recognition of thematically important elements from the media exemplars into categories, or codes. I derived the codes from the current research related to myths and stereotypes of serial and mass murder (FBI, n.d.; Hickey, 2016; Yaksic, 2022). As Patton (2015) indicated, the derivative initial coding categories would be a process of convergence. This process was iterative, and each exemplar required multiple passes.

My process of using a thematic analysis to a qualitative survey instrument approach served as the foundation of this study. My purposeful thematic analysis and coding of sufficient rigor, with multiple iterations, allowed for the creation of a contemporary instrument, a survey, to capture the perceptions of the target population in reference to the possible effect of the media productions.

Role of the Researcher

The key instrument in a qualitative study of this nature is the researcher themselves. Valid qualitative studies use multiple data sources (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In the role of researcher, my participation was comprised of data collection,

instrument creation, another round of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The initial data collection was from a thematic or content analysis and review of twelve media exemplars that were watched and coded based on the stereotypes and tropes identified by Yaksic (2022), Hickey (2016), Walters et al. (2015), and The Federal Bureau of Investigation (n.d.) and categorized through convergence. I, of course, had no personal or professional relationship with the media exemplars in any capacity. I also took great care to not have a personal, professional, or power relationships with the study population.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) asserted that there was a greater potential for researcher bias within qualitative studies like this one, so there was a distinct need for me to be objective. Within this issue, I needed to eschew any personal beliefs or biases related to the study. In this case, I needed to be free of any preconceived biases with regard to the media exemplars which were demonstrated by utilizing a coding process that is iterative and went through multiple rounds included the use of a master codebook and maintained regular identity checks in terms of bias. I also needed to maintain the identity checks and eschew any bias when analyzing and interpreting survey data returned from the participant population.

Saldana (2016) was adamant, using the term "rigorously ethical" in describing the personal attributes of one who undertakes a qualitative study (p. 39). This was apparent in the assertion that researchers need be ethical with data, actively choosing to not ignore problematic areas of text or, in this case, media exemplar. Saldana (2016) was also adamant that an extensive vocabulary is necessary in qualitative research noting that

word choice was one of the most important aspects of and, sometimes, sum total of qualitative data.

I used the master codebook to record words, phrases, nonverbal scenes, and narrative film conventions utilized within the media exemplars that were significant to the purpose of the study. In the master codebook, I included broad buckets of themes where I recorded specific phrases, lines of dialogue, or significant nonverbal performance. This analysis resulted in the creation of the survey instrument.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I selected a purposeful sample of 12 dramatized versions, all feature length or longer, of the crimes and life of Ted Bundy. Over the past 30 years, the number of filmed media presentations on Ted Bundy, both documentary and dramatized, have numbered in the hundreds. These dramatized versions were chosen as a representation of the infotainment aspects of true crime media due to their number (12 since 1986), a significant dramatized portrayal of Ted Bundy by a professional actor, and the availability of these productions to mass audiences. The following programming was chosen: *The Deliberate Stranger* (1986), *Ted Bundy* (2002), *The Stranger Beside Me* (2003), *The Riverman* (2004), *Capture of The Green River Killer* (2008), *Bundy: Legacy of Evil* (2009), *Bundy: Reborn* (2012), *Serial Thriller: Angel of Decay* (2015), *Bundy and The Green River Killer* (2019), *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019), *No Man of God* (2021), and *Ted Bundy: American Boogeyman* (2021). Media representations that included substantial actual footage of Bundy or other real-life participants were not

included. In order to identify material for this study, I used the Internet Movie Database, an aggregator of film production including participants, genre, and production company for the character of Ted Bundy. This was then narrowed to feature films or feature-length television/streaming presentations based on running time.

For the second half of the study, I used professional homicide investigators within urban police departments in Southeastern Michigan. These departments represent urban investigators, but due to the media saturation level of the Ted Bundy case there was name recognition as well as recognition of his crimes. The access to the police departments was through a small business university where I teach within the program that the officers are enrolled. I did not need to use my own students for this project as the director of the university program distributed the survey to students outside of my section. The survey was distributed to 100 police officers within the program with the appropriate documentation and IRB approval. Patton (2015) noted that large qualitative sample sizes, with modern technology, are more manageable. I assured the accessibility of the media exemplars through purchase. The survey instrument was created to be brief, so the large potential sample size of investigators was manageable as well with the knowledge that a certain percentage of them did not opt to participate in the survey or did not have the proper prior experience in homicide investigation. At a 50% disqualification (through experience or self-selected), the remaining participants at 50 was thought to be enough to reach data saturation. After the distribution of the survey, the response rate was stagnant at 40%. The survey answers, though, were enough to indicate that 40% would be adequate and this was confirmed by the dissertation committee.

Instrumentation

As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument within qualitative studies. There were four areas of importance that I followed to ensure validity; these four areas are criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor as indicated by Ravitch and Carl (2016). When there are validity issues, they are predominantly due to a lack of process for information gathering. Therefore, I needed to collect, code, and record data without bias. The master codebook included the broad areas identified by current research behind the myths and stereotypes of serial murder (FBI, n.d.; Hickey, 2016; Yaksic, 2022) as a guideline for assessing the dialogue, phrases, and nonverbal performance communications that were recorded and coded. Organizing this data structure was imperative for effective coding and that was accomplished using Microsoft Word software as a means of creating and sorting the database. This tool was used to collect, code, and record the data from the media exemplars increasing the credibility of the data collection process and aiding in reflexivity.

The survey instrument delivered to the participant population was reflective of the data analysis with the predominant themes turned into brief short answer questions to assess whether or not the participant population perceptions fall in line or are reflective of the predominant themes derived from the thematic analysis of the media. The content validity of this instrument was reflective of the analysis conducted with regard to RQ1. The completion of the instrumentation, and its subsequent analysis, will serve to answer RQ2. I conducted this study as a single researcher, utilizing multiple data sources with

regard to RQ1 (the 12 media exemplars) and undergoing multiple iterations of coding utilizing available software mitigated researcher bias.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I collected data from the 12 produced feature-film length filmed media productions of a dramatization of the life and crimes of Ted Bundy. I purchased each of these productions, either on physical media (DVD or Blu-ray) or digital media (.mp4 file or streaming service) and ensured accessibility. Prior to formal coding, I watched each of the media presentations at least once to increase familiarity with the production. Data collection and coding then commenced in approximately 2-hour intervals using the master codebook derived from the solid foundation of current information on the myths and stereotypes regarding serial and mass murder. As indicated earlier, I conducted the coding on paper then transcribed using Microsoft Word housing the master codebook. I formally viewed and coded twice each of the media exemplars. Again, the multiple iterations of coding mitigated the application of researcher bias or personal beliefs. After coding, I analyzed the data methodically and multiple times to mitigate biases but also to eliminate any false assumptions. The predominant themes were then turned into a brief Likert survey in order to collect participant data with regard to the perceptions.

I sent participants digital surveys through their university email originating from the program's director (and not the researcher) with the information conveyed that there is no requirement to participate in this survey and that there will be no academic advantage if one does participate in this survey. Furthermore, participation in the survey was not a requirement for advancement. Once completed, a participant may request to

have their participation eliminated from the final study. The survey itself conveyed this information as well and, once complete, served as the participant's exit from the study. In the event that there were too few participants, the survey could have been administered to another class of officers from the university's student population.

For RQ1, I viewed, analyzed, and coded the aforementioned media exemplars to identify predominant themes related to myths and stereotypes perpetuated about serial and mass murderers through repeated exposure to true crime media. I determined the usage of specific media exemplars due to the great deal of media over three decades devoted to Ted Bundy as well as the availability and popularity of dramatized versions of the story to ensure that there was name and phenomenon recognition from the study participants. My thematic analysis determined the specific questions to comprise the survey for homicide investigators in the subsequent research question. Using the process recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), I organized and prepared the data for analysis, reviewed the media exemplars for familiarity, reviewed the media exemplars and coded appropriately generating themes and rich description, and repeated. I then analyzed the predominant codes, holding for surprising codes, to create the survey instrument for distribution. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that using predetermined codes in the social sciences was not standard, but the myths and stereotypes already noted by researchers can form the basis of a master codebook for the aims of this study.

For RQ2, I distributed the survey instrument to the participant pool as previously indicated. The return of the survey prompted me to analyze the returned data to see if the

reported survey data corroborates the thematic analysis done for RQ1 and, if so, to what extent.

Data Analysis

I obtained the data used for the thematic analysis from multiple sources, but all of it was either physical media (DVD or Blu-ray) or digital media (.mp4 or streaming service) purchased in order to ensure accessibility. The collected data was directly related to RQ1 since true crime media, with these exemplars in particular, were indicative of the mythmaking and stereotyping of serial and mass murder perceptions. The data collected post RQ1 and answering RQ2 determined whether or not the mythmaking and stereotyping had affected the study participant population. The type of coding was a thematic analysis utilizing a master codebook with broad categories that dialogue, phrases, or nonverbal performances were associated with over multiple coding sessions in an iterative coding process. I took down the coding and notes as handwritten notes and entered into a Microsoft Word spreadsheet, which served as the master codebook. My use of this software allowed for sorting in order to identify instances with common characteristics associated with a given media exemplar. This process was utilized for each of the media exemplars in order to reduce any potential biases or assumptions. In addition, this process and software was able to accommodate large amounts of data.

The survey instrument created from the thematic analysis was distributed and returned. Upon return, I analyzed the data and grouped again utilizing a thematic analysis. I also used the master codebook and media exemplars for the survey instrument.

I used the same iterative process of methodical data analysis with multiple passes of analysis in order to mitigate researcher biases and assumptions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness within this study was needed since there are, approximately, 26 hours of film media exemplars coded and analyzed. Accurately representing that information in the coding and ensuring the validity of the research method was critical. In this case, I ensured that validity by utilizing triangulation.

Credibility

Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that triangulation is a means of strengthening the validity and accuracy of research findings. For this study, I used repeated iterations of coding and analysis of the multiple (12) media exemplars to ensure saturation. In addition, I coded and analyzed the survey instruments utilizing the same iterative process. That saturation and multiple iterations of coding the same exemplars aided in the reflexivity of myself as sole researcher to assuage any personal or research biases and mitigated influences and assumptions, also echoing the best practices of Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Transferability

In order to ensure the generalizability and transferability of results, I coded and analyzed the media exemplars over multiple iterations utilizing criteria culled from current research and expert opinion. The criteria used for selecting the media exemplars as well as the rich descriptions of the coded phrases, dialogue, and nonverbal

performances will allow future researchers to apply that to survey instruments that can be utilized with different participant populations.

Dependability

I achieved dependability in this study, as indicated, through repeated iterations of coding and analysis of data through triangulation. The use of a master codebook derived from the existing research as a template aided me in being able to assuage the limitations that may be present in narrative or thematic analysis. My credentials in analyzing the particular type of media exemplars were also critical. Overall, though, the rich description of coded themes I recorded, through repetition, were integral to the dependability of the study and allow the application of the data to account for similar identifying criteria across the media exemplars and then the usage of that identifying criteria to create the survey instrument for the participant pool.

Confirmability

Confirmability is akin to objectivity and reliability and necessary for a study to be valid. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted, a portion of this is the researcher's role within the study. To this end, I based the parameters of the study on established qualitative research practices and existing research and exemplars. The use of the survey instrument was also based on those elements and the findings of RQ1. Throughout this process, I ensured that there were no ethical considerations, no participant relationship issues, and all data was presented accurately and without bias.

Ethical Procedures

In order to abide by norms, standards, and research ethics, I sought and received institutional permissions from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). For RQ1 there were no ethical concerns since the media exemplars were publicly released productions of filmed entertainment purchased or obtained legally through accepted methods of commerce.

