SERIAL KILLING MYTHS VERSUS REALITY:

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SERIAL KILLER MOVIES

MADE BETWEEN 1980 AND 2001

Sarah Scott McCready, B.A.

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2002

APPROVED:

Tory J. Caeti, Major Professor
John Liederbach, Committee Member
D. Kall Loper, Committee Member
Robert W. Taylor, Chair of the
    Department of Criminal Justice
Eric J. Fritsch, Program Coordinator
    Of the Department of Criminal
    Justice
David W. Hartman, Dean of the School of
    Community Service
C. Neal Tate, Dean of the Robert B.
    Toulouse School of Graduate Studies

McCready, Sarah Scott., <u>Serial Killing Myths Versus</u>

<u>Reality: A Content Analysis Of Serial Killer Movies Made</u>

<u>Between 1980 and 2001</u>. Master of Science in Criminal

Justice, August 2002, 102pp., 28 tables, 1 figure,

references, 92 titles.

Public perceptions about serial homicide are more

mythical than fact. Myths about serial homicide are

perpetuated through several sources, especially the

entertainment media. The number of films depicting serial

killers and serial killing themes has increased in recent

years. However, the reality of these films is debatable.

This research examines the reality of the films

involving a serial killing theme. Hickey provides

statistical information on serial killers and serial

killings. A content analysis of the fifty top grossing

serial killer movies made between 1980 and 2001 was

conducted using variables from Hickey research. Research

shows similarities and differences between variables,

however, results concludes the entertainment media does not

accurately portray serial homicide.

Copyright 2002

By

Sarah Scott McCready

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Growth of the Serial Homicide Phenomenon

The serial homicide phenomena has become one of the most petrifying, yet captivating topics of interest in society. This particular crime has magnetized the public into a state of panic (Jenkins, 1994). The sensationalism of high profile killers has grown tremendously in the past twenty years (Surette, 1998; Jenkins, 1994).

A few high profile killers, The Zodiac Killer, Wayne Williams and Ted Bundy created a serial killing panic in the late 1960s and 1970s. The Zodiac killed people at random in the San Francisco area in the late 1060s and 1970s. While committing the murders, the Zodiac taunted the police, sent threatening letters and coded statements to the media and killed (by his own account) no less than fifty people. The Zodiac was never caught and the story became the inspiration for the Dirty Harry movies. Wayne Williams, a young African American male, killed over 20 black children in Atlanta, Georgia (Lane and Gregg 1995). Theodore Bundy shocked the nation with his horrendous acts of kidnapping and murder in the 1980s.

Ted Bundy was an attractive and charming man, not exactly what the public visualized as a typical serial killer.

Bundy was one of the most celebrated serial homicide cases in history (Jenkins, 1994). His crimes stunned, yet fascinated the general public. Together, The Zodiac, Bundy and Williams, set in motion a moral panic about serial killers. The killings were both random and targeted the most helpless elements of society, typically young women and children. A media-fueled panic ensued as the public increasingly began to fear random victimization by a serial killer. Other high profile killers such as Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, and The Hillside Stranglers also contributed to the serial killer panic.

In 1983, the Justice Department held a conference stating the danger of serial killers (Jenkins, 1994). According to newspapers in 1984, the FBI announced that about 5,000 people per year were killed by serial killers (Hickey, 2002). It was stated there were over 35 active serial killers operating at anytime in the United States (Jenkins, 1994). This caused a wide spread panic throughout the public. According to Hickey's research (2002), the media may have misinterpreted some information given by law enforcement which created disorder and anxiety.

This artificial wave of anxiety by the public is also referred to as a moral panic (Jenkins, 1994).

Much of the knowledge on serial homicide is guided by misinformation. Most of the information is sensationalized by the media. The facts get intertwined causing the social construction of myth (Hickey, 2002).

The growth of serial killers in the 1980s and throughout the years has brought many fans along with it. We construct the phenomenon and keep it alive. The public acts as the audience to serial killers. The killers are responding to us. Hence, the "observer may affect the observed" (Tithecott, 1997). These factors may also help explain the rise in the serial killer panic.

Overview on the Role of the Media

Newspapers, radio and television have been means by which the media has been able to influence public opinion. These three act as forms of communication for the outside world. The general public may be using the media as their only means of interpretation on crime issues. The media may not be delivering the full news story. Unless one works in the criminal justice system on a daily basis, one's images of crime and criminals may be distorted. This leaves it up to the public to fill in the missing gaps (Surette, 1998). Therefore, the public may be unaware it is only isolated

events that gain media attention. The entertainment media then produces films based on these celebrated and isolated events.

