

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

ON SERIAL KILLERS: THE COLLECTIVE'S SEARCH FOR
UNDERSTANDING

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It was a cold and stormy autumn night in the small university town of Lennoxville, Quebec. The streets were littered with the usual array of intoxicated students and others on their way to get intoxicated – there are very few forms of entertainment to be found in Lennoxville. As students traveled from party to party, bar to bar, one young woman was held captive in her dorm room. Unbeknownst to her three roommates, Robyn Harper sat face-to-[inter]face with one of the most notorious serial killers of our time: Ted Bundy. Harper was immobilized, trapped in the confines of her 100 square foot dorm room by Bundy's allure. Luckily for Harper, just before Bundy could consume her being, she was able to [hit] escape.

The very next night Harper was struck with curiosity. Her run in with Bundy only prompted a desire to find more serial killers. Night after night she sat at her computer clicking and reading, reading and clicking – each click heightening her need for more. After Bundy came Dahmer, followed by Gacy and Berkowitz, then Manson and Wuornos then Gein ... what began as a way to kill small town boredom was quickly becoming a serial obsession with no apparent end in sight.

Six years have passed and I, Robyn Harper, still find myself fascinated with the serial killer. Shortly after I first discovered my interest with serial killers I became determined to know everything I could know about the figure, specifically, I became interested in forming an understanding of the psychology of the serial killer. The search for a rational explanation began; certainly, I thought, there must be something that causes these individuals to act the way they do. The serial killer entered into my academic writing first as the subject of a research paper linking childhood trauma and brain injuries to psychopathic behaviour. The psychological

study only piqued my curiosity, answering very few of my questions and, instead, creating new questions to be answered.

Making my way to graduate studies in Communication & Culture program at Ryerson University and York University shed a fresh perspective on studying the serial killer. Shifting away from scientific understandings of the serial killer, I began to explore the role of the serial killer in our culture leading me to research on the life-writing of serial killers, serial killers as celebrities, a comparison between serial killers and consumers and a psychoanalytic approach to the representation of the serial killer in film. There are a multitude of approaches available for looking at the serial killer and bodies of research that support these various points of views.

Academic study is only one way of looking at the serial killer. In the past few decades much talk has been devoted to the notion of the serial killer, from discussions related to criminology, science, psychology and sociology to discussions that take place through books, films and television. The title of serial killer is used to define the individual who commits serial murder, but the title does not belong to the individual – it is only used to describe him (him since, typically, serial killers are males). The notion of the serial killer belongs to the collective. To pinpoint individuals as serial killers we must be familiar with the term, knowledgeable about the usages and implications of the term.

The term belongs to the collective, not the serial killer himself. In tracing the usages of the term and the talk surrounding the serial killer it becomes possible to re-examine the concept in terms of the collective in a way that speaks of the collective, more so than of the serial killer himself. By no means am I an expert on serial killers;

in fact, I would argue that I am quite the contrary – in all my years looking at the subject I am constantly amazed at the existing ways of seeing the serial killer and the new perspectives constantly arising. There is a multitude of voices involved in the talk on the serial killer and I am not positing myself as any form of final voice on the subject; instead, I will draw attention to some of the more prominent talk that surrounds the serial killer in order to mark what the serial killer reveals about the collective.

I will begin by examining the term serial itself and its importance in the notion of the serial killer. What does the term serial say? It draws on series – a term often used in reference to novels, films and, quite literally, the television series. Series carries notions of multiple segments that are all linked in some way. There is an ongoing nature to the series – when one segment ends, another begins. The series creates anticipation, anxiety of what is to come and a hope for closure. As “serial killer” is a relatively new term it becomes possible to trace its inception and examine what is being revealed in this naming process. I then go to illustrate how this term serial is what sets serial killing apart from other forms of multiple murder (such as mass murder, spree killing, terrorism and assassination). I will explore the features of the serial killer that appear to make it unique to the collective by developing the language of the accounts of understanding the serial killer: the profiling account, the study of numbers, facts and statistics as a way to apprehend and comprehend the serial killer; the logical extension of society account, where the serial killer is a reflection of society from concerns with the individual to celebrity and consumerism; and the serial killer account, where the serial killer explains his own motivations. In

looking at these accounts it becomes possible to see the clichés that are used to discuss the serial killer and how these reveal thoughts and fears of the collective, rather than providing the insight on the serial killer that the accounts are seeking.

To begin, let us look at what serial killing is not. Serial killer is distinct from other forms of murder. Elliott Leyton, a Canadian social-anthropologist and professor of anthropology at Memorial University in Newfoundland, studies six of the most notorious multiple murderers in his book *Hunting Humans: The Rise of the Modern Multiple Murderer*. Leyton makes a distinction between multiple murder and other forms of murder remarking, “No one ever became famous by beating his wife to death in an alley; but virtually all our multiple murderers achieve true and lasting fame” (Leyton 29). What, then, is this distinction between multiple murder and other forms of homicide? The image Leyton conjures is of spousal abuse – personal, intimate and often gone unreported. With spousal abuse there is an established relationship between victim and abuser unlike with the multiple murderer where there is no known relationship.

This lack of connection between victim and perpetrator appears to set multiple murders apart from other forms of homicide. What then separates serial murder from other forms of multiple murders? Multiple murders include mass murder, spree murder, assassination and terrorism – all of which remain separate from one another and the serial killer. These multiple murderers do share commonalities, yet each remains distinct in terms of the actions of the killer as well as the way they are perceived by the collective.

The assassin and the terrorist are associated with political motives. The assassin, like the serial killer, can be known for murder over an extended length of time, but unlike the serial killer, the assassin is often linked to monetary motives. When money is involved the scene is less macabre and more understandable. Motivation for the killing is present – an explanation required in understanding murder. Murder for profit becomes less of a spectacle than serial murder. The true murderer is the one who pays the assassin, creating a separation between the act of killing and the desire for murder. Desire and drive separated takes away notions of killing for pleasure. Since the murders are politically and financially driven the random aspect distinct to serial murder is absent. A specific person is targeted and few are at perceived risk of being affected by an assassin.

The terrorist, as noted, is also often linked to political motivations yet unlike the assassin they are less specific in target. The name of the terrorist evokes terror. The very name suggests the role the figure has in evoking terror and panic. The terrorist works for a higher power, blurring distinctions of individuality amongst terrorists. They work as a group, as a mass fighting for their cause, evoking terror in the unpredictability and extreme nature of their crimes. Unlike the assassin, the terrorist is associated with randomness, a “you could be next” cliché: a cliché found in mass murder, spree murder and serial murder.