For the human participants, I needed to have IRB approvals in place. As indicated, I utilized adult students in Southeastern Michigan police departments enrolled at a small business university where I was also an adjunct instructor. This was an educational setting, and there were distinct parameters for ethical conduct with student usage. Walden University (n.d.). has indicated that doctoral candidates may not use their own students for surveys that are purely for research purposes but does indicate that "data collection from former students or other teacher's students could be ethically acceptable" (p. 1). I mitigated the ethical implications of conducting a portion of the study on my own work site by the non-supervisory and part-time nature of my role as an adjunct instructor. In addition, as indicated earlier, I culled the participants from a group of adult students that were not within my own classroom. The survey instruments were also anonymous with no identifying information outside of qualifying information. I provided no incentives for participation and participants had the option to either opt in or out of the survey instrument at will with no ramifications to any academic, social, or professional situations. I did not know any of the students personally and did not have them in a previous course.

I also ensured the anonymity of the partner organizations, the small business university, and the urban police departments in Southeastern Michigan. Data is stored on a single-user, password-protected computer for five years, after which time all files will be deleted.

Summary

In Chapter 3 I clarified my intentions with regard to the thematic analysis of the media exemplars, the data collection with analysis, and the creation of the survey instrument distributed to the participant pool, and, finally, the intention to report the findings of that survey. The core concept was in regard to the media representation of serial and mass murderers and if that representation has had a cultivation effect on homicide investigators. Within the bounds of that core concept, I have declared my role as researcher, including the limitations of such, and provided a plan of iterative coding and recoding, along with reflectivity, that eliminated biases and limited assumptions that may have colored the analysis of data.

The internet provided the information necessary to gather the 12 media exemplars, and these have been ethically acquired. The potential participants in the study were approved via Walden University's IRB prior to distribution of the survey instrument and with the permission of the director of the survey site. I used those two research questions as the guiding principles in collecting the media exemplars and determining the participant pool for this study.

Chapter 3 also indicated which data collection procedures I believed to be appropriate for this study including relevant research and established practices and

procedures as a rationale. The detailed account of the steps taken were sufficient to provide the necessary credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for the study. I detailed iterative process of repeated viewing, repeated rounds of coding, and repeated analysis sessions to foster triangulation was apparent. My plan utilized a master codebook and rich description that allowed me to identify prevalent themes and, in turn, distribute a survey instrument to assess the possible effect of those themes.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the analysis, the procedure undertaken, a detailed account of categories, codes, themes, and the data retrieved and analyzed from the survey instrument. In addition, Chapter 4 also includes a discussion of the results of the study and the application to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Serial murder is a relatively uncommon category of crimes that have garnered inordinate amount of focus within media compared to the rarity of instances. The presence and proliferation of that media has resulted in a type of notoriety for these crimes and a representation as *celebrity monster* for the criminals. Very little research has been conducted on the effects of true crime types of mass media on audiences, and even less on the effects of these types of media on law enforcement audiences. There is a great deal of research on the effects of Gerbner and Gross' cultivation theory looking at the effects of crime programming on general audiences, but most of it deals with either news programming or filmed crime fiction. Therefore, my aim in this study is in two parts. Phase 1 was examining true crime media of a notorious serial murderer. Phase 2 was distributing a survey to professional homicide investigators to examine correlations between their perceptions and the media exemplars. The research question for Phase 1, the media exemplars, follows:

RQ1: What thematic patterns exist in docudramas of a notorious crime that perpetuates unrealistic perceptions of serial and mass murderers?

The research question for Phase 2, the survey to homicide investigators, follows:

RQ2: To what extent are homicide investigator perceptions of serial and mass murderers affected by popular media depictions of serial and mass murderers?

I present the study findings for each research question separated by phase below followed by a final overall summary where I address each phase in terms of researcher

trustworthiness including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The chapter concludes with a summary of how both phases of the study have answered the respective research questions.

Phase 1

Demographics

The study documents for Phase 1 were the 12 media exemplars of dramatized films featuring an actor portrayal of serial murder Ted Bundy. Each of these exemplars, ranging in release years from 1986 through 2021, were a minimum of feature-length (over 70 minutes), and originally aired or premiered on a nationwide platform. This included premiering via broadcast on television or cable, release theatrically, nationwide release on physical media, or on a readily available streaming service. I chose the media exemplars as indicative of being, supposedly, based on a true story utilizing very little, if any, existing footage of Ted Bundy or principals involved in the investigation, and were presented as a factual representation of Bundy's crimes. As indicated in Chapter 3, my selection of these exemplars was purposeful, ensuring the widest range of possible viewership but also representing the same genre and type of presentation. I used the following media exemplars in the study: *The Deliberate Stranger* (1986), *Ted Bundy* (2002), *The Stranger Beside Me* (2003), *The Riverman* (2004), *Capture of The Green River Killer* (2008), *Bundy: Legacy of Evil* (2009), *Bundy: Reborn* (2012), *Serial Thriller: Angel of Decay* (2015), *Bundy and The Green River Killer* (2019), *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019), *No Man of God* (2021), and *Ted Bundy: American Boogeyman* (2021).

Data Collection

Prior to reviewing media for coding, I developed categories of codes from existing research on myths and stereotypes in the perception of serial killer behavior culled from Yaksic (2022), Hickey (2016), Walters et al. (2015), and The Federal Bureau of Investigation (n.d.). I used a hierarchical framing, as indicated by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2019), into three large thematic groupings of categories from the literature emerged: investigation and intelligence, modus operandi and signature, and societal and relationship management. In accordance with the findings of Jnanathapaswi (2021), I took a deductive approach to coding via thematic or narrative analysis, and, after the initial review of all media exemplars prior to coding, the specific codes within the categories became evident. I examined the media exemplars in terms of character dialogue, juxtaposition of imagery, thematic overtones, and preponderance of specific story elements or imagery, therefore, the codes within the categories were as follows:

- Investigation and intelligence housed ineffective policing, criminal genius/highly intelligent, and media/police engagement.
- Modus operandi and signature housed insane/psychopath, compulsion/level of violence, and victim appearance/type.
- Societal and relationship management housed relationship issues and popular/charming demeanor.

The codes correlated with commonly found thematic elements in the exemplars. I used a thematic analysis, where each exemplar was viewed two more times, with each viewing undergoing a round of coding divided between the three categories, and the eight

codes within the three categories. Each exemplar, prior to coding, began with a spreadsheet created by hand divided by category and then code. After the initial viewing of the exemplars, I viewed each exemplar two more times where the codes fell into the aforementioned three categories and eight codes derived from a review of the salient literature. During each viewing, I recorded relevant pieces of dialogue, character interaction, character blocking, imagery, progression of imagery, juxtaposition of imagery, and thematic elements in the relevant category/code area. I then transcribed the handwritten codes to a master Microsoft Word document dedicated to that particular exemplar. I used thematic analysis in selecting on-screen dialogue, behavior, thematic elements, placement in the narrative, and imagery that aligned with the categories. My previous degrees and work within the filmed media and entertainment field was tbe tactile representation the skill set I used to break down segments and scenes and clearly identify elements illustrative of the themes. In cases where verbatim dialogue reinforced the theme between characters or to the overall narrative, only that dialogue was used as the code to avoid image/dialogue redundancy. Data collection did not vary from the pattern outlined in Chapter 3 and only *Bundy Reborn* (2012) provided an unusual circumstance that will be described in the Data Analysis section.

Data Analysis

Following the three total viewings of each exemplar, the three content categories and eight codes within the content categories all had corresponding condensations from the exemplars. The number of condensations per category and then per code was largely

dependent on the thematic aims of the exemplar. Each exemplar, and a summary of its

relevant coding, follows, but overall analysis revealed interesting results.

In the first category, investigation and intelligence, nine of the exemplars

exhibited traits coded to ineffective policing, 11 of the exemplars exhibited traits coded to

criminal genius/highly intelligent, and seven of the exemplars exhibited traits coded to

media/police engagement. In the second category, modus operandi and signature, 11 of

the exemplars exhibited traits coded to insane/psychopath, 10 of the exemplars exhibited

traits coded to compulsion/level of violence, and seven exemplars exhibited traits coded

to victim appearance/type. Finally, in the third category, societal and relationship

management, seven exemplars exhibited traits coded to relationship issues and nine

exemplars exhibited traits coded to charming/popular demeanor. Every exemplar had at

least one of the eight codes in some manner. The dominant code throughout the group of

exemplars was instances portraying Ted Bundy as highly intelligent or a criminal genius.

This is followed closely by groupings around ineffective policing, insanity/psychopathy,

compulsion to kill/level of violence, and, finally, how charming Ted Bundy was. Not

coincidentally, aside from ineffective policing, these are all common perceptions of a

serial murderer according to the relevant literature. A summary of relevant data from

each of the exemplars follows.

The first exemplar that I examined was *The Deliberate Stranger* (1986). This was

the earliest of the media exemplars, airing as a two-part mini-series in 1986, starring

Mark Harmon as Ted Bundy. Notably, this was the only version of the story released

prior to Bundy's execution in 1989. The exemplar exhibited traits of all eight codes, with

a majority of the traits to be found under ineffective policing, criminal genius/highly intelligent, and compulsion/level of violence. Fourteen separate instances of police being largely ineffective are exhibited. For example, a Washington detective states, "We got suspects but no evidence." The case is intimated to have cause Detective Davies' heart attack, and inter-departmental issues are evidenced, with Colorado detectives accusing the Utah sheriff's department of, "Gross incompetence." Within the same category, 11 instances referenced Bundy as a criminal genius or highly intelligent including multiple pieces of dialogue from Bundy himself like, "I know the system, I've worked it, studied it," to his Washington girlfriend and, "So good to have things in my own hands again," to a journalist friend regarding taking over his own case. Police characters also comment on Bundy's intelligence as Colorado detectives warn Florida detectives, "Be careful, that's how he gets control. We know him," and "You don't know what you got in there" in reference to Bundy's apprehension and questioning in Florida. The inherent psychopathy and insanity in serial murder is reiterated multiple times in the exemplar, mostly by law enforcement characters. Notably, Bundy is called, at various times, a "nut," "some crazy," "real sicko, and "wacko type," among others, with the lead detective in Utah stating that Bundy had, "The most twisted mind I have ever seen." Additionally, 10 instances showing or telling of Bundy's compulsion to, and level of, violence were exhibited. Most notably, the on-screen violence, as opposed to off-screen, including representations of real time murders and the presence of blood effects steadily increases culminating in the first blood audiences see appear in the seventh act during the Florida

murders. The four victims in the Florida sorority house are far more violent than the subsequent victims in Washington, Colorado, and Utah.

The second exemplar that I examined was *Ted Bundy* (2002). This media exemplar differed from the 1986 effort and presented itself more firmly within the horror genre with gratuitous violence as part of the presentation. This was released in a limited theatrical run and then received a wide release on VHS and DVD in 2002. This exemplar exhibited six of the codes with no entries for media/police engagement or victim appearance/type. Minimal condensations in the investigation and intelligence as well as social and relationship management categories are evident with the ineffective policing code garnering the most at eight, with three of those eight around the corruption of the prison guards demeaning and torturing Ted Bundy prior to his execution. In accordance with the genre of the film and its thematic presentation as a horror movie, a majority of the condensations were found in the modus operandi and signature category, with 11 instances coded under insane/psychopath and 16 coded under compulsion/level of violence. This exemplar took care to feature the decapitated head of victim in Bundy's apartment where he applied make-up prior to a sexual relationship with the body part. Additionally, dialogue from the exemplar reiterates this as Bundy states, regarding his own series of crimes, "I guess some people are compelled to kill. Gotta admire a guy like that, takes daring, guts." In another instance, while attending a party, a partygoer asks Bundy, "Do you think those women can still be alive?" Bundy answers, before laughing, with "No way. They are way dead." As indicated earlier, the level of on-screen violence is much greater and much more gratuitous than the previous presentation. There are

extended scenes of Bundy housing multiple victims at one time while torturing, raping, and killing them in front of one another in great detail. The film's penultimate scene of horror features an extended tracking shot through a field as the camera slowly comes upon Bundy raping a young Florida teenager. The sound of that violent rape underscores the slow camera movement and was intended to induce dread.