Film of the 1980s can be held responsible for the popularity of the serial killer trends (Simpson, 2000). Many novels have also been made supporting this appeal and fascination such as; *Silent Terror, The Cross-Killer, Rules of Prey, Ripper, Over the Edge* and *Silence of the Lambs* (Jenkins, 1994). However, the media is perhaps the most influential of forming public opinion about crime and criminals through movie advertisements. These can first entice and lure the audiences into theatres; then it is the masked villain and helpless victim which catch the public's attention. The commercials then leave the public hanging and asking for more. The entertainment media benefits tremendously by the public's desire for horror and adventure films. The revenue made by these films keeps Hollywood in business.

The majority of the public's perception of serial killers may originate from criminal characteristics and serial killer characters that are portrayed in film. Characters such as Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* and Mickey and Mallory in *Natural Born Killers* are seen as psychopaths (Surette, 1998). Once we see these types of

characters repeatedly, one may start to believe these images of villain versus victim. Therefore, these images may influence the public's perception on criminals and crime itself.

Common reactions to serial killer flicks are fear-based: sleeping with the lights on, checking the locks, looking under the bed or in the closets, or even installing an alarm system. The goal of the film is to create fear or thrills, however these films, especially when characterized as real, can also reinforce misperceptions. These misconceptions may then begin to shape the way people think about crime and criminals. However, these films may affect different people in different ways. While these films may horrify some, they may inspire and motivate others (Caputi, 1993). The exact relationship between watching serial killer films and a person's perception of the reality of serial killing is unknown.

Overview of the Mythmakers

A myth is an embellished story which is told repeatedly and is accepted as truth (Robinson, 2000). Myths are very controlling and can shape our perceptions on crime and the criminal justice system. Myths inform us of crime problems and what solutions may be necessary (Kappler et al., 2000).

The most influential source of myth in criminals and crime is the media (Bohm, 1986). The entertainment media is very prone to misconceptions of crime. The information contained in crime television shows is an example. Murder and assault are the least committed of crimes. However, they are shown more often. Greed is shown as a number one motive for crimes and police brutality is commonly exaggerated. The media helps to reinforce myths (Robinson, 2000; Bohm, 1986). Research has shown that all aspects of the media, including newspapers, significantly contribute to the public's perceptions (Entman, 1989). The media can reach large amounts of the population very quickly allowing these myths to spread at an alarming rate.

Other mythmakers include the public itself, politicians and law enforcement officials (Bohm, 1986). The public may take their own experiences as victims and portray those crimes as typical criminal behavior. Politicians may use the crime myths to their advantage in order to campaign a new crime bill. Law enforcement officials also feed crime myths. One example is the misleading technique of the crime clock used by the FBI. The crime clock details how many crimes are committed each second in America. According to the crime clock, there is an assault every 31 seconds (Kappeler et al., 2000). The

public may misinterpret this data and perceive it as literal. The misrepresentation of statistics is a massive myth maker. However, many events are embellished for shock value and to boost ratings. All of these mythmakers can provide the illusion of accuracy. Once in place, myths are hard to dismiss. This is why it is important to differentiate a myth from reality.

Differentiating myth from reality can be difficult. Therefore, one must be made aware of the negative consequences of myths. Because of myths, criminals may be seen as evil and abnormal causing a distorted reality. If this myth were accurate, criminals would reflect personalities of such fictional characters as Hannibal Lector in *Silence of the Lambs*. This perception, if seen as reality, causes unneeded fear. The statistics of high crime rates and "nothing works" attitude can also create a feeling of failure in the public. The public may think that if new crime policies, implemented by government officials, aren't working, then nothing will. Crime myths can also cause stereotyping in law enforcement and corrections, creating bias. Bias can be created from the amount of discretion allowed to members of law enforcement to stereotype criminals. The judge may create a stereotype based on the criminals which enter the courtroom. Finally,

the correctional officers may stereotype the typical

inmate. However, given the negative factors, the most

disconcerting consequence of myths is the over whelming

amount of fear instilled in the American public (Bohm,

1986).

Known and Unknown of Serial Killers

Much of what is known about serial killers is based on

relatively few known cases. Hickey (2002) provides perhaps

the most detailed look into the reality of serial homicide.

The exact statistics are reviewed in chapter two and

chapter four of this research. However, it is important to

note that although Hickey's research provides data on

serial killers from 1850 to 1995, the total number is only

400. Indeed, it can be argued that the small number of

killers is indicative of just how mythical the phenomenon

has truly become. The original FBI study used as the basis

for criminal profiling was based on only 30 offenders

(Hickey, 2002). Further, what is "known" about serial

killers must be tempered with the realization that the data

is somewhat questionable. In short, there is much more

unknown than known about serial killers and serial killing.