The naming of mass, spree and serial emphasize the timing of the crimes as a key distinction of each. Often, these three forms of murder are grouped most closely together, hinting that they share common central themes. The mass killer takes place in the shortest period of time with the murderer claiming several lives in one location

in a set length of time. This centralized location often becomes the focus of the crime. The mass killing at Columbine High School in April 1999, which quickly comes to mind when thinking of mass murder, emphasizes the relationship of the victims to one another and the impact of the crime is on the community. The aftermath of these mass killings, these massacres, become an attack on an isolated group of people where there is little to discriminate between victims. Instead, it is a “wrong place, wrong time” cliché that is often attached to the notion of the mass killer whereas the crimes of the serial killer take place in multiple locations, similar to the spree killer. Multiple location shifts the impact away from a community or specific location and out into society at large.

The spree killer starts to most closely resemble the serial killer. With the spree killing there is little to no break between killings, just the time necessary to change locations. This rampage leaves little time for the crime to attract significant attention from the media, police and the collective. The killings are impulsive and opportunistic rather than methodical and calculated. The “cooling-off” period distinct to the serial killer becomes an integral element to the notion of serial killing. It is this feature that provides time to perpetuate fear in the collective, gives time for the serial killer to plan his next attack and gives time for law enforcement to conduct an investigation. The timing of the serial killing attacks function as a sort of game – leaving all parties involved waiting to see what the next move will be: will the police get enough clues to catch the killer; will the killer strike again?

Combining the elements that makes serial killing distinct from other forms of multiple murder involves: a link between drive and desire, with the serial killer

killing for his own pleasure rather than for money or serving some higher political or religious purpose; a random attack, as no specific individual or place is under attack; and extended lengths of time between attacks, permitting the serial killer to develop a method. All of these elements are central to the very naming of the notion of the serial killer.

Looking to the naming of the notion, the etymology of serial killer is relatively short. The concept of the serial killer is a fairly new phenomenon making it possible to trace its precise inception as the term has been in existence for less than 30 years. Given its name by FBI agent Robert Ressler, serial killing was known by other names. Before the coining of the term serial killing, these murders were known as “stranger killings” and “crimes in series” in Britain and were referred to as “repeat killings” in the United States. The continual renaming of the concept draws attention to the naming process itself with each possible name drawing upon a different concept.

“Stranger killings” places emphasis on the relationship between victim and murderer – accentuating the causation of the crime. There is nothing to say that these crimes are indeed repetitive yet the term is bound-up with the notion of the serial killer, as we know it today stressing the initial importance of motive of the crime. The stranger, the unknown, is one who cannot be reasoned with. What could be the reason for killing someone you do not even know? How can a murder be solved if there is no connection between the murderer and the victim? The concept of stranger killings demands these questions to be asked. Georg Simmel theorizes the stranger not as “the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person

who comes today and stay to morrow” (Simmel 1). The stranger is part of a group and yet not in that he has not and will not belong to the group. Calling attention to membership and non-membership, inclusion and exclusion, the notion of the “stranger killer” functions as a warning on marginality.

The peculiarity of the crime is that in these stranger killings the murder is not committed by a friend or relative or someone known to the victim. Is this then revealing that it is understandable when strangers are not involved – when people murder those they know? What does this then say about the collective? There is comfort in knowing there is a relationship between victim and murderer – comfort in knowing your murderer.

Shifting away from the motives involved in the murder “repeat killings” emphasizes the multiple murder aspect of these crimes. When serial killers began to command the attention of law enforcement of the United States then President, Ronald Reagan, was the one to begin referring to this new breed of serial killer as “repeat killers” – taking attention away from the randomness of the murders and placing emphasis on the on-going nature of the crime. Repetition implies that each killing is the same as the last – marking no distinction between the murders, or victims. With each murder being a repetition of the prior one, there is no new evidence being contributed, nothing new being added. The notion of repeat killing hints at mindless repetition, no additional thought put in from one murder to the next. Drawing from this term, serial killer factors in the same ongoing nature of repeat killings, but adding a distinction between each part of the series.

Ressler's term picks up concepts from each other the prior names given to the present notion of serial killing as well as taking influence from what the British called "crimes in series". Ressler writes that it "seemed a highly appropriate way of characterizing the killings of those who do one murder, then another and another in a fairly repetitive way" (Ressler and Schachtman 30). Repetition is not Ressler's only concern, or Reagan's term would have sufficed. In addition to this numerical reasoning for the naming of the serial killer, Ressler also chose the name based on memories of the "serial adventures we use to see on Saturday at the movies ... each week you'd be lured by another episode, because at the end of each one was a cliff-hanger" (Seltzer 37). The wording of Ressler's sentence produces much intrigue – words such as adventures, lured and cliff-hanger all relate back to the current concept of the serial killer, but of primary importance in what Ressler remarks is the serial story. Suddenly the repetitive nature takes back seat to the captivating ability the crimes have.

Series was first used to describe a set of things that are of one type arranged in a line or a connection, a link or bond between objects. The term serial draws on the notion of the series and was first used in 1840 in reference to Charles Dickens' novels, which were published one part at a time, rather than all at once. The story is released in sequence slowly in order to increase demand in order to satisfy the curiosity of the readers. It was an effective way to make a living in order to charge less per installment and increase readership through intrigue. To ensure the reader was left wanting more each chapter would end with a cliffhanger, a suspenseful situation left to be resolved in the next section.

This serial story model involving the cliffhanger translated itself to cinema in the early 20th century. Film serials, the serial form that Ressler makes reference to, began as short films referred to as “chapter plays” that functioned the same way as the serial novel – each short chapter would end with a cliffhanger enticing the audience to return the following week to find out what happens to the hero or heroine. Since the early 20th century films have shifted to a sequel model where an entire film can be left off in a cliffhanger that indicates a sequel will be released. Like Dickens’ incentives for the serial story, the film serial is founded on monetary incentives, functioning as a way to have audiences paying to see more, paying to satisfy their curiosity.

Again to increase viewership, the serial structure has made its most recent media appearance in television programming. The very structure of television itself is based on the series. The TV series, a word literally derived from serial, functions as a place where week-after-week audiences tune in at a specific time to see the continuation of a television show. Like the serial story and film serial, there are common characters, plot lines and an ongoing story being told. There is a thread that weaves each part all together and toys with the audience with its inconclusive segments. This serial structure that is so largely engrained in our media watching experiences is the basis for the notion of the serial killer, according to Ressler. Ressler views the serial killer as the reader left in suspense, each murder only piquing his curiosity, but there is also a way to see the serial killer as author, leaving everyone else in constant suspense until his apprehension – each murder adding another piece to the puzzle, heightening anticipation of what is to come.

The cliffhanger is used in the serial story as the device that creates suspense. Not exclusive to the serial story, cliffhangers have been used since the beginning of storytelling. A notable example of the early use of the cliffhanger is the story of *One Thousand and One Nights* – an Arabian tale dating back to 800-900 AD. It is a story of a queen who uses the cliffhanger to postpone her pending execution. In telling the king a story every night and leaving it off with a cliffhanger the queen's life has importance as long as she holds the end to the story, thus buying her more time before her execution.