The third exemplar that I examined was *The Stranger Beside Me* (2003). Directly based on the true-crime novel of the same name by Ann Rule, this was a television movie presentation and, therefore, did not feature the gratuitous violence of *Ted Bundy* (2002). Ann Rule is the main character in the presentation and her relationship with Ted Bundy is the focus of the piece. The exemplar has instances of each of the eight codes, but the theme of the piece, as Rule discovers she was good friends with a monster, sees the highest level of groupings of condensations within the criminal genius/highly intelligent code and the compulsion/level of violence code. Fourteen condensations are coded under criminal genius/highly intelligent with dialogue from a Washington detective to Rule saying, "He's a freaking Svengali," in reference to the then-unknown killer being indicative of the tenor of the exemplar. In addition, after Bundy's escape, he tells Rule, "I am a cause celeb," and, at a later point, "Patience, Ann, I have a lot of show left in me." This exemplar made it a point to include the real-life words of Bundy's presiding judge in Florida that, after sentencing him to death, said, "You would have made a good lawyer and I would have loved to have you practicing in front of me." Nine condensations were coded under compulsion/level of violence. A majority of these were in dialogues between Rule and other characters. Rule, as a character, was presented as more competent than the

police and was called in to consult on police matters, including the Ted case. From this point of authority, Rule stated, "I wanted to believe that there was a time he could have stopped… before he became a monster," in a voice over, and "The night you failed to get Julie, you had to get your fix," directly to Bundy. Rule also managed to get other characters to make admissions that the police could not. For example, Bundy's girlfriend told Rule, "He wouldn't have sex unless he was choking me, tying me up… maybe he is only interested in a girl if she's dead." The level of violence, although not as extreme, did increase over the course of the film with the Florida sorority murders the first to show on-screen blood and a Washington detective tell Rule, "Two were beaten with a flashlight and two were mutilated… nothing's changed, Ann, he's still a monster." The presentation ends with white text over a black screen reading: The term serial killer did not exist before Ted Bundy.

The fourth exemplar that I examined was *The Capture of the Green River Killer* (2008). This exemplar was a limited series debuting on the basic cable channel Lifetime. It is interesting as the first example of Ted Bundy as character within the Green River Killer investigation in Seattle. In this exemplar, Bundy is already incarcerated, and his crimes are not explored in detail, but there are 15 condensations coded under criminal genius/highly intelligent. Four condensations appear under ineffective policing, with one of them featuring the FBI calling Bundy an 'amateur' and refuting his hypothesis on the Green River Killer that later turns out to be true in the presentation. One condensation appears under media/police engagement as Bundy keeps track of the Green River investigation via the television. The vast majority of condensations revolve around

criminal genius/highly intelligent and most of those are pieces of dialogue from Ted Bundy accurately profiling the Green River Killer. For example, "I have intuition based on feeling," "violent death is indispensable to Green River's fantasies," and "vext time you find a body, stake it out." The Reichert character calls the FBI and asks, "what if Bundy is right? If Bundy is right and the guy doesn't want to get caught." Bundy's ideas are dismissed by the FBI, with the exemplar intimating that if only Bundy had been listened to, the Green River Killer would have been caught long before. The conceit of the theme, that a letter from Bundy was so powerful that it caused the Washington police and the FBI to consult him, is a powerful one further exemplified by the length of time spent on Bundy's execution at a point in the exemplar when it appears that the Green River Killer would never be caught. In the final act, as Reichert is arresting Gary Ridgeway, he states, "It was Ted Bundy that gave me the clue."

The fifth exemplar I examined was *Bundy: A Legacy of Evil* (2009). This exemplar was another straight to physical media release, available nationwide on VHS and DVD in 2009. Much like *Ted Bundy* (2002), the exemplar was presented as firmly fitting within the horror genre with levels of gratuitous violence, torture, and rape that would not be found in the broadcast or basic cable presentations. Although every code, aside from media/police engagement, had at least a single condensation, the majority of condensations, including twelve instances, appeared under compulsion/level of violence, with six instances under insane/psychopath, and one under victim type/appearance. That one under victim type/appearance could conceivably bridge codes as Bundy demeans and degrades a victim as if she were his girlfriend, complaining of all women that did him

wrong. It is this, along with the many instances of gratuitous violence, that thematically

drives the exemplar. The presentation opens with Bundy, covered in blood, dragging a

victim from his car with a rope around her neck. He states, "After I kill you, I'm going to

burn you, watch your face melt. Watch your eyeballs fall out of your head." Bundy then

proceeds to bludgeon the victim to death with a shovel. A particularly telling segment,

eschewing timelines, sees a multiple minute montage of Bundy using ruses to entrap

victims, engage in blunt force attacks, and culminate in burning the head of a victim.

Throughout the montage, imagery of desiccated corpses of women in various stages of

decay are intercut. The Florida sorority murders are particularly vicious and are

juxtaposed occurring immediately after Bundy's escape from the Colorado jail. Another

instance sees Bundy, acting as his own lawyer, cross examining a Florida detective and

asking the detective to describe the Chi Omega crime scene in detail while responding in

a lecherous manner. Unique to this exemplar is the number of condensations related to

relationship issues, with 11 instances coded. Aside from Bundy's grandfather drunkenly

trying to tell a young Bundy the truth about his mother and his mother, as an elderly

woman, visiting death row and telling Bundy, "I have always loved you, Teddy," the

remainder of the instances revolve around Bundy's inability to keep a girlfriend. A scene

where Ted prematurely ejaculates in his pants is followed by an argument where his then-

girlfriend said, "You ooze jealousy, Ted Bundy. I'm sorry your father didn't love you. I

could have better sex with a damn retard. You're a boy that will never be a man." It is

this exchange that the exemplar uses as the impetus for Ted to begin his killing spree and,

after gaining confidence, finds that same woman, proposes to her, and then leaves after

she says yes. The narrative comes full circle within the same code as the warden in Florida tells Bundy, just prior to his execution, "You're a whining, immature little boy that never had the balls to be a man."

The sixth exemplar I examined was *The Riverman* (2010). Much like *Capture of the Green River Killer* (2008), this exemplar is another version of Ted Bundy acting as consultant to Washington police, specifically the character of Bob Keppel. Therefore, the majority of condensations, fifteen, fall under criminal genius/highly intelligent. The exemplar had at least one condensation six codes with no instances appearing in victim type/appearance and relationship issues. Unlike the prior thematically similar exemplar, this presentation also features extended conversations of Bundy confessing to his crimes in Washington resulting in a fair number of condensations under compulsion/level of violence, at nine, and insane/psychopath, at 11. The original conceit of the narrative is that law enforcement thought so much of Bundy's intelligence that they took his letter of an offer to help in the Green River investigation seriously, resulting in the vast majority of condensations under that code. In this presentation, the letter comes to Keppel's home address. In a conversation between Keppel and his wife, she asks "How did he get our address?" Keppel responds with "I don't know, he's in prison so he can't do anything." Mrs. Keppel then says, "How do you know? He escaped twice." In the letter, Bundy writes, "It's quite presumptuous of me to write, I know, but I have insight into, and I think I know a serial killer's motives and frame of mind. I believe I can bring a unique perspective to your hunt." The Washington police immediately send Keppel and Dave Reichert to Florida to interview Bundy and get his insights. During that interview,

multiple condensations of Bundy's dialogue relate to an accurate, in the narrative,

criminal profile, indicating, "This guy [Green River] is a bottom feeder. Trolling is what

he does," "I can get you inside his head, but I need the case files," and, "He's impressive

to a point… he blends. He knows the scene better than his prey does." The next scene

after Bundy's extended profile of the Green River Killer sees Florida detectives find a

suspect in Gary Ridgway, the eventual culprit, with Reichert saying, "After Bundy talked

about it… we have a suspect." An overarching theme of the first part of the Bundy

interviews is the control that Bundy maintains in the conversations, at one point

convincing Keppel to go 'trolling' like the Green River Killer did while adopting

language that Bundy uses to refer to victims into Keppel's own vernacular. The change in

narrative tone begins prior to Bundy's execution, where the majority of condensations

falling under insane/psychopath and compulsion/level of violence are coded as Keppel

convinces Bundy to start confessing. This is exemplified in an exchange between Keppel

and Bundy. Keppel begins, "We found her head, but never found her body." Bundy

demurs, but Keppel continues, "We found four skulls in your apartment. You dumped

them at the same time. Why did you keep them? Because the corpse is just as important?"

"It's about possession," Bundy responds, "Basically a person in that situation is God.

They will always be a part of you. The grounds they are on are sacred to you and you'll

always go back." The conversation continues with Keppel finally asking, "How do you

keep that power?" Bundy responds with, "By beating off to the skulls."

The seventh exemplar I examined was *Bundy Reborn* (2012). This exemplar

proved problematic. Billed as "Son of Bundy" tale, it was nothing of the sort simply

using a direct to DVD title as a selling point of a horror film. The film itself has not

mention of Ted Bundy but appears to be a repetitive and derivative approach to what

popular media believed serial murder to be: traumatic childhood resulting in criminally

genius and Machiavellian plan of domination over women. If the exemplar were to be

coded, it would feature condensations in all eight codes with a majority of them in the

compulsion/level of violence area. The violence is gratuitous and steadily builds as the

murderer, a brilliant medical student, attempts to create the perfect family that was taken

from he by murdering women until finding the perfect vessel for his children. This

exemplar was not coded and will not be utilized in the summary.

The eighth exemplar I examined was *Serial Thriller: Angel of Decay* (2015). This

three-episode mini-series originally aired released to basic cable and is accessible through

a major streaming service. Unique among the exemplars, the name of the serial murderer

is not revealed until the middle of the second episode and the presentation is intended to

be under the mystery genre. The exemplar exhibited all of the codes aside from

media/police engagement with the majority of condensations in the compulsion/level of

violence code (22), ineffective policing (16), insane/psychopath (nine), and criminal

genius/highly intelligent (eight). The predominant theme, therefore, is rooted in Bundy's

level of violence and the inability of the police to stop him. The exemplar opens with an

extended, dialogue-free, chase scene through the woods as a young woman is pursued by

a figure in a ski mask. She is bloody and the pursuit culminates in a fatal attack. In

recurring moments throughout the exemplar, Bundy returns to the corpse and intimacy is

intimated. The dialogue between law enforcement reiterated the violent nature and

compulsion of Bundy. Keppel announces, "That jawbone was totally smashed. She was beaten to a pulp!" and, in a conversation responding to the dumping of victim skulls and not bodies, "What if he didn't? What if he decapitated them?" Additionally, law enforcement is routinely at a loss to the level of violence they see with a Colorado detective noting to Keppel, "I've never seen mutilation like this. The killer forced sticks into her vagina." The idea of compulsion is present, too, with the character of McChesney noting, "The next one has to be better. More exciting, more brazen." The exemplar moves into the finale as Bundy, while in Florida, drinks himself into a psychotic moment at a local bar as he hallucinates all of his past victims as patrons rejecting him. This is the implied impetus for the Chi Omega crimes. After capture, a final scene with Bundy and Keppel discusses the idea of 'possession' as has been utilized in prior exemplars with Bundy quipping, "Everyone has their vices. You're addicted to your work, and I'm addicted to mine."