Gathering material on serial killing may be difficult.

Interviewing a convicted serial killer may be seen as the

most logical way to gather data. However, there are

restrictions which limit the accessibility. Even if access

is gained into these institutions, receiving accurate

information and cooperation from the serial killers may be

a difficult task. Some killers may claim their innocence

therefore; characteristics surrounding their murderous acts

remains unknown. Some killers may not cooperate due to

gained media attention. False statements are made in order

to shock the public, or the killer will say whatever they

believe one is suppose to say, regardless if it is true or

not. The interviewer may question the sincerity and

accuracy of the data given by the serial killer (Hickey,

2002). The information gained in an interview should be

seen as one source of data only.

<center>Research Question</center>

This study researches one central issue: Does the

popular entertainment media accurately portray serial

homicide in American film? To answer this question

effectively, one must first define and explore aspects

surrounding serial homicide. The definition of a serial

killer must be given in order to identify the person in

question. The history of crime films plays a role.

History allows the origin of crime movies. Demographics,

characteristics and statistics of male, female, and team

killers must be identified. Profiles of what and who is

<center>9</center>

being studied must be acknowledged. The phenomenon of myth should be distinguished from the definition of truth, in order to avoid misconceptions. Determination of how the media acts as mythmaker must also be analyzed. This will help to avoid such myths from spreading any further. This document will help the reader to decide whether or not serial homicide is accurately portrayed by the media.

<div align="center">Overview of Document</div>

The second chapter, or literature review, consists of a discussion on the growth of the serial killer phenomenon, role of the media, mythmakers and known and unknown facts of serial killers. Definition of serial killers are discussed, along with typologies of male, female and team serial killers. Statistics based data on mobility classification, targeted victims, occupations, methods, motives, disposition, location and number of victims will be discussed involving male, female and team killers.

The third chapter discusses the detailed methodology used to conduct the case study. Details on reliability, validity, and finally the limitations of the study will be described in length.

The fourth chapter contains the results of the case study. Comparisons between statistical data and data in film will be made and be discussed. The results shall

contain statistical data found in the characteristics of
the serial killers. These characteristics consist of race,
gender, age, marital status, methods, motives, occupation,
mobility classification, disposition of killer, and number
of victims. This evidence will then determine whether or
not the popular entertainment media accurately portrays
serial homicide in American film. Chapter five will
generalize, discuss and conclude the study in its entirety.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The reality of serial homicide will be contrasted against crime and criminal justice myths. This is included in the research portion of the study in order to emphasize the importance of acknowledging the difference between truth and reality of serial homicide. The definition of serial killers must first be identified in order for the reader to understand who the research is pinpointing. Demographic and other statistical data is also discussed in order to differentiate between accurate profiles and stereotypes. The research then gives the reader an accurate portrayal of serial killers in American film. This information foreshadows the next chapter, which is the methodology behind the case study.

Reality of Serial Homicide

Serial murder, in its earliest form was referred to by the FBI as "lust murder" (Egger, 1998). Regardless of who said it first, many are confused on the actual definition. In 1984, *Newsweek* described a serial killer as one whom "explodes in homicidal rampage" (Egger, 1998). According to law enforcement, serial murder means "sexual attacks and the resulting death of young women, men, or children committed by a male killer…" (Egger, 1998). Many scholars may vary in definition of serial killers, but essentially offer the same description. (1) Serial murder occurs when one or more individuals commit murder of three or more people over a period of time. (2) There is a cooling off period between each murder. This period may last one week, one month, one year, or even five years. (3) There is usually no connection between the victim and assailant. (4) Many serial murders are different geographically. They tend to move from location to location. (5) Motives are not for material reasons, but for power and control (Douglas, 1999; Egger, 1998; Hickey, 2002; Holmes, 1998).

Researchers have been trying to create a set definition, provide classifications and establish motives and characteristics of serial killers for many years.

As difficult as it may be to set a one-definition answer, these characteristics of serial killers help investigators further their case nevertheless. Hickey's research (2002) defines serial homicide as "any offenders, male or female, who kill over time…with a minimum of three to four victims…who have a pattern with their killing that can be associated with the types of victims selected or the method or motives…"

Typologies of Serial Murder

Several researchers have gathered data and have created several categories, labels, motives and types of murderers. Categories may include biological, sociological, or psychological traits (Siegel, 1