In the Victorian era the cliffhanger was used in the same manner of developing suspense often literally involving someone hanging off of the end of a cliff at the end of a chapter. The cliffhanger and the serial story, two closely intertwined ideas, shape the notion of the serial killer into a narrative-like structure. Unlike the serial story, the serial killer is a narrative without closure – it is a story that ends in a cliffhanger.

Viewing the serial killer in terms of being a narrative, as the notion of the series suggests, each crime is a new chapter in an ongoing sequence begging questions about authorship and power. The serial story is used for economic reasons, creating audience interest and therefore earning profits for the author/film/television channel. Ressler's notion speaks to this model, this view that there is a set hierarchy between producer and consumer or author and viewer. Ressler sees the serial killer as the one left hanging after each of his crimes with a piqued curiosity for more. To Ressler it is a relationship between the serial killer and his crimes – but where does Ressler's own interest and concern fit in? Where does the rest of society take part?

The serial killer has power over the situation and authorship of the story, elevating him above the status of audience. We may disseminate his story, but it is his to tell – it is his to control. Everyone else then functions as the audience, anxiously awaiting a conclusion, latching on to every segment of the serial crimes. The audience, specifically law enforcement, then battles the serial killer for the power to end the story: who will prevail, who will choose how and when the story/case will end (if at all)? In “Serial killing and the transformation of the social” author Jon Stratton discusses this narrative view of serial killing stating:

“The serial killer produces a narrative without closure but also a plural narrative. It is a narrative without a guarantee of the reinstatement of a rational social order in a final revelatory closure ... In the narrative of serial killing death is not an end, a moment of final climax, but an anti-climax, a melodramatic pause in an individual narrative” (Stratton 92).

Each murder committed by a serial killer leaves the public at the edge of their seats waiting to find out what will happen next; will the police prevail, or will the killer claim another victim? In this sense each murder acts like the end of a chapter in the book of the serial killer; however, the serial nature of the crimes simultaneously take place on a larger scale with the apprehension of each serial killer marking the end of the chapter of the book on serial killing. It is only upon the apprehension of one serial killer that society becomes aware of the presence of more. The crimes are serial in relation to each individual killer, but also in the continual cliffhanger created at the thought that more serial killers are out there. The fear the serial killer creates is greater than the fear of the individual killer; each serial killer contributes to the never-ending cliffhanger of the fear of the unknown.

Ressler is appealing to the notion that there is an end in sight. His reference to serial films comes with the closure given to the audience at the end of the series. As the very naming of the serial killer suggests, there is a need for order to be restored, for the final chapter to come to a nice and tidy close. It is this closure that the collective is seeking when discussing the serial killer. The collective seeks refuge in restoring rational order and will pursue any avenues necessary to find this when faced with the crimes of the serial killer. In addition to the naming of the serial killer, the nature of these serial crimes force the collective to *have* to understand the actions of the serial killer: making action so perverse that the collective cannot avoid trying to understand. This same need for knowing is reflected in the early detective novel where:

“There is a certain self-reflexive strain in the detective novel: it is a story of the detective’s effort to tell the story, i.e., to reconstitute what “really happened” around and before the murder, and the novel is finished not when we get the answer to ‘Whodunit?’ but when the detective is finally able to tell ‘the real story’ in the form of a linear narrative” (Zizek 49).

Serial killers create a detective in all of us, leaving us searching for ways to explain their crimes. It is through exploring the ‘talk’ surrounding these accounts of understanding that the serial killer can be better understood in terms of the collective. Of the many accounts let us look to: the profiling account, further understanding where Ressler is coming from; the logical extension of society account; and the serial killer’s account.

I. THE PROFILING ACCOUNT

Psychological profiling was developed in New York in the 1950s specifically for the purpose of assisting police pursuits in the apprehension of multiple

murderers. Freudian psychiatrist James Brussel was inserted into a case to develop a profile of what he thought the criminal would be like based on the nature of the crime. Following Brussel's work, in the early 1970s the FBI set up the Behavioral Science Unit, a division that uses the modern disciplines of psychology and sociology to paint a portrait of the "serial killer" in order to understand the figure.

The text of the profiler focuses on numbers, statistics and the ability to calculate trends and behaviour. The Behavioural Science Unit continued to expand as the serial killer became increasingly present in the United States. As the story goes, homicides rates in the 1980s had more than doubled since the 1960s. Cases were becoming increasingly difficult to solve not because of the increased numbers, but because of the shift in cause linked to the crime. In fact, homicides were being committed inexplicably, unlike homicides of the past that had a direct link between the victim and offender. The United States government reacted to this trend by opening the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (Vi-CAP), a department within the FBI dedicated to understanding this "new" form of violent criminal.

On this task force was Robert Ressler, the man who coined the term serial killer. Ressler was a FBI agent who was transferred to Vi-CAP from the Behavioral Science Unit. Vi-CAP is comprised of a centralized computer database that houses information on unsolved homicides. Looking for trends in homicides that take place in multiple places, the goal of Vi-CAP is to detect methods and motives of homicides in order to increase the likelihood of solving crimes. This emphasis on numbers and facts permeates the textbook definition given to the serial killer by the FBI. Upon its initial inception "serial killer" was classified as "a person who kills more than three

victims, during more than three events, at three or more locations, with a cooling-off period in between” (Innes 6). The FBI has since updated the definition to “an offender associated with the killing of at least four victims, over a period greater than seventy-two hours” (Seltzer 9). Three victims becomes four and the serial killer is given a time frame requiring he take more than 72 hours to kill his four victims. This method of identifying a serial killer externalizes the notion: numbers become the determining factor as to whether or not there is a serial killer at large.

Placing this importance on numbers and statistics continues to affect the profiling account of the serial killer. Obsessed with accounting for all serial killer crimes, debates arise over whether or not the serial killer is as rampant as many believe. Leyton perpetuates the idea of the rampant serial killer contending:

“Their numbers do continue to grow at a disturbing rate: until the 1960s, they were anomalies who appeared perhaps once a decade; but by the 1980s, one was spawned virtually each month. Today, according to unofficial U.S. Justice Department estimates, there may be as many as one hundred multiple murderers killing in America, stealing the lives of thousands” (Leyton 22).

In contrast, Joseph Fisher, author of *Killer Among Us: Public reactions to serial murder*, attests the serial killer is quite rare, stating that “although estimates vary widely, perhaps only 10 serial murderers are active in the United States every year, and they may account for just 100 murders annually, or less than 1 percent of the total homicide count” (Fisher 13). Bringing in some more statistics, Fisher then compares death by serial killer to a form of death he shows to be just as statistically probable – lightning.

The language of numbers appeals to the notion that there is truth in numbers and validity in statistics. Making chaos understandable, numbers seem to collect the mayhem that serial killers create. The widespread panic created within the collective can be eased by illustrating the equal chance that you have of being killed by a serial killer as you do from being killed by lightening. This language of numbers is the basis of the profiling account of serial killers. To the profiler, in order to understand the serial killer the chaos must be boiled down to calculable facts. To predict behaviour there need to be trends and these trends point to an attempt to understand the Other in order to classify the unclassifiable.