The ninth exemplar I examined was *Bundy and the Green River Killer* (2019). The presentation was released directly to physical media (DVD and Blu-ray) as a national release. It is a British production and maintained European word usage and obvious physical locations. The role of Ted Bundy was limited to his involvement as a consultant in the Green River Killer investigation and, therefore, the majority of coded elements and condensations fall under criminal genius/highly intelligent (seven) and insane/psychopath (eight) while describing what he believes a serial killer does. Like previous exemplars that are narratives revolving around the Green River investigation, Bundy is in custody and receives a visit from the FBI and Washington police after sending a letter offering

insight into the case. The letter is taken seriously at the onset and law enforcement believes that Bundy can be an asset to the case. In a particularly notable scene, the unnamed Washington detective gives Bundy the casefile. After approximately 30 seconds on screen with it, Bundy profiles the Green River Killer, stating, "The Riverman enjoys easy prey, prostitutes are low risk… people that have jobs and lives are noticed. With all of the slasher films, stake-out drive-ins, stake out dump sites, he will be returning to get whatever kicks he can out of it. There is a certain aspect of possessiveness to a serial killer, a taking if you will. He might be intending to return to the scene and interact with the body." Bundy is correct, in the narrative, and his recommendations result in detectives meeting with and capturing Gary Ridgway, including a tense moment where he is spotted at a dump site and assaults an officer. Limited re-enactments of the Bundy crimes are apparent, but the introduction to his character is via a version of the Chi Omega murders where Bundy bludgeons two women and stalks a third victim through the house before being run off. Visually and conceptually, the scene was derivative of a fully fictional horror film and, as an introduction to Bundy, served that purpose. As Bundy speaks to detectives, he details the issues at hand in the narrative, noting, "People want to believe they can recognize bad. People that enjoy this sort of thing look like everybody else. We serial killers are your sons, your husbands, and we are everywhere. There will be more dead tomorrow." The film concludes Bundy's portion with an FBI agent recounting a story he was told by Bundy's aunt about a three-year-old Ted placing knives around her as she slept. He states, "Some are borne with a darkness inside them," further reiterating the idea of insanity or psychopathy.

The tenth exemplar I examined was. *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019). This presentation was viewed on a national Blu-ray release but is available worldwide on the media streaming service Netflix. The exemplar features condensations under all codes, with the majority of them falling under criminal genius/highly intelligent (16) and relationship issues (10). At its core, this exemplar is a relationship drama between the character of Liz and Ted Bundy, wherein the first act of the presentation he convinces Liz that he is being framed. The condensations related to Bundy's intelligence are mentioned throughout, including in conversations with Liz like, "I convinced the judge to name me co-counsel, all the other prisoners think I am a bigwig," and, "I have this under control Liz, I have this all figured out." Evidence of Bundy's criminal genius are apparent in the presentation as he plots his Colorado escape by practicing jumping off his bed and wearing two sets of clothes to court that day. The Utah escape is also highlighted, showing Bundy taking materials from the license plate manufacturing area of the prison and working on his light fixture at intervals where the sound would not be noticed. As in other productions, comments of the Florida presiding official during sentencing regarding Bundy as a "bright young man" and "good lawyer" are utilized here. The elements of relationships are touched upon in the exemplar as the film is from Liz's point of view and, when that relationship falters, it focuses on Bundy's coercion of Carol Anne, eventually marrying her in open court. The predominant relationship themes revolve around the ability for Bundy to convince women to believe in his innocence and engage in long-term relationships even while incarcerated. The exemplar opens with Bundy meeting Liz in a bar and is intercut with their final meeting on death row. That

final meeting sees Bundy confess to Liz that he severed a woman's head with a hacksaw, blurring the thematic lines. While not overly indulgent in the violent aspects of the crimes, the underlying tension is there with seven condensations under insane/psychopath with the Florida attorney general telling the jury in summation, "You have been witness to the unspeakable horrors of the victims and the crimes," and a final image of text on-screen reading: He requested his ashes be spread in the Cascade Mountains where he deposited his victims. There are elements of ineffective policing and charming/popular demeanor, at seven and six instances, respectively, with soundtrack choice a narrative device that effectively conveys meaning. As Bundy thinks of escape in Colorado, "Lucky Man," by Emerson, Lake, and Palmer plays over and the montage of the escape out the window is underscored by "The Letter" by the Box Tops.

The eleventh exemplar I examined was *No Man of God* (2021). This presentation was viewed on a national Blu-ray release and is available on worldwide streaming services. The presentation details the relationship, post-incarceration of Bundy, with FBI agent Bill Hagmaier. Like other presentations based on Bundy relationships, this exemplar featured multiple codes and condensations in the criminal genius/highly intelligent arena with 13. It features condensations in all eight codes, though, with eight condensations in compulsion/level of violence and three in insane/psychopath. Those codes in Modus Operandi and Signature, though, are all detailed in dialogue between Hagmaier and Bundy. The initial scene where Hagmaier volunteers to be the one that interviews Bundy as a follow up to Douglas' work is interesting as all of the other agents refused the task noting that no one can get anywhere with Bundy. Hagmaier does,

though, after writing a formal letter. Even prior to the first meeting, the Florida warden

tells Hagmaier, "You think you're smarter than him? He will come down and cat and

mouse with you and make you believe you're getting somewhere then go back to his cell

and jerk off to the memory of it." The intelligence and cunning of Bundy are firmly

established. In their first meeting, Hagmaier says, "Look, we both have psychology

degrees, you almost have a law degree. You have more education than me. I'm looking

for understanding." There are references to FBI bulletins in Bundy's possession that

Hagmaier "doesn't get" routinely and a scene where Bundy accurately profiles an

investigator interviewing him noting that the investigator obviously had a relationship

with the victim the investigator is asking about. Bundy is complimented by the FBI on his

profiling skills in terms of Green River using only newspaper clippings, among other

instances. Although the insane/psychopath condensations were in dialogue form, they

still formed that narrative intent. In a discussion with Reverend Dobson, Bundy stated, in

reference to why he is the way he is, "Most damaging kind of porn are those that involve

violence, sexual violence. The wedding of those two forces are too terrible to describe…

we are your sons, your fathers, we are everywhere." Immediately prior to Bundy's

execution, he asked Hagmaier, "Did you get what you came for? Do you know why I did

it?" Hagmaier responds, "Because you wanted to."

 The twelfth and final exemplar I examined was *Ted Bundy: American Boogeyman*

(2021). This final exemplar was viewed from a nationwide DVD release and is also

available via worldwide streaming services. The exemplar has condensations from six of

the codes excluding media/police engagement and relationship issues. Narratively, it is a

modern horror film with a reliance on graphically displaying murder, therefore the majority of condensations are in insane/psychopath (10), compulsion/level of violence (10), and victim appearance/type (three). Factually, the story is inaccurate featuring Bundy moving into the guest house at Chi Omega in Florida and being stopped, mid-murder, by newly minted FBI Agent McChesney before disappearing into the night. The great deal of graphic violence in the exemplar drove the narrative including visual depictions and dialogue describing the crimes. A character portraying an FBI BAU psychologist, after an initial meeting with Bundy, reported back to Ressler and McChesney saying, "In my 16 years as a clinical psychologist, Ted Bundy is the most dangerous person I've ever observed. The act of murder is not about violence, it is about possession. There are two distinct parts to his personality: Ted, helpful, charming and then the entity. The dominant personality is the mask of sanity. Then the entity developed from an addiction to pornography at a young age… obsessed with sexually explicit violence. The entity gives him magical properties." That monologue, largely utilizing Bundy's own confessional words but delivered through the voice of psychological authority, is interesting. More condensations reiterate the idea of Bundy as insane and a maniac is depicted in a segment where, while living in the Chi Omega guest house, Bundy abuses mannequins while drinking heavily. The mannequins had been left there by the Chi Omega house mother. During the abuse, Bundy hallucinates that the mannequins have come to life and are then abusing him sexually, culminating in the mannequins cutting Bundy's throat. The hallucination ends and the segment leads into Bundy planning the murders in Florida. The final act of the exemplar is more a derivative

of classic slasher film narratives than dramatizing fact. Agents Ressler and McChesney track Bundy to Florida and he is stopped, mid-rape, in the Chi Omega house by McChesney after she encounters multiple victims, all bloodied and traumatized, both living and dead. The attack on the Florida coeds is graphic with Bundy biting the chest of a victim, multiple gruesome attacks including bludgeoning and strangling. As Bundy disappears, literally, into the night outside the Chi Omega house, a Bundy voiceover intones, "The little girl screamed and screamed. I liked to kill and am the most cold-hearted son of a bitch you'll ever meet. We serial killers are your sons, your husbands. We are everywhere." As a potential reason for Bundy's mania, a final scene with his mother is documented. She states, regarding her father, "He used to say Teddy was conceived in Hell. I guess that made him the devil," intimating she was raped by her father.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As detailed in Chapter 3, I used various methods to ensure credibility. By selecting 12 media exemplars all fitting specific qualifications (e.g., notorious criminal, actor portrayal, mitigating actual Bundy footage, mass media potential, etc.) are representative of true crime media focused on serial murder, in general. The subject matter expertise was twofold. Firstly, over two decades as a media practitioner, historian, and analyst allowed me the insight to examine the exemplars in detail and accurately deduce where traits would be coded. Secondly, my immersion in the literature on true crime media, in general, and Ted Bundy specifically, dovetailed with a thorough

examination of current myths and stereotype literature that allowed me to apply the hierarchical coding approach resulting in the relevant categories and codes. In turn, the multiple viewings, creation of tools, and subsequent coding allowed me to compile results in accordance with Saldana (2016)'s best practices.

Transferability

My repeated viewings of the media exemplars, concurrent with rounds of coding, allowed for the highest possible level of reliability and external validity. By their very nature, qualitative results do not transfer readily to a larger population, but by selecting these representative examples, using the criteria mentioned earlier, I increased the level of transferability since these media exemplars are largely indicative of similar efforts outside of those dealing specifically with Ted Bundy. The hierarchical approach to creating categories also allowed me to use the relevant literature to lay the foundation for coding which allowed for thick description in the study.

Dependability

I implemented the above-mentioned procedures and practices, in part, to achieve the requisite dependability. As described in Chapter 3, multiple rounds of viewing and coding, including the handwritten notetaking and then transcription to a digital format, the years of experience in media exemplars, and a thorough understanding of the relevant literature surrounding, and history of, true crime media all aided me in making the study dependable. Future researchers should be able to expand upon this study, or replicate this study, based upon the documented process herein. Additionally, the process should also be able to be transferable to different serial killer subjects within the same genre.

Confirmability

As sole researcher, my reflection was a constant throughout the process. During the process of examining the potential media exemplars through actively accepting or rejecting a media exemplar trait in terms of a particular code, my pre-existing opinions and personal feelings were challenged. Through that introspection, in all steps of the process, and embracing a hierarchical approach based on relevant research, I was able to be objective and effectively triangulate in order to ensure the reliability and confirmability of my findings.

Study Results

My review of each of the exemplars exhibited varying amounts of condensations and codes related to the three large category areas. Broadly speaking, each of exemplars, with the exclusion of *Bundy Reborn* (2012), can be placed into three broad buckets: a true crime retelling of Bundy's crimes from a personal perspective, a horror film using the Bundy crimes as a framework, and a Hannibal Lecter-esque presentation with Bundy as profiler in the Green River case. Regardless, the registered codes and condensations supported the myths and stereotypes noted by Yaksic (2022), Hickey (2016), Walters et al. (2015), and The Federal Bureau of Investigation (n.d.), answering RQ1: What thematic patterns exist in docudramas of a notorious crime that perpetuates unrealistic perceptions of serial and mass murderers? Therefore, development of the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge utilized the verified myths and stereotypes reinforced through the coded media exemplars. A majority of the overall condensations were found in the Investigation and Intelligence category, specifically under ineffective policing and

genius/highly intelligent. The second highest number of condensations were found in the

Modus Operandi and Signature category, specifically under insane/psychopath and

compulsion/level of violence. Please see Table 1.