In the name of classification “serial killer” becomes the broad term used to describe these particular multiple murderers. In making a group out of these individual killers, the profiling account speaks to a notion that these men are all the same on the basis of their shared actions. What is discovered from this grouping is then thought to reveal other commonalities of this group – illustrating a pattern in prior actions that lead up to the action under investigation, the serial killing. Stratton comments on this way of studying the serial killers as a group:

“With functionalist sociology’s concern with normativeness ... This kind of profiling assumes that serial killers as a group are as quantifiable as any other normative grouping within the social. It either discounts the individual serial killer’s anomic relation to the social or assumes that anomic people themselves form a normative, quantifiable grouping within the social” (Stratton 87).

Determining the motive for one serial killer is then thought to shed light on the motive of all serial killers. In viewing serial killers as a group it is as if to say that

since they are all “afflicted” with this desire to kill then they belong together as a group for study.

Talking about serial killers as a group is not distinct to the profiling account, in fact all accounts lump the individual killers together as a recognizable group – is that not what is being done in this paper? As each killer is recognized as other he is grouped together with the rest of the Other as a means of understanding the Other, rather than as individual anomalies. In the profiling account this grouping is used to better diagnose the serial killer, to understand motives, actions, psychology, and to use data to predict early warning signs that a serial killer is in the midst.

The serial killing is talked about like a disease with recognizable warning signs and symptoms. Forensic psychiatrist and serial killer profiler, John Marshall McDonald developed what is now known as the McDonald triad, or the triad of sociopathy. The sociopath, or the psychopath, is defined by his or her psychological gratification in criminal, sexual or aggressive impulses and the inability to learn from past mistakes. The triad could then include the likes of rapists and shoplifters. Some could argue it is present in most people under certain circumstances, and yet is used most often to predict early warning signs of a serial killer. The triad continues the talk of the profiling account that human behaviour can be calculated and predicted if studied effectively.

The triad itself consists of chronic bedwetting, fire setting and the torturing of small animals – all of which are said to point to future sociopathic behaviour. Developed by MacDonald in a 1963 paper titled “The Threat to Kill”, the triad was based on a study of hospitalized patients who had, at some point in time, threatened

to kill someone. The three characteristics of the triad illustrate the reliance on statistics to determine facts. Two of the three elements are crimes in and of themselves. In this reliance on statistics, the list provided by the triad consists of two cases of childhood criminal activity – an understandable precursor for adult criminal activity and ... bedwetting.

Logic does not appear present in the profiling account, as no logical explanation is provided to prove cause-and-effect between bedwetting and serial killing. Profiling appeals to understanding in numbers – the only form of understanding of the serial killer found to be possible. Statistics tend to reveal a shallow understanding and also a sense of security in “facts”. With all of the work of the profilers, it is important to recognize the profiling account as unsuccessful in reality. To “qualify” as a serial killer there is the necessity to kill at least four victims over a period greater than 72 hours before being considered a serial killer, by the FBI profiler’s standard. Without a doubt many individuals possess the potential to become a serial killer, but they are apprehended before having a chance to strike the necessary four times. These individuals will never be known as serial killer and, subsequently, they will not influence the concept and understanding of the serial killer. It is only those who can outlast the profilers and make it to four or more murders that fit the mold. The profiling account then speaks to this escape from the law as the notion of the serial. We idly sit by as these murderers are able to continue their series of killings as the law is unable to capture these individuals time and time again.

The “success” of a serial killer then is dependant on the ability to escape the law and go undetected. This ability to stand outside of the law is unique to the serial killer. Going back to comparisons between other forms of multiple murders, the importance of police detection is lacking in cases of mass murderers and spree killers. The one time strike of mass murderers and the short period of time of the attacks of spree killers mean that there was little, if anything, the police and profilers could have done to stop them. The nature of both of these crimes typically leads to a speedy arrest or the killer committing suicide. There is little room for a prolonged police investigation whereas the serial killer begins a game of cat and mouse with the profiler. Without the failure of the profiler to detect a serial killer and prevent the serial killer from committing murder there would be no serial killer to profile. The profiling account seeks to create a psychological and sociological understanding of the serial killer in the name of law enforcement and apprehension of violent criminals. Ironically, the profiling account relies on the “success” of the serial killer to have a figure to profile. Devoid of the ability to escape the law there would be no such thing as a serial killer. Without the criminal there is no need for a detective.

The game of cat-and-mouse is based on the premise that the pursuit of the cat is constant in spite of near captures and repeated escapes made by the mouse. Unable to defeat the cat, the mouse manages to at least escape the cat. This concept is often associated with a never-ending pursuit. Just as the mouse escapes the cat, there have been several cases where serial killers have escaped from the law. One notable escapee is Jeffery Dahmer, who slipped away from the police on three separate occasions before his final apprehension. Each run-in with the law took place in three

separate locations over a period of time greater than 72 hours – I wonder what these numbers reveal in the profiling account!

On the first occasion, Dahmer was pulled over by police for driving under the influence. Unbeknownst to the police, intoxicated Dahmer was on his way to the local garbage dump to dispose of his first victim. The garbage bags storing the dead body in the backseat of Dahmer's car went undetected and Dahmer was let off on a warning to head back home and not drive under the influence again. Dahmer was not as lucky the second time he had a run in with the law. Dahmer was arrested and sent to jail for the sexual assault of a 14-year-old boy. Dahmer's father, who had suspicions that there was something "off" about his son, pleaded to the court to keep Dahmer in jail for the in the best interest of everyone. The court denied his request and Dahmer was released – only to kill again. In his third and final escape of the law, one of Dahmer's victims managed to escape his home while Dahmer went out to restock on beer. Drugged and naked, the young boy made it to the street in front of Dahmer's apartment and was eventually able to get help from police. The police went with the boy to Dahmer's apartment to question Dahmer, who had since returned from the store. Dahmer calmly explained that the young boy was his lover who had a drinking problem. He showed nude photos of the boy to the police to show evidence of their relationship. The police bashfully left – leaving the young boy alone in Dahmer's "care".

Dahmer's escape from the law echoes the relationship between many serial killers and their profilers. Contrary to the reality of the profiler's lack of success in catching the serial killer, fictional representations of the profiler tell a different tale.

Fictional accounts of the profiler depict the profiler as constantly successful in solving serial homicide cases. Like the detective novel, the fictionalized accounts of profiling end with the profilers nabbing their man. The discrepancy between fictional and non-fictional profiling accounts leaves room for inquiry.

There are dozens of television programs focusing on crime, specifically homicide and even serial murder. From the multiple *CSI: Crime Scene Investigators* and *Law and Order* series to *Criminal Minds*, *Dexter*, *NCIS: Naval Criminal Investigative Services*, *The Mentalist* and *Bones*, to name a few, television programs focused on crime are splattered across the television specifically focused on detection and profiling. David Schmid contends that we find both pleasure and anger in watching the serial killer escape the law: “the criminal’s rejection of the law is horrifying but also exhilarating. The serial killer both outrages and thrills us by his seeming ability to stand outside the law” (Schmid 24). The profiling account on television allows the audience to satisfy curiosity and pleasure in watching the serial killer escape, but then affirms our confidence in the law as the killer is caught at the end of the episode.

The television series *Criminal Minds* stands out as the best fictional representation of the profiling account as it focuses on the lives of the FBI’s Behavioural Analysis Unit – depicting a fictional version of the profiling unit Ressler worked for. The investigators of *Criminal Minds* all possess a thorough knowledge of serial killer psychology and are able to profile killers immediately after hearing about them. The profiles they create paint a picture of their suspect which is then used to help the BAU team along with the police find and arrest the culprit.

The team is rarely proven wrong – with nearly every episode ending in the capture of the criminal thanks to the expertise of these FBI agents and their knowledge of psychology and sociology. The cat-and-mouse game is still present with the serial killer getting away a few times in each episode, but ultimately the savvy team catches their mouse. This profiling account calls for the restoration of order. The collective's faith in the law is restored as profiling is seen as useful and necessary to put an end to serial killing. There is a denial of reality – not only a denial that there is no way to explain the other, as the non-fiction profiling account denies, but also a denial in the failures of the law.

Fictionalized profiling accounts work to reestablish faith in law and order by sending a message through the media that the law is on our side. It is the collective who create and demand these television programs, speaking to our need to believe in the effectiveness of profiling. The fear of the serial killer is, in part, the fear of random death, but it is also a fear of being unprotected. The security brought in studying and analyzing as a form of understanding is not only what the actual profilers are appealing to, it is also what everyone involved in the profiling account appeals to. The profiling account functions as a way to explore the fascination with the serial killer while easing anxiety in a search for understanding. Studying the serial killer in such a rational, calculated and statistical manner disassociates the profiler from any personal interest and intrigue there may be in the figure. Seen as a necessity to understanding, the profiling account allows us to explore the other in restrictive and acceptable terms.

II. The Logical Extension Account

The logical extension account views the serial killer as an extension of society – as an exaggerated personification of the rest of the collective and its ideologies. The account is talked about in terms of: the individual, where the serial killer is an “everyman”; celebrity culture, where the serial killer becomes the logical extension of our star system; and consumerism, where the serial killer becomes a logical extension of consumer behaviour. Each logical extension account speaks to our fears of society’s current situation, whether it is the mask of normalness, the lack of substance in our celebrities, or the serial tendencies of the consumer.

a. The serial killer as logical extension of the individual

Derived from the profiling account, serial killers are found to be “abnormally normal”. Rather than being dismissed as insane, the serial killer is instead found to be extremely normal in most aspects of his life. According to this logical extension account, serial killers are shown to be extremely calculating and aware of their actions. Rather than being amoral beings, they are just immoral. In fact, they are very ordinary individuals:

“...though the multiple killer often may appear cold and show no remorse, and even deny responsibility for his crime, serious mental illness or psychosis is rarely present. Most unexpectedly, in the background, in personality, and even in appearance, the multiple murderer is extraordinarily ordinary” (Levin & Fox 48).

Mastering the art of simulation to masquerade in society, the serial killer could then be anyone – he is an everyman and, that said, he could be any man. Leyton contends that serial killers are not the freaks of our society; rather, they can be seen as a “logical extension of many of the central themes in their culture – of worldly

ambition, of success and of failure” (Leyton 22) he goes on to note that serial killers are among the most class-conscious individuals in society – aware of every nuance of power and status.

This account talks to notions of normal versus abnormal appealing to the idea that the Other should be visible. Contributor to this extension of society account is David Schmid, author of *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*. Schmid’s focus is on the serial killer as logical extension of our celebrity culture, but he also contributes to the logical extension of the everyman line of thinking: “This ordinariness quickly becomes problematic,” notes David Schmid, “because it makes it difficult to distinguish serial killers from “normal” men, and consequently the categories of normal and abnormal start to blur” (Schmid 177).

This account speaks of “normalness” as though it is natural and the serial killer is unique in his ability to learn to blend in with society; however, we are all masters of disguise when it comes to normalcy. The tenets of “normal” are learned. One must look no further than Freud’s concept of the superego to see how we learn ideology to shape and control the id, our desires. Social practices of everyday normalness are learned by all of us; we all must put on our disguises to act in ways that are deemed appropriate. Attributing the serial killer with this skill of knowing how to act “normal” suggests that everyone else simply *is* normal – everyone else instinctively understands the hierarchies of class and social status. This concept perpetuates this notion that class, gender, race, etc. are natural to “normal” people.

This uncanny knowledge of “normalness” that the logical extension account attributes to the serial killer becomes a focal point that leads to the cliché of “the

killer next door”, the notion that your own next-door neighbour could be a serial killer and you don’t even know about it. *The Killer Next Door* is also the title of true crime novelist Ann Rule’s book on Ted Bundy. Rule shares her story of working alongside Bundy at a call centre, never having any idea that he could be capable of being a serial killer. This “killer next door” mentality brings new meanings to the term stranger killing, suggesting that even people you may think you know are truly strangers: how well can one really know another?

The recent case of Dennis Rader, more famously known as the BTK (Bind, Torture, Kill) killer, is so shocking for people to understand precisely because of Rader’s ability to blend in with society. Killing ten known victims from 1974-1991, Rader was discovered after he re-established contact with the authorities in 2004, after being “inactive” for thirteen years. A husband, a father, President of the Congregational Council of the Christ Lutheran Church and a Cub Scout leader – Rader was never even among the suspects for his crimes. Emotions are whipped into a frenzy as every neighbour and co-worked is seen as a potential killer.

This way of speaking as though anyone could be a potential serial killer is oriented towards notions of social isolation and alienation. The logical extension account appeals to the cliché that “we are all strangers” – a concept often linked to the city. Serial killers, then, become an urban disease – a product of weak community ties and dissolving moral values. Emile Durkheim stresses the importance of social facts on shaping a collective consciousness of moral obligations and social rules. Durkheim argues that: “There are in each of us...two consciences: one which is common to our group in its entirety...the other, on the contrary,

represents that in us which is personal and distinct, that which makes us an individual” (Durkheim 129). The serial killer as extension of the individual acts as a reminder of the dangers of a life without shared moral and social rules.

Attention is given to the double identity of the serial killer, but according to Durkheim, this idea of this double self applies to the whole of society:

“It is not without reason, therefore, that man feels himself to be double: he actually is double.... In brief, this duality corresponds to the double existence that we lead concurrently; the one purely individual and rooted in our organisms, the other social and nothing but an extension of society” (Durkheim 162).