Table 1

Presence of Eight Serial Murder Myths by Media Exemplar

Exemplar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
The Deliberate Stranger (1986)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ted Bundy (2002)	x	x		x	x		x	x
The Stranger Beside Me (2003)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Capture of Green River (2008)	x	x	x			x		
Bundy: Legacy of Evil (2009)	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
The Riverman (2010)	x	x	x	x	x			x
Bundy Reborn (2012)								
Serial Thriller: Angel… (2015)	x	x		x	x	x	x	
Bundy and Green River (2019)		x	x	x	x			
Extremely Wicked… (2019)	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
No Man of God (2021)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ted Bundy: American… (2021)	x	x		x	x	x		x

Note. (1) ineffective policing; (2) genius/highly intelligent; (3) media/police engagement; (4) insane/psychopath; (5) compulsion/level of violence; (6) victim appearance/type; (7) relationship issues; and (8) charming/popular demeanor.

There were condensations in other categories, of course, but the development of the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge predominantly utilized questions

relating to general serial murder in terms of respondents' level of familiarity with offender intelligence, whether or not the offender was compelled to violence, and what the respondent believed constituted psychopathy. Due to the demographic of the respondents, I chose not to include questions regarding ineffective policing due to potentially dissuading the respondents from answering. Basic questions on what respondents believed in terms of serial murder demographics, relationship building, and modus operandi rounded out the remaining questions. After the general questions regarding serial murder, I asked specific questions on the same topics in regard to Ted Bundy. The Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge can be found in Appendix A.

Phase 2

Research Setting

After developing the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge, I placed it online via SurveyMonkey with a declaration of anonymity preceding the survey and functioning as consent. The survey was sent via the small business university's campus director via e-mail to potential participants. The participants, all employed in law enforcement Southeastern Michigan and students at the small business university, acknowledged their employment status and whether or not they have participated in homicide investigations. Both the campus director and the consent page describe the voluntary nature of the survey and its intent as a tool for a PhD student. The survey was sent outside of scheduled class time and would take place entirely online with an estimated completion time of twenty minutes. All of this was completed after approval by Walden's IRB as described in Chapter 3.

The research question for Phase 2, the survey to homicide investigators, is as follows:

RQ2: To what extent are homicide investigator perceptions of serial and mass murderers affected by popular media depictions of serial and mass murderers?

I designed the survey in order to answer that research question, at least in part, and those results will be discussed below. In addition, a discussion of researcher trustworthiness also follows touching on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Demographics

The study participants were all law enforcement professionals that, at one point in their career, participated in homicide investigations. All participants were also students at a small business university. No other demographic information was relevant to the study and was not collected.

Data Collection

The survey was emailed to approximately 100 potential participants three times over the course of four weeks by the campus director at the business university. The survey remained open, online, for the entire four-week period. Only the single survey was used, and the data was collected and collated automatically via Survey Monkey. There was no deviation from the approved process by Walden's IRB from Chapter 3. As of this writing, the online survey is closed. No unusual circumstances arose in the process of data collection. A total of 47 respondents answered the survey with four respondents indicating that they were not employed in law enforcement and two additional indicating

that they had not participated in homicide investigations. Therefore, 41 respondents took part in the survey. This is less than the 50 declared necessary in Chapter 3, but after consultation with my dissertation chair and committee, over 40% of the approached potential participants took part in the survey with remarkably consistent answers discussed in the following section. Therefore, the data collection was sufficient for the purpose of this research question.

Data Analysis

After developing the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge utilizing elements of myth and stereotype as indicated by Yaksic (2022), Hickey (2016), Walters et al. (2015), and The Federal Bureau of Investigation (n.d.) and results of the coded media exemplars of Ted Bundy, the survey was delivered online and consisted of 42 questions. The first 27 questions were related to the participants' opinion with regard to popular ideas regarding serial murder and the remaining 15 questions dealt specifically with those popular ideas in terms of Ted Bundy specifically. Each question, aside from the short answer on psychopathy, was on a Likert scale indicating the level to which a participant believed was the likelihood of a phenomenon or their familiarity with it. I will discuss the results of the data in a subsequent section, but the reporting corresponds to the established myths, stereotypes, and media representations discussed earlier, overall. As indicated earlier, I chose not to include survey questioning calling into question the efficacy of investigations due to the demographics of the participants, but overall, the responses corroborated the predominant themes found in the media exemplars, most notably in the perception that a serial murderer is unable to maintain a long-term

relationship, the psychopathy of a serial murderer, and the predilection for a serial murderer to choose victims based on physical appearance. A full breakdown of responses can be found in the Study Results section, below.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As outlined in Chapter 3, I used thematic analysis to create the qualitative survey instrument based off of established practices in terms of narrative analysis. Phase 1 of Chapter 4 outlined the purposeful and rigorous thematic coding utilized to create the survey based off of the twelve media exemplars and the myths and stereotypes indicated by Yaksic (2022) and others. Following Walden's IRB regulations and gaining approval allowed me to utilize participants in order to gauge the proliferation of true crime media themes in regard to whether or not homicide investigators' perceptions.

Transferability

In selecting exemplars and the coding process, the generalizability of the information, including transferability of results, was paramount. The criteria for selecting the media exemplars, as discussed in Phase One, was due to media saturations and that, along with the established opinions of experts in terms of serial murder misconceptions, allowed for rigorous development of the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge. The survey is highly transferrable to other participants within law enforcement since its creation was not dependent on specific demographic information but on the general impressions of serial murder and of a single, notorious serial murder with a large body of previously released true crime media representations across multiple modalities for nearly

four decades. Therefore, the survey can be used by subsequent researchers within law enforcement communities regardless of location within English speaking communities.

Dependability

In line with Chapter 3, dependability of the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge is steeped in the rigorous coding, with repeated iterations, of the 12 media exemplars and the usage of a master codebook developed through the use of expert opinions in terms of serial murder myths and stereotypes from Yaksic (2022) and others. The rigor of the coding, detailed in Phase 1 and in part due to my past professional and academic work, has led to rigor in the development of the survey. Dependability in this study was achieved, as indicated, through repeated iterations of coding and analysis of data through triangulation. The use of a master codebook derived from the existing research as a template aided me in being able to assuage the limitations that may be present in narrative or thematic analysis. There were no adjustments to the consistency or dependability strategies described in Chapter 3.

Confirmability

My objectivity and reliability as researcher, akin to confirmability, was tantamount to the efficacy of this study. As outlined in Chapter 3, I based the study's Phase 1 on established qualitative research practices without deviation from those practices. The existing media exemplars led me to the creation of the survey instrument and the survey's distribution followed all the parameters of Walden's IRB without outside manipulation, ensuring reliability. This reliability extended to ethical

considerations, participant relationship issues, and biases in data reporting. There were no adjustments to the confirmability strategies as outlined in Chapter 3.

Study Results

Phase 2 focused on answering the second research question. RQ2: To what extent are homicide investigator perceptions of serial and mass murderers affected by popular media depictions of serial and mass murderers?

The first part of the survey dealt with questions developed based on serial murder in general with Question 1 and 2 I asked basic participant inclusion questions. With question 3, I asked participants, "Are you familiar with the term serial killer?" with 86% of respondents indicating that they were either familiar or very familiar with the term. With questions 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, I asked about the demographics of serial murder, indicating that 99% of respondents believed serial murderers to be often or always male, 81% believed that serial murderers are rarely female, 91% believed that they are often or always Caucasian, 100% believed that they are rarely or sometimes African American, and 100% believed that serial murderers are rarely or sometimes Hispanic or Asian. In question 9, I asked, "What is the likelihood that a murder may have been committed by a serial murderer?" with 50% of respondents indicating that they believed it was either very unlikely or unlikely. With question 10, I asked, "In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer is 'highly intelligent'?" with 58% indicating that they believed it was likely or very likely.

Questions 11 and 12 dealt with the mental health of serial murderers with 43% if respondents indicating that it was likely or very likely that serial murderers were insane

and 80% of respondents believed that serial murderers were likely if very likely psychopaths. In question 13, I asked respondents to write a short answer response to "Please write a brief definition of psychopath, according to your experience." 29 respondents answered the question. Responses varied in length and content, but, notably, 11 of the responses indicated that psychopathy included a lack of empathy or remorse. Additionally, 11 of the respondents indicated that violence or aggression was a component of psychopathy. Only one respondent indicated that a psychopath enjoys inflicting pain or is a sadist. Outliers in the responses, aside from sadism, include psychopathy being any diagnosed mental defect and psychopathy being the presence of multiple personalities from one respondent each.

Questions 14, 14, 15, 17, 18, 25, and 26 dealt with modus operandi. Of the respondents, 51% believed that serial murderers were likely or very likely sexual predators, 85.7% believed that it was likely or very likely that serial murderers worked alone without partners, 36% believed that it was likely or very likely that serial murderers traveled extensively to commit murders, only 28% believed it was likely or very likely that serial murderers engage with law enforcement to learn about or influence the investigation, while 45% believed that it was likely or very likely that serial murderers engaged with the media to learn about or influence the investigation. Question 25 asked if a serial murderer leaves only an 'organized' or 'disorganized' crime scene where 45.71% of respondents indicated yes and 54.29% of respondents indicated no. In question 26, I asked, "In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer, prior to their current

crimes, has not had interactions with the criminal justice system?"; 37% of respondents indicated it is either unlikely or very unlikely while 34% indicated that it was likely.

Questions 19 and 20 dealt with the childhood of a serial murderer. 80% of respondents indicated that it was likely or very likely that serial murderers were abused as children and 82% of respondents indicated that it was likely or very likely that a serial murderer killed animals as a child.

Questions 21, 22, and 23 dealt with signature. 77% of respondents indicated that it was either likely or very likely that serial murderers chose victims based on physical appearance, 80% of respondents believed that the level of violence in a serial murderer's crimes increased with the frequency of killing, and 91% of respondents believed that it was either likely or very likely that a serial murderer is compelled to kill until either caught or killed.

Questions 24 and 27 focused on serial murderer relationships. With question 24, I asked, "In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer can maintain a long-term relationship?" 31% of respondents indicated rarely while 57% indicated sometimes. In question 27, I asked, "What is the likelihood that a serial killer had an unusual relationship with their mother or mother figure?" 62% indicated that it was either likely or very likely that there was an unusual relationship.

The second section of the survey dealt specifically with applying the thematic codes to Ted Bundy. Beginning with question 28, I asked, "Are you familiar with the serial killer, Ted Bundy?" 43.75% of respondents indicated they were somewhat familiar, 34.38% indicated they were familiar, and 12.5% indicated they were very familiar. With

question 29, 72% of respondents indicated that it was either likely or very likely that Ted

Bundy had an unusual relationship with his mother. In question 30 I asked, "In your

opinion, how familiar to you think Ted Bundy was with the investigation of his crimes?"

with 65% of respondents indicating they believed he was familiar or very familiar. In

questions 31 and 32, 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Ted Bundy was

"very intelligent" but only 37% agreed that he was a "criminal genius." In question 33, I

asked, "In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy was abused as a child?"

with 68% of respondents indicating they believed he was likely or very likely abused.