Everyone, then, is an extension of society. Each individual functions as an extension of the ideological beliefs of his or her society. In this regard the serial killer is, arguably, less of an extension of society than the rest of the population and more of an individual – seeking to impulsively satisfy his own wants and needs without consideration of the moral and social demands society has in place.

The serial killer’s ability to appear “normal” draws attention to the ability that everyone has to appear “normal” and the fact that it is very much an appearance. Speaking of the serial killer in terms of the cliché “the killer next door” orients to the collective fear of estrangement from one another and our communities. It is a fear of the real – a fear of what would happen if everyone acted upon their impulses and a fear of what people are capable of desiring to do. If the Cub Scout and church leader is capable of murder, then what of everyone else?

b. Serial killer as logical extension of celebrity and consumerism

The logical extension of serial killer as celebrity and the logical extension of the serial killer as consumer are closely intertwined as the celebrity reinforces

consumer practices as consumers consume the celebrity. Chris Rojek, in his book *Celebrity*, contends that “we will not understand the peculiar hold that celebrities exert over us today unless we recognize that celebrity culture is irrevocably bound up with commodity culture” (14). Consumers flock to the serial killer, transforming the serial killer into a star; in turn, the serial killer strengthens notions of consumption by exemplifying extreme consumption and acting as a figure to consume.

Perhaps on the margins before their crimes, serial killers are at the centre of attention after their crimes. Take Robert Pickton for example: Robert Pickton, once nothing more than a pig farmer from British Columbia, has recently been canonized into the serial killer hall of fame as ‘Canada’s worst serial killer’. Apprehended in 2002, Pickton’s trial came to a close in December of 2007 when he was convicted of the second-degree murders of six young women. Mere months after his arrest, Pickton was already a reference in songs and the inspiration for an episode of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigators*. His celebrity skyrocketed in a matter of minutes. The media has already deemed Pickton a cultural legend, and this is not the first time instant fame has happened for a serial killer. Less than an hour after Jeffrey Dahmer’s arrest the media began their quest to obtain the rights to his story.

There are books, films and websites dedicated to the lives and murders of serial killers. The Internet houses forums for a serial killer fan following and auctions off serial killer memorabilia (cleverly referred to as murderabilia) for those who want to feel even closer to these killers. It has become possible to attain almost anything that has belonged to serial killers; from buying a piece of wood from Ed

Gein's home to owning a piece of Charles Manson's hair, there is nothing that money cannot buy for the serial killer obsessed.

David Schmid and Brian Jarvis stand out as the most significant contributors to the account of the serial killer as extension of celebrity and consumer. This account calls for an understanding of commodification and consumer behaviour, pointing more to the detriment of consumerism than to an understanding of the serial killer himself. Just as the previous logical extension account appeals to collective fears of alienation, the logical extension of celebrity and consumerism continue this appeal and the fear of the individual acting, in Durkheim's term, solely on behalf of their individual unlimited desires. Durkheim contends that these:

"Unlimited desires are insatiable by definition and insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity. Being unlimited, they constantly and infinitely surpass the means at their command; they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture" (Durkheim 247).

These desires must then be contained – this account heeds warning to the dangers that could occur if these desires continue uncontrolled.

The celebrity status obtained by the serial killer marks the start of this discussion. As there is no limit to commodification, Don Slater remarks, "Marx's capitalists are economic amoralist ... they are utterly indifferent to the specific use-values they produce, be they heroine or hospitals, so long as they can be sold on the market" (108). There is a market for this murderabilia, just like there is a market for serial killers, so they will be produced and sold. Though murderabilia is an example of obsessive commodification of the serial killer other forms are less controversial and more commonly practiced. The image of the serial killer has replaced the image

of the cowboy. Serial killers quickly become famous – put in the limelight as some sort of modern-day icon. This account of the serial killer demands that in order to make sense of the serial killer “we must be able to recognize [the objective] world as indeed having been made by us. If we do not ... then we see it as literally alien, as a natural environment that is beyond our control—which is how the world of objects appears” (Slater 104). In transforming the serial killer into an object for consumption, like the celebrity, the topic of alienation comes to the forefront. In exploring the relationship between commodity culture and the creation of the serial killer as a celebrity this logical extension account perceives the killer as closely resembling the consumer in our commodity culture.

In the past, fame has meant being honoured and acclaimed. Gaining fame was a long process, but this fame meant that your name became long lasting as a result. Today, fame is momentary; people want to be famous in their own lifetime and it requires very little to attain this fame. The lines between fame, notoriety, and celebrity have been blurred as celebrity and fame have become “the visible, rather than the talented” (Schmid 9)—“visibility is now an end in itself” (Gamson 9). The association between celebrity and ‘goodness’ is gone:

“It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between celebrity and notoriety because, although notoriety usually connotes ‘transgression, deviants and immortality ... today celebrity often involves transgressing ordinary moral rules by, for example, excessive conspicuous consumption, exhibitionist libidinous gratification, drug abuse, alcohol addiction, violence and so on’. Bearing this in mind, we might best interpret celebrity serial killers as continuous, rather than discontinuous, with the history of fame” (Schmid 10).

Rather than seeing the serial killer as an exception to the rule of celebrity, they must be seen as a part of our celebrity culture, for celebrity “need not be admirable, merely spectacular” (Schmid 10). And who could be more spectacular than the serial killer. In this respect, the serial killer becomes this logical extension of the star system.

This account of seeing the serial killer as a logical extension of celebrity then runs in line with the account of the serial killer as a logical extension of consumer culture. In the past someone became famous for his or her merits – for who they were as a person; now, fame is a construct of the media and people are famous for being commodities – for what they represent as an object. Slater marks this shift:

“In the ‘society of the spectacle’ all of reality has become alien and objective; we observe everyday life as a spectacle that unfolds without our participation, activity or involvement.

Everything has been deprived of its proper reality by being turned into signs and images on the basis of their commodification” (Slater 127).

Joshua Gamson applies this to the commodification of human subjects observing, “when persons are marketed for profit ... merit and game are separated and image overtakes substance” (Gamson 78). This image is no longer a subject, merely a representation of the subject—it is now thing-like in its form. This reification has become our way of both viewing and acting upon the world; through consumption we relate to the world. The creation of a dichotomy between subject and object means:

“Subjects are pure consciousness or reason, and external to nature and the material world. The latter, in turn, is emptied of mind or consciousness ... objects come to have meaning purely in terms of the uses to which they may be put by human subjects” (Slater 102).

Serial killers, like celebrities, are beneficial, as are all commodities, in their profitability. What then makes them profitable? Slater makes reference to W.F. Haug's view that the sale of goods depends on the "buyer's self-acknowledged need for the good in question: use value is a necessary condition of sale" (Slater 113). This account orients to the demand of the consumer – questioning why the collective is willing to spend money and time on the serial killer. What use-value can be found in consuming the serial killer? What satisfaction does the image of the serial killer promise us? What does the serial killer appeal to?

Initially the actions of the serial killer are what garner attention, but it is their image and their social representation that secure their celebrity. Schmid contends that "surely serial murderers are famous for what they do, not for who they are," yet, Schmid continues, "in the serial killer, however, action and identity are fused ... every detail of the murderer's life story, everything that concerns who he is, contributes to an understanding of what he has done." (Schmid 15-16) and it is the search for this understanding that appeals to the consumers. This account reiterates the profiling account as there is this search to find solace in the rational. We tear apart the actions and the mind of the serial killer in a desperate search for meaning. The struggle to rationalize the serial killer extends "the model of commodity fetishism ... [illustrating how] the modern world is increasingly dominated by rationalization and instrumental rationality and that this orientation reduces both people and things to the status of manipulable, calculable objects" (Slater 117).

The celebrity structure is talked about in its relation to consumerism. In Graeme Turner's book *Understanding Celebrity* he notes the way that film stars

“operated as a means of promoting the values of consumerism during the 1920s and the 1930s” (Turner 40), comparatively, the serial killer became a dominant cultural representation in the 1960s when an “alternative cultural framework” was erupting (Schmid 113). In this account, resisting the capitalist order becomes futile and, instead, the serial killer became a sort of warped reflection of the consumer. Both are driven by a sense of lack and alienation and neither can control their need to consume and objectify. Jarvis points out that “to ‘consume’ is to devour and destroy, to waste and obliterate” (Jarvis 329)—a definition that characterizes both the serial killer and the consumer and as Durkheim contends this consumption only leads to wanting more and more: “The more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs” (Durkheim 248).

The logical extension of the consumer account speaks to the notion of lack and alienation. The account contends that the consumption that both the consumer and the serial killer partake in is driven by this sense of lack that both figures are faced with. Both figures are caught up in class-consciousness. Class-consciousness is a major aspect of consumerism – we aim to buy better things that can place us on a higher rung in society. Judith Williamson observes “the fundamental differences in our society are still class differences, but use of manufactured goods as a means of creating class or groups forms an overlay on them” (Williamson quoted in Slater 114). The serial killer bypasses manufactured items and instead consumes the most direct reification of class: the individuals who belong to their target class, producing the serial killer as a resentment killer cliché.

The resentment killer cliché maintains that, rather than attempt to elevate their class status, serial killers seek revenge on the classes that reject them and begin their “extended campaign of vengeance” (Leyton 28). They murder strangers who become objects that represent these classes they so adamantly envy and resent. A common example for this is Ted Bundy, “a figure who would become, for many, the personification of serial murder” (Schmid 197). Bundy was illegitimately born (unbeknownst to him until adulthood) into a lower-middle class family. Bundy spent his life trying to climb the social ladder in the hopes of becoming accepted in upper-middle class society. In his childhood it became obvious he was ashamed of his family and by adolescence he was stealing cars and luxury items to give him the appearance of being from a better upbringing. An intelligent young man, it became easier for him to attain the rise in rank he so desperately desired through studies at University, becoming an attorney, and being briefly romantically involved with a socialite (whom he rejected once she accepted his proposal of marriage) (Michaud 10). He was well on his way to attaining his goals, but seemed unable, or unwilling, to maintain his façade. He began to prey on “the middle class and the desirable” (Leyton 78); consuming the class he longed to belong in.

The search to satisfy their need for revenge on society begins, but like consumerism there is no end to needs. Mark Seltzer compares the two through examining the serial. Seltzer contends, “the question of serial killing cannot be separated from the general forms of seriality, collection and counting conspicuous in consumer society and the forms of fetishism – the collecting of things and representations” (Seltzer 65). Some consumers collect designer handbags and some

serial killers collect skulls. To both collectors the items they collect represent a certain ideal. The handbag is separated from its origins and the relationship between objects and subjects is erased. The handbag does not represent poor working conditions in third world countries; instead, it represents “your personality in an extraordinary way”, “high status”, “all that is exclusive, sexy, and stylish”, the possibilities are endless because they represent whatever you need them to represent. Similarly, the victims of serial killers are not viewed as someone’s children, or an innocent person; they are objectified and seen as an item that too can represent whatever the killer needs it to represent — be it control or masculinity, for example. Unfortunately, according to this account, no one item can satisfy the needs of either the serial consumer or the serial killer “despite the advertising promises of unique purchases that offer instant fulfillment, there are no singular only serial objects in consumer society and ‘each commodity fills one gap while opening up another: each commodity and sale entails a further one’” (Jarvis, quoting Haug 340).

This account warns against consumerism on a large scale and continues on to pinpoint specific warnings about consumer culture, for example, the treatment of women. The objectification of women is nothing new to consumer culture. Like celebrities and serial killers, the woman is often turned into an object to be marketed in our commodity culture. Consumers often aim to either be or possess women through purchasing products associated with the objectified female; however, serial killers take this one step further and take “the promises of advertising too literally – acting out the fantasy of a world ready-made for our consumption” (Jarvis 335). In this light, this account speaks of serial killing as a reflection of a consumer culture

that values the masculine. The serial killer seeks dominance and wants to demonstrate his virility and control. Like the male consumer, the serial killer wants to possess the woman, but uses violence instead of money to do so. It is considered normal male behaviour to have a trophy wife, yet it is shocking that serial killers collect trophies of women they kill. In both cases the woman is objectified into a commodity fetishism that promises this idealized masculinity. Viewing the serial killer as a logical extension of consumer culture “unmasks the serial killer as a gothic double of the serial consumer.” (Jarvis 328).

Jarvis takes this one step further in discussing the ways the consumer then goes on to consume the ultimate consumer (the serial killer) – a form of the serial killer as celebrity account. Though there is the fascination with a rationalization of the serial killer as outlined previously, there is also the basic fact that we are a society fixed on consumption. Within our society there is a tendency to be drawn to scenes of violence.

As Lacan contends:

“These images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body . . . One has only to listen to children aged between two and five playing, alone or together, to know that the pulling off of the head and the ripping open of the belly are themes that occur spontaneously to their imagination, and that this is corroborated by the experience of the doll torn to pieces” (Lacan 179).

Mark Seltzer defines this allure with violent scenes as the makings of a “wound culture: the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gather around shock, trauma, and the wound” (Seltzer 1).

Seltzer concretizes a common conception that we are drawn to the serial killer to

satisfy our need to consume this violence. Like the collection of handbags or skulls, the representations of the serial killer can differ, but the need to consume them has been long lasting. Jarvis furthers this idea stating:

“The spectacular increase in images and narratives of serial killing in millennial western culture, from the media coverage of historical homicide to the proliferation of fictional and supernatural fantasies of serial homicide, ultimately embodies the consumption of consumption in a necrocapitalist order.” (Jarvis 343)

The serial killer as celebrity represents the epitome of consumerism. The celebrity is commodified to illustrate who and what we should envy and desire. These icons of consumption, the serial killer and the celebrity, serve the function of continuing the proliferation of consumerism.