Interestingly, 56.25% of respondents said 'yes' to Ted Bundy being insane while 90.63%

of respondents said 'yes' to whether or not Ted Bundy was a psychopath. With question

36, I asked, "In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy interacted with law

enforcement during the investigation?" and 68% of respondents indicated they believed it

was either likely or very likely that Bundy did. In the following question, 56% of

respondents believed that it was either likely or very likely that Ted Bundy interacted

with the media during the investigation. In terms of Bundy's modus operandi, in question

38 I asked, "In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy committed crimes

across multiple jurisdictions in order to influence the investigation?" with 75% of

respondents indicating it was either likely or very likely. A majority of respondents, 87%,

in the following question, also believed that it was either likely or very likely that Ted

Bundy chose his victims based on physical appearance. For 1uestions 40 and 41, I asked

about the public perception of Bundy. 62% of respondents either agreed or strongly

agreed that, at the time of the murders, people considered Bundy handsome, while 71%

of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that Bundy, at the time, was considered charming. Finally, in 1uestion 42, 62.5% of respondents believed that it was either likely or very likely that Ted Bundy's escape from custody was due to his intelligence and cunning.

Summary

This study involved the examination of 12 media exemplars, all of which were true crime narrative dramatizations featuring Ted Bundy. I evaluated each of the exemplars and iteratively coded using categories and codes derived from the prevailing myths and stereotypes of serial murderers as determined by expert opinions. I viewed and coded each exemplar multiple times to achieve the highest possible degrees of validity, reliability, and transferability. Dialogue, visual presentations, performances, and cinematic affectations within each exemplar matched the three categories and eight codes derived from expert opinion. I used these thematic elements, the answer to the first research question, within the survey instrument, the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge. The survey was based on the expert opinions used for categories and codes in the exemplars and the results of the narrative analysis of the exemplars themselves. I had the survey delivered to homicide investigators. The results of that survey served to answer research question two.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion reiterating the purpose and nature of the study, as well as my rationale used for undertaking this particular type of research. Coding and survey findings are summarized with how they both conform to the existing knowledge and then extend the knowledge of the cultivation effects of mass media with regard to

serial murder and the presence of these effects in homicide investigations. The limitations

and implications of the study are revisited, and I include recommendations for further

research. I will conclude with the potential for social change that this study has.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Crime and criminality are present throughout media, of various types, and broadly described under the true crime genre. The popularity of the genre has resulted in a number of issues in terms of belief systems being manipulated through the application of Gerbner and Gross's (1976) cultivation theory. A vast majority of that true crime media represents relatively rare occurrences of serial and mass murder leading to a belief in various stereotypes related to serial and mass murder, notably including the frequency of the phenomenon as discussed by Yaksic (2022), Hickey (2016), Walters et al. (2015), and The Federal Bureau of Investigation (n.d.). The researchers that used Gerbner and Gross, predominantly did not address the effects of true crime media cultivation on law enforcement, specifically homicide investigators. Although researchers have acknowledged a connection between media and belief systems, even true crime media and belief systems, the lack of research specific to law enforcement was telling. To address this research gap, I analyzed data in two phases. First, using the dramatized version of the Ted Bundy story with 12 different media exemplars dating from 1986 through 2021, a series of three themes emerged relevant to the myths and stereotypes of serial murder and these housed eight codes:

- Investigation and intelligence theme housed ineffective policing, criminal genius/highly intelligent, and media/police engagement.
- Modus operandi and signature housed insane/psychopath, compulsion/level of violence, and victim appearance/type.

- Societal and relationship management housed relationship issues and popular/charming demeanor.

These themes were then applied to design a survey instrument entitled the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge distributed to a population of law enforcement professionals that had participated in homicide investigations. Notably, the homicide investigators did largely report, on Likert scales of likelihood, that their belief systems of serial murder in general, and Ted Bundy specifically, comported with acknowledged myths and stereotypes. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What thematic patterns exist in docudramas of a notorious crime that perpetuates unrealistic perceptions of serial and mass murderers?

RQ2: To what extent are homicide investigator perceptions of serial and mass murderers affected by popular media depictions of serial and mass murderers?

Interpretation of Findings

The presence of a cultivation effect of media on an audiences' perception of crime and criminality has been well-documented over the past 40 years, transcending various modalities of media delivery including print, visual media, and the internet. A belief in prevalent myths and stereotypes of serial and mass murder to the general viewing audience including frequency of the crime, disposition of the offender, and modus operandi among other attributes is an effect of cultivation. Based on limited prior research to quantify the thematic elements of true crime media, I used a notorious criminal with media saturation, Ted Bundy, that I could reasonably indicate would have name value with a law enforcement population. Through the thematic analysis of the

media exemplars, that myths and stereotypes determined by Yaksic (2022), Hickey (2016) and others were indeed represented by the media. I then developed the baseline for the thematic coding based off of the relevant research and media exemplars. This led to the three themes housing eight codes as described in the preceding section, demonstrating that the allied experts' beliefs in myths and stereotypes was valid. Every one of the exemplars (aside from *Bundy Reborn* (2012) as indicated earlier) exhibited some of the themes and codes with all themes and codes represented as a group. For the second phase, based on the limited research of cultivation effects on law enforcement audiences, the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge was distributed producing interesting results. The three themes with eight codes were all represented (aside from the code indicating investigative ineptitude) in the responses of the homicide investigators in a general sense, as applied to serial murder in general, and in a specific sense, as applied to Ted Bundy. Survey results from participants indicated that the homicide investigators believed in the propensity of serial murderers to be always or often White, male, work alone, select victims according to appearance, drive long distance to throw off investigations, and partake in investigations or media related to the crimes. The homicide investigators did indicate that the occurrence of serial murder is relatively rare, but insanity and psychopathy, in their perceptions, have a positive correlation with serial murder. This is also echoed in their belief that a serial murderer will more than likely not be able to maintain a long-term relationship and have an unusual relationship with their mother. In terms of Ted Bundy, specifically, the homicide investigators' perceptions aligned with the media representations echoing the thematic analysis and indicating that

Bundy was charming, very intelligent, handsome, had relationship issues, could not control murderous impulses, and selected his victims based on appearance. Overall, the survey results from homicide investigators fall in line with the reported myths and stereotypes of serial murderers indicating that that there is, to some degree, a level of cultivated thought between true crime media and homicide investigators which, in turn, could influence investigations or how one approaches their role as a law enforcement professional. Notably, even as the study population indicated that they believed the phenomenon of serial murder was rare, which is reiterated by their on-the-job experience, that rarity has led to a belief system that houses myths and stereotypes. This is the core of Gerbner and Gross' theory, wherein a lack of real-world experience means that media representations provide the context and the content. The issue here, and with other studies dealing with cultivation, is notable in the sense that the creators of true crime media are not beholden to accurate representation of data. These representations can be quite far afield (as noted in the media exemplars for this study), and the power of the cultivation effects are such that even professionals can be influenced to believe in misinformation. Even though a great deal of research exists in terms of general perceptions of crime and violence in terms of the cultivation effects of media, the scarcity of research on how that same media is an issue that this study attempts to address in some small part.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations described in Chapter 1 surround my role as both researcher and instructor. The separation of those roles was addressed through Walden's IRB prior to the study. I also addressed the limitations surrounding geographic location as well as the

name recognition with Ted Bundy and they do not appear to have been issues. However, in limiting the media exemplars only to Ted Bundy, that limited the true crime dramatizations to a single notorious criminal. Granted, media saturation with Bundy's story is real, but limiting the focus to a single serial murderer limited the scope of the study and meant that the findings from the media exemplars might not be generalizable to all serial murderers.

In addition, even though I took great care in the coding and analysis of data, my role as a sole researcher was a limitation. This, through common human error, could lead to limitations and threats to confirmability, credibility, and dependability.

Recommendations

Future research opportunities in the subject area, based on the findings of the study, include replicating the study for a similar population using a different serial murderer with enough media exemplars (Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, various takes on Jack the Ripper, etc.) or media exemplars purporting to be a documentary presentation without fictionalized content. Another interesting avenue of discussion would be unsolved serial murders with adequate media representation (like the aforementioned Jack the Ripper or the Zodiac Killer in San Francisco) noting the commonalities inherent in these presentations and how they are internalized in the selected audience. These are all similar studies featuring a law enforcement population to gauge cultivation effects. In addition, research opportunities based on shifting modes of media delivery could be conducted differentiating between physical, broadcast, or streaming media. From a study population standpoint, further research outside of the

Midwest, with Federal homicide investigators, or even non-American homicide investigators could be conducted in order to broaden the scope of the study all within the realm of media cultivation. Lastly, researchers could investigate the perceptions of the media makers themselves to determine their influences in what could possibly be a cycle of cultivation.

Implications

Following a thorough review of the previous literature on the media representations of true crime and the effect that these media representations have on audiences; I was able to identify a gap in the literature surrounding the application of serial murder myths and stereotypes as applied to law enforcement audiences. The cultivation theory provided the baseline for the study, and I used the literature surrounding this theory to positively identify the power of media in shaping the beliefs of crime and violence in general audiences. Using the most common myths and stereotypes as noted by Yaksic (2022), Hickey (2016) and more, I deductively coded via narrative analysis 12 dramatized true crime presentations of the Ted Bundy story widely available to viewers from 1986 to 2021. These themes and codes are as follows:

- Investigation and intelligence housed ineffective policing, criminal genius/highly intelligent, and media/police engagement.

- Modus operandi and signature housed insane/psychopath, compulsion/level of violence, and victim appearance/type.

- Societal and relationship management housed relationship issues and popular/charming demeanor.

The themes and codes, through the exemplars, provided the groundwork for designing the Survey of Serial and Mass Murder Knowledge that I distributed to a population of professional investigators that have or are working on homicide cases in their police department. Readers and future researchers can use this study to expand the awareness and understanding of true crime media influence on a law enforcement audience, an underrepresented demographic in the discussion of media, and shed light on the potential social and professional hazards that these media representations present.

In my study, homicide investigators largely reiterated myths and stereotypes of serial murder as presented by true crime media exemplars. That is the core of the cultivation theory. Even though serial murder is rare, as confirmed by the study population's perceptions, the persistence and frequency of the media has nevertheless influenced those perceptions. Although there is a great deal of research on just how media representations affect a general audience, there is a scarcity of research on how media representations affect a law enforcement audience. Therefore, that audience could not reasonably be expected to know that the perceptions that they have regarding serial and mass murder could be based on media, via cultivation, and adopted as known fact in their professional lives. If that is the case, then there is the distinct possibility that homicide investigations could be influenced through misinformation adopted as fact leading to outcomes that not only do not serve the public, but also present the capacity for injustice to take place. With this knowledge, though, incoming law enforcement professionals, as well as seasoned veterans, could receive awareness training or cultivation awareness education designed to convey the issues that may be inherent as

members of a society that bases some aspects of worldview on media representation. This level of societal change could lead to more equitable investigations, criminal homicide closure rates, and departmental asset allocation.

Furthermore, in this study, I showed the practical effects of true crime cultivation to the general populace, including those media makers, of the importance of veracity of information, eschewing the lurid representations designed to provide entertainment. The relative safety of calling these media representations mere entertainment for general audiences is no longer valid when law enforcement professionals act upon, even unwittingly, misinformation within homicide investigations.

Conclusions

Previous researchers focused on the overall cultivation effects of mass media in terms of crime and violence for general audiences. There were distinct gaps in the literature related to an audience of law enforcement. Because the powerful effects of cultivation in media, and cultivation in true crime media, were well documented, this study served to apply those effects to a law enforcement audience using common themes in true crime dramatizations. I chose to explore the influence a notorious criminal story, with adequate media saturation, had in terms of reinforcing the myths and stereotypes of serial and mass murder. That analysis led to the creation of a survey instrument distributed to homicide investigators to gauge their perceptions of serial and mass murder. The survey instrument results largely reiterated the findings of the survey showing that homicide investigators could be influenced by true crime media in the same manner as general audiences. Unlike general audiences, though, homicide investigators

would have professional cause to apply those influenced perceptions within their field of work. This study appears to be the first looking at correlations, if any, between true crime media and criminal investigation. Future scholars could replicate this study in a number of ways by choosing different offenders and different populations of law enforcement. The themes within this study, though, are sufficient to begin the process of shining a light on the undue influence that pop culture media representations, specifically true crime, can have on not only the perception of crime but directly on the investigation, and subsequent adjudication or lack thereof, of homicides. This makes the study germane to law enforcement, first and foremost, as well as media professionals, but may also have a direct effect on victims of crime and their families.

References

Aamodt, M.G., Leary, T. and Southard, L. (2020). *Radford/FGCU annual report on serial killer statistics: 2020*. Radford University

Abul Hassan, A. and Mukhtar, A. R. (2020). TV crime re-enactment shows and crime: Perception of Labore based investigation officers. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology, 12*(3/4), 18–29.

Alitavoli, R. and Kaveh, E. (2018). The U.S. media's effect on public's crime expectations: A cycle of cultivation and agenda-setting theory. *Societies, 8*(3), 58. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8030058.

Anderson, J.F., Mangels, N. J., and Langsam, A. H. (2009). The challenges of teaching criminological theory: Can academia deliver what the media promises?. *Criminal Justice Studies, 22*(2), 223–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/14786010902975523

Arendt, F. (2010). Cultivation effects of a newspaper on reality estimates and explicit and implicit attitudes. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications, 22*(4), 147–159

Arendt, F., Steindl, N., and Vitouch, P. (2015). Effects of news stereotypes on the perception of facial threat. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications, 27*(2), 78–86.

Arriaga, P., Adriao, J., Madeira, F., Cavaleiro, I., Maia e Silva, A., Barahona, I., and Esteves, F. (2015). A 'dry eye' for victims of violence: Effects of playing a violent video game on pupillary dilation to victims and on aggressive behavior. *Psychology of Violence, 5*(2), 199–208.

Bailey, N. (Director). (2008). *The Capture of the Green River Killer* [Film]. Lifetime
Television.

Barcella, L. (2019). Living with Ted Bundy. *Rolling Stone*.
https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/ted-bundy-serial-killer-joe-
berlinger-documentary-783216/

Berlinger, J. (Director). (2019). *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* [Film].
Netflix.

Bilandzic, H., Schnell, C., and Sukalla, F. (2019). The cultivation of idealistic moral
expectations: The role of television exposure and narrative engageability. *Mass
Communication and Society, 22*, 604–230.
https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1606247

Bissell, K., and Hays, H. (2011). Understanding anti-fat bias in children: The role of
media and appearance anxiety in third to sixth graders' implicit and explicit
attitudes toward obesity. *Mass Communication and Society, 14*(1), 113–140.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. and Terry, G. (2014). Thematic analysis. In P. Rohleder and A.
Lyons (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Clinical and Health Psychology*,
MacMillan. https://dor.org/10.1007/978-1-137-29105-9_7.

Brechman, J. M. and Purvis, S. C. (2015). Narrative, transportation and
advertising. *International Journal of Advertising, 34*(2), 366–
381. https://dor.org/10.1080/02650487.2014.994803

Bright, M. (Director). (2002). *Ted Bundy* [Film]. First Look Media/DEJ Productions.

Busselle, R. W. (2001). Television exposure, perceived realism, and exemplar accessibility in the social judgment process. *Media Psychology, 3*(1), 43–67. https://dor.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0301_03

Call, C. (2019). Serial entertainment: A content analysis of 35 years of serial murder in film. *Homicide Studies, 23*(4), 362–380. https://dor.org/10.1177/1088767919841660

Calzo, J. P., and Ward, L. (2009). Media exposure and viewers' attitudes toward homosexuality: Evidence for mainstreaming or resonance? *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *53*, 280–299.

Cavender, G. and Deutsch, S. K. (2007). CSI and moral authority. The police and science. *Crime Media Culture, 3*(67), 67–81. https://dor.org/10.1177/1741659007074449

Chadee, D., Smith, S., and Ferguson, C. J. (2019). Murder she watched: Does watching news or fictional media cultivate fear of crime? *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, *8*(2), 125. https://dor.org/10.1037/ppm0000158

Chomsky, M. J. (Director). (1986). *The Deliberate Stranger* [Film]. Warner Brothers Television.

Chung, J. E. (2014). Medical dramas and viewer perception of health: Testing cultivation effects. *Human Communication Research, 40*(3), 333–349.

Crawford, J. (Director). (2015). *Serial Thriller: Angel of Decay* [TV Series]. Discovery Investigation.

Creswell, J. W., and Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Crichlow, V. J., and Fulcher, C. (2017). Black men down: An assessment of experts' quotes on deadly encounters with police. *Race and Social Problems, 9*(3), 171–180. https://dor.org/10.1007/s12552-017-9197-x

Darnell, D. A., and Cook, S. L. (2009). Investigating the utility of the film War Zone in the prevention of street harassment. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*, 266–274.

Dellasega, C. (n.d.). Mothers who write: Ann Rule. https://www.writerswrite.com/journal/ann-rule-3013

De Zuniga, H. G., Correa, T., and Valenzuela, S. (2012). Selective exposure to cable news and immigration in the U.S.: The relationship between Fox News, CNN, and attitudes toward Mexican immigrants. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 56*(4), 597–615.

Ditton, J. and Duffy, J. (1983). Bias in the newspaper reporting of crime news. *The British Journal of Criminology, 23*(2), 159–165. https://doi.org/10.1093.oxfordjournals.bjc.a047355

Dolliver, M. J., Kenney, J. L., Reid, L. W., and Prohaska, A. (2018). Examining the Relationship Between Media Consumption, Fear of Crime, and Support for Controversial Criminal Justice Policies Using a Nationally Representative Sample. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 34*(4), 399–420. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986218787734

Douglas, J. and Olshaker, M. (1995). *Mind hunter: Inside the FBI's elite serial crime unit* [ebook]. Scribner.

Eagles, B. (Director). (2010). *The Riverman* [Film]. Twentieth Century Fox

Edwards, E. (2020). Morbid curiosity, popular media, and thanatourism. *Australian Journal of Parapsychology, 20*(2), 113–138.

Eschholz, S., Chiricos, T., and Gertz, M. (2003). Television and fear of crime: Program types, audience traits, and the mediating effect of perceived neighborhood racial composition. *Social Problems*, *50*(3), 395–415. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2003.50.3.395

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (n.d.). *Serial murder: Multidisciplinary perspectives for investigators*. Behavioral Analysis Unit. National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime. https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2012). Crime in the United States 2012. Expanded homicide data table 1. murder victims by race and sex, 2012. http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/ crime-in-the-u.s/2012/crime-in-the-u.s.-2012/offenses-known-tolaw-enforcement/expanded-homicide/expanded_homicide_data_table_1_murder_victims_by_race_and_sex_2012.xls.

Farrands, D. (Director). (2021). *Ted Bundy: American Boogeyman* [Film]. Dark Star Pictures.

Feifer, M. (Diector). (2009*). Bundy: A Legacy of Evil* [Film]. Lionsgate Entertainment.

Fereday, J. and Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(1).

Garcia-Castro, J. D. and Perez-Sanchez, R. (2018). Fear of crime and cultivation effect: Social and psychological predictors. *Universitas Psychologica, 17*(3), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy17-3.fcce

Gerbner, G. (1970). Cultural indicators: The case of violence in television drama. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 388, 69–81. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1038317

Gerbner, G. (1972). Communication and social environment. *Scientific American, 227*(3), 152–162. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/24927435

Gerbner, G. (1980). Death in prime time: Notes on the symbolic function of dying in the mass media. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 447, 64-70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1042304

Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication and Society, 1*(3/4), 175–194.

Gerbner, G., and Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 173–199.

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., and Signorielli, N. (1980). Additional comments on cultivation analysis. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 44*(3), 408–410. https://www.jstor.com/stable/2748114

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., and Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant, and D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17–40). New York, NY: Routledge.

Grabe, M.E., and Drew, D.G. (2007). Crime cultivation: Comparisons across media genres and channels. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 51*, –171.

Gray, P. (2020). On the outside: Film-making as story-telling through introspective re-enactment, and the significance of anonymity in the spoken word. *Media Practice and Education, 21*(3), 185–199. https://doir.org/10.1050/25741136.2020.1800299

Gramlich, J. (2020). What the data says (and doesn't say) about crime in the United States. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewreserarch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/20/facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/

Grant, T. (2016). The hammer and the hummingbird: Spectating crime in inside the documentary film. In M. Arntfeld and M. Danesi (Eds.), *Criminal Humanities*. Peter Lang.

Greek, C. E. (1994). Becoming a media criminologist: Is "newsmaking criminology" possible? In G. Barak, (Ed.), *Media, Process, and Social Construction of Crime: Studies in Newsmaking Criminology* [ebook]. Routledge

Green, M. C. (2004). Transportation into narrative worlds: The role of prior knowledge and perceived realism. *Discourse Processes, 38*(2), 247–266. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326950dp3802_5

Gregoriou, C. (2011). *Language, ideology and identity in serial killer narratives*. Routledge.

Hafdahl, M. and Florence, K. (2021). *The science of serial killers: The truth behind Ted Bundy, Lizzie Borden, Jack the Ripper, and other notorious murderers of cinematic legend* [ebook]. Skyhorse

Harris, M. (Director). (2012). *Bundy Reborn* [Film]. Summer Hill Films

Hassan, A. A., and Mukhtar, A. R. (2020). TV crime re-enactment shows and crime: Perception of Lahore based investigation officers. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology, 12*(3/4), 18–29.

Hawkins, R.P. and Pingree, S. (1981). Using television to construct social reality. *Journal of Broadcasting, 25*(4), 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838158109386459

Hefner, V., and Kretz, V. E. (2021, April 14). Does the glass slipper fit? Disney princess films and relationship beliefs and attitudes. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*. Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000290

Hickey, E. W. (2016). *Serial murderers and their victims* (7th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Hier, S. (2020). Almost famous: Peter Woodcock, media framing, and obscurity in the cultural construction of a serial killer. *Crime, Media Culture, 15*(3), 375–394. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659019874171

Hodgkinson, S., Prins, H., and Stuart-Bennett, J. (2017). Monsters, madmen… and myths: A critical review of the serial killing literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 34*, 282–289. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2016.11.006

Holbrook, R. A. and Hill, T. G. (2005). Agenda-setting and priming in prime time television: Crime dramas as political cues. *Political Communication*, 22(3), 277–295, DOI: 10.1080/10584600591006519

Hughes, M. (1980). The fruits of cultivation analysis: A reexamination of some effects of television watching. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 44*(3), 287–302. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2748103

Jarvis, B. (2007). Monsters inc.: Serial killers and consumer culture. *Crime Media Culture, 3*(3), 326–344. https://doi.org/10.1177/1746159007082469

Jeffres, L. W., Neundorf, K., Campanella Bracken, C., and Atkin, D. (2008). Integration theoretical traditions in media effects: Using third-person effects to link agenda-setting and cultivation. *Mass Communication and Society, 11*, 470–491. https://doi.org/10.1080/152054308082375303

Jnanathapaswi, S. G. (2021). Thematic analysis and coding: An overview of the qualitative paradigm. *An Introduction to Social Science Research*. APH Publishing. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.17159249

Johnson, J. D., Olivo, N., Gibson, N., Reed, W., and Ashburn-Nardo, L. (2009). Priming media stereotypes reduces support for social welfare policies: The mediating role of empathy. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35*, 463–476.