Commodity culture is talked about as being so pervasive that it is difficult, if not impossible, to live outside of. The serial killer attempts to digress against capitalist society, but does so only through divergent forms of consumption. As the doors to fame are opened by a need for more and more celebrities to consume, the serial killer is then seen as this logical extension of celebrity culture. In accepting our role in the creation of this commodity fetish the serial killer is then seen as a logical extension of our consumer culture both in the transformation of the figure into a commodity as well as the individual himself as a mirror of a serial consumer.

The logical extension accounts pull away from the actions of the serial killer and stress a focus on the potential dangers of our society. The accounts speak to collective fears about the state of society and the logical extension of where things may lead. The serial killer is talked about as a “worst case scenario” warning

pointing to the dangers of consumption, current paths to fame and the objectification of women.

III. The Serial Killer Account

The serial killer account combines clichés from the previously mentioned accounts and includes many others. Serial killers are turned to for insight on their own behaviour. Court cases and interviews are examined for meaning. The serial killer account covers a lot of ground, but underlying each of the clichés is the denial of control. Blame is shifted onto something else, whether it be insanity, the supernatural, or simply uncontrollable urges. The account given by the serial killer accepts no responsibility for his actions. Latching onto preconceived notions, the serial killer adopts common clichés about murderers in order to explain their actions in a way that seems to satisfy the collective. In outlining these multiple accounts of the serial killer commonalities appear.

To begin, there is the talk of insanity. John Haigh, the Acid Bath Murderer, claimed insanity in order to be excused of his crimes. At his trial he attempted to prove his insanity by drinking his own urine, which had the effect of disgusting the jury, but not proving his insanity. Roger Bastide and Jean McNeil in *The sociology of mental disorder*, stake the claim that it is the “collective consensus [that] defines insanity and decides when it is cured; in the system of madness the ‘madman’ is the least important element”. Insanity is a construct of the collective to explain difference and to dismiss the other.

When serial killers first began to make a prolific appearance, a widely held belief was that these men were insane based on the ability the serial killer has to defy

all laws of the rational: therefore he *must* be insane. The serial killer can plead insanity, aligning himself with this insanity account. Insanity can mean the difference between life and death if the serial killer is facing capital punishment. But, as Bastide and McNeil indicate, it is the collective who define the insane and by legal definition insanity is based on the 19th Century McNaghten Rules of whether or not the offender understands the difference between right and wrong and whether or not the offender flees or makes an attempt to hide the crime. Fleeing is the very nature of the serial killer – it is the fleeing that makes them “qualify” as a serial killer. The appeal to insanity then becomes an excuse told by the serial killer shaped around collective notions of insanity as a logical explanation for irrationality.

Instead of speaking of insanity many serial killers discuss the presence of an “evil” inside of them. Supernatural appeals are less strictly defined by law and create an interesting explanation for the irrational. The accounts are endless:

"I was born with the devil in me. I could not help the fact that I was a murderer, no more than the poet can help the inspiration to sing. I was born with the evil one standing as my sponsor beside the bed where I was ushered into the world, and he has been with me since"
(H.H. Holmes);

"Satan gets into people and makes them do things they don't want to" (Herbert Mullin); "I will be avenged. Lucifer dwells within all of us!"(Richard Ramirez); and the list goes on. These accounts appeal to a notion among the collective that there must be some form of innate evil at work within the serial killer. Joseph Fisher explores public reactions to serial murder and details the common reaction of turning to the supernatural for answers. He comments about how hastily people turn to the supernatural when reason becomes difficult to understand: “responses to serial killers

demonstrate how thin the veneer of rationality is and how quickly people revert to atavistic ways of thinking” (Fisher 18).

The serial killer account also includes the previously mentioned accounts about logical extension of society as the serial killer maintains he has no control over him impulses and he is man divided unable to control his dark side. Jeffrey Dahmer describes his need to kill along the lines of consumerism:

"My consuming lust was to experience their bodies. I viewed them as objects, as strangers. It is hard for me to believe a human being could have done what I've done ... I was completely swept along with my own compulsion. I don't know how else to put it. It didn't satisfy me completely so maybe I was thinking another one will. Maybe this one will and the numbers started growing and growing and just got out of control, as you can see... I think in some way I wanted it to end, even if it meant my own destruction " (Dahmer quoted in Leyton 78).

Again, the idea of control over ones desires is present as the serial killer's account provides another “excuse” for his actions. As exemplified in Dahmer's speech, the need to be caught is intertwined with their uncontrollable addiction. Without the self control to stop, or turn himself in, the serial killer needs an outside source to stop him: "For Heaven's sake catch me before I kill more. I cannot control myself" (William Heirens). The serial killer speaks as a powerless being, in stark contrast to the power he exhibits over the lives of his victims.

Both the supernatural cliché and the uncontrollable consumer cliché lead back to Durkheim's notion of the dual self. When asked what he thought when seeing a pretty girl walking down the street, Edmund Kemper replied, "One side of me says, 'I'd like to talk to her, date her'. The other side of me says, 'I wonder how

her head would look on a stick?" The serial killer expresses this pull between what he knows to be normal and acceptable and what he is driven to do.

The serial killer account calls attention to desire and drive as the serial killer explains his action through multiple ways of denying control. The serial killer account involves the serial killer speaking to an audience – the collective who have deemed him the serial killer, the collective who is searching for meaning. Whether or not what the serial killer says is true is not of importance. What is important, then, is the serial killer's use of the same clichés the collective uses to describe his crimes. The account of the serial killer appeals to these widely held beliefs either as a way of seeking sympathy or because the serial killer, like the collective, can only work within these collective restraints.

Like the account of the serial killer, I cannot provide an understanding for my own compulsion of learning about serial killers. In my research on the serial killer I have not come any closer to an understanding of myself than the collective has come to an understanding on the serial killer. I am driven by my desire to know about the serial killer and I am not sure what motivates this desire. As the serial killer goes from stranger/other in our society to a logical extension of society, I shift from a victim of the serial killers' allure to a participant with a serial impulse.

The multiple accounts used to understand the serial killer shed little light on why the serial is the way he is. Instead, these accounts reveal the reaction of the collective to the Other. Collective fears are brought to the surface as society is faced with the irrational. Each of the accounts works to make the otherness of the serial killer visible and, once visible, hopefully comprehensible. The collective resists any

acceptance of the serial killer as being an ordinary occurrence and cannot accept the possibility that reality is harsh, cruel and that, at heart, we all possess uncontrollable desires. By turning to profilers, theorists, serial killers and our own perspectives, we utilize established clichés to define a workable understanding of the serial killer. Faced with the other, the collective reveals their true nature and their true fears.

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