Jones, A. (Director). (2019). *Bundy and the Green River Killer* [Film]. Independent Moving Pictures.

Kappeler, V. and Potter, G. (2018). *The mythology of crime and criminal justice* (5th ed.). Waveland Press.

Kennedy, L. (2018). 'Man I'm all torn up inside': Analyzing audience responses to *Making a Murderer. Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 14. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659017721275.

Kort-Butler, L. A., and Habecker, P. (2018). Framing and cultivating the story of crime: The effects of media use, victimization, and social networks on attitudes about crime. *Criminal Justice Review, 43*(2), 127–146.

Kort-Butler, L. A., and Sittner Hartshorn, K. J. (2011). Watching the detectives: crime programming, fear of crime, and attitudes about the criminal justice system. *The Sociological Quarterly, 52*(1), 36–55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2010.01191.x

Kuckartz, U., Rädiker, S. (2019). Building a coding frame. In: *Analyzing Qualitative Data with MAXQDA*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15671-8_8

Ladewig, J. W. (2020). Murder and presidential elections: A cultivation-based issue-ownership theory of local television news and its geographic structure. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 50*(4), 811–844. https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12683.

Lee, M. and McGovern, A. (2014). *Policing and media: Public relations, simulations and communications* [ebook]. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203095997

Leistedt, S.J. and Linkowski, P. (2014), Psychopathy and the cinema: Fact or fiction?.

    Journal of Forensic Science, 59, 167–174. https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-

    4029.12359

Levan, K., and Stevenson, K. (2019). There's gonna be bad apples: Police–community

    relations through the lens of media exposure among university students.

    International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy, 8(2), 83–105.

Lull, R. B., and Dickinson, T. M. (2018). Does television cultivate narcissism?

    Relationships between television exposure, preferences for specific genres, and

    subclinical narcissism. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 7*(1), 47–60.

Mancini, D. E. (2013). The "CSI effect" in an actual juror sample: Why crime show

    genre may matter. *North American Journal of Psychology, 15*(3), 543–564.

McCabe, R. (2022). Conversations with a killer: The Ted Bundy tapes and affective

    responses to the true crime documentary. *Studies in Documentary Film, 16*(1),

    38–54. https://doi.org/10.10808/17503280.2021.1874236

McCann, B. J. (2021). Duplicity and the depraved uncanny mediations of Ted Bundy.

    Women's Studies in Communication, 44(3). 340–359.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/07491109.2020.1834038

Mendehlson, J. (2020). Psycho and Texas Chainsaw Massacre's different takes on the

    same killer. *Comic Book Review.com*. https://www.cbr.com/psycho-texas-

    chainsaw-takes-on-same-killer/

Merriam, S.B. and Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., and Signorelli, N. (2009). Growing up with television: Cultivation processes. In J. Bryant and M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: advances in theory research* (3rd ed). Routledge.

Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., and Signorelli, N. (2015). Yesterday's new cultivation, tomorrow. *Mass Communication and Society*, 18, 674–699. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1072725

Nama, A. (2004). More symbol than substance: African American representation in network television dramas. *Race and Society, 6*(1), 21–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.racsoc.2004.09.003

Oliver, M. B., and Armstrong, G. B. (1995). Predictors of viewing and enjoyment of reality-based and fictional crime shows. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 72*(3), 559–570. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769909507200307

Parrott, S., and Parrott, C. T. (2015). US television's "mean world" for white women: The portrayal of gender and race on fictional crime dramas. *Sex Roles*, *73*(1-2), 70–82.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peelo, M. (2006). Framing homicide narratives in newspapers: Mediated witness and the construction of virtual victimhood. *Crime Media Culture, 2*(2). 159–175. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659006065404

Pouliot, L. and Cowen, P.S. (2007). Does perceived realism really matter in media

> effects?. *Media Psychology, 9*(2), 241–

> 259. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701285819

Rafter, N. (2007). Crime, film and criminology: Recent sex-crime movies. *Theoretical*

> *Criminology, 11*(3), 403–420. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480607079584

Ravitch, S., and Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative Research: Bridging the Conceptual,*

> *Theoretical, and Methodological*. Sage Publications

Ray, C., and Kort-Butler, L. (2020). What you see is what you get? Investigating how

> survey context shapes the association between media consumption and attitudes

> about crime. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45, 914–932.

> https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-019-09502-7

Reizer, A., and Hetsroni, A. (2014). Media exposure and romantic relationship quality:

> A slippery slope? *Psychological Reports, 114*(1), 231–249.

Rule, A. (2018). *The stranger beside me* [ebook]. WW. Norton

Ruva, C. L., and Guenther, C. C. (2015). From the shadows into the light: How pretrial

> publicity and deliberation affect mock jurors' decisions, impressions, and

> memory. *Law and Human Behavior, 39*(3), 294–310.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Scharrer, E. (2001). Tough guys: The portrayal of hypermasculinity and aggression in

> televised police dramas. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 45*(4),

> 615–634. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4504_5

Sealey, A. (Director). (2021). *No Man of God* [Film]. RLJE Films.

Seltzer, M. (2007). *True crime: Observations of violence and modernity* [ebook].

    Routledge.

Schilt, P. (2000). Media whores and perverse media: documentary film meets tabloid TV

    in Nick Broomfield's *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*. *Velvet Light*

    Trap, 50+. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A90190351/AONE

Segura, S. (2014). Counterfactual reasoning, responsibility and blame for serial murders:

    the perception and prevention of violent crimes. *Revista de Psicologia Social,*

    29(2), 265–295. https://doi.org/10.1080/02134748.201.918827

Selepak, A. and Cain, J. (2015). Manufacturing white criminals: Depictions of criminality

    and violence on *Law and Order*. *Cogent Social Sciences, 1*(1),

    https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2015.1104977

Seymour, T. (2019). The real *Mindhunters*: Why 'serial killer whisperers' do more

    harm than good. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-

    radio/2019/aug/19/the-real-mindhunters-why-serial-killer-whisperers-do-more-

    harm-than-good

Shapiro, P. (Director). (2003). *The Stranger Beside Me* [Film]. Barbara Lieberman

    Productions.

Shapiro, J., and Rucker, L. (2004). The Don Quixote effect: Why going to the movies

    can help develop empathy and altruism in medical students and residents.

    Families, Systems, and Health, 22(4), 445-452.

Signorielli, N. (1990). Television's mean and dangerous world: A continuation of the cultural indicators perspective. *Cultivation analysis: New directions in media effects research*, 85–106.

Surette, R. (1994). Predator criminals as media icons. In G. Barak (Ed.), *Media, process, and the social construction of crime: studies in newsmaking criminology*. Garland

Swart, J. (2016). Psychopaths in film: Are portrayals realistic and does it matter? In M. Arntfeld and M. Danesi (Eds.), *Criminal humanities*. Peter Lang.

Till, B., Arendt, F., and Niedderkrotenthaler, T. (2021). The relationship between crime-related television viewing and perceptions of the death penalty: results of a large cross-sectional survey study. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*(715657), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.715657

Trainum, J. L. (2019). The CSI effect on cold case investigations. *Forensic Science International*, 301, 455–460. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2019.05.020

Vicary, A. M. and Fraley, R. C. (2010). Captured by true crime: Why are women drawn to tales of rape, murder, and serial killers? *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 1*(1), 81–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550609355486

Walden University. (n.d.). Educational settings. https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/research-center/research-ethics/educational-settings

Walters, B. K., Dislane, L. E., Patrick, C. J., and Hickey, E. W. (2015). Serial murder: facts and misconceptions in *Science in the Courtroom*. National Courts and Science Institute, Inc.

Weiss, C. H. and Singer, E. (1988). *Reporting of social science in the national media* [pdf]. The Russell Sage Foundation. https://www.russellsage.org/publications/reporting-social-science-national-media

Xiao, W. (2010). More than just anorexia and steroid abuse: Effects of media exposure on attitudes toward body image and self-efficacy. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, *18*(1), 50–62.

Yaksic, E. (2022). *Killer data: Modern perspectives on serial murder*. Routledge.

Appendix A: Survey of Serial Killer and Mass Murder Knowledge

Inclusion Questions
1. Are you or have you ever been employed in law enforcement? **Yes** or **No**
2. Are you currently participating, or have you ever participated in a homicide investigation? **Yes** or **No**

If you have answered **NO** to either of these questions, thank you for your time. You do not need to complete the rest of the survey.
If you answered **YES** to **BOTH** questions, please proceed with the remaining questions.
General Questions
1. Are you familiar with the term "serial killer"? a) very unfamiliar b) unfamiliar c) somewhat familiar d) familiar e) very familiar
2. In your opinion, what is the frequency that a serial killer is male? a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often 5) always
3. In your opinion, what is the frequency that a serial killer is female? a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often 5) always
4. In your opinion, what is the frequency that a serial killer is Caucasian? a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often 5) always
5. In your opinion, what is the frequency that a serial killer is African American? a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often 5) always
6. In your opinion, what is the frequency that a serial killer is Hispanic or Asian? a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often 5) always
7. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a murder may have been committed by a serial murderer? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely
8. In your opinion, what Is the likelihood that a serial killer is "very intelligent"? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely
9. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer is insane? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely
10. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer is a psychopath? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely
11. Please write a brief definition of psychopath, according to your experience:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
12. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer is a sexual predator? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely
13. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer commits their crimes alone, without a partner? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

14. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer travels extensively in order to commit murder? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

15. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer engages with the police to learn about or influence the investigation? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

16. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer engages with the media to learn about or influence the investigation? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

17. In you opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer experienced child abuse? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

18. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer abused or killed animals as a child? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

19. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer targeted their victims based on physical appearance? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

20. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer increased their level of violence as the frequency of killing increased? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

21. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer is compelled to kill until either caught or killed? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

22. In your opinion, what is the frequency that a serial killer can maintain a long-term relationship? a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often 5) always

23. In your opinion, does a serial killer leave only an 'organized' or a 'disorganized' crime scene behind? **Yes** or **No**

24. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that a serial killer, prior to their current crimes, has not had interactions with the criminal justice system? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

25. What is the likelihood that a serial killer had an unusual relationship with their mother or mother figure? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

Specific Case Questions

1. Are you familiar with the serial killer, Ted Bundy? a) very unfamiliar b) unfamiliar c) somewhat familiar d) familiar e) very familiar

2. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy had an unusual relationship with his mother? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

3. In your opinion, how familiar do you think Ted Bundy was with the investigation of his crimes? a) very unfamiliar b) unfamiliar c) somewhat familiar d) familiar e) very familiar

4. In your opinion, what is the level of agreement with this statement: "Ted Bundy was very intelligent."? a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neither agree or disagree d) agree e) strongly agree

5. In your opinion, what is the level of agreement with this statement: "Ted Bundy was a criminal genius."? a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neither agree or disagree d) agree e) strongly agree

6. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy was abused as a child? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

7. In your opinion, was Ted Bundy insane? **Yes** or **No**

8. In your opinion, was Ted Bundy a psychopath? **Yes** or **No**

9. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy interacted with law enforcement during the investigation? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

10. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy interacted with the media during the investigation? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

11. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy committed crimes across multiple jurisdictions in order to influence the investigation? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

12. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy chose his victims due to their personal appearance? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely

13. In your opinion, do you believe that people at the time considered Ted Bundy to be handsome? a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neither agree or disagree d) agree e) strongly agree

14. In your opinion, do you believe that people at the time considered Ted Bundy to be charming? a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neither agree or disagree d) agree e) strongly agree

15. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that Ted Bundy escaped from custody due to his intelligence and cunning? a) very unlikely b) unlikely c) neutral d) likely e) very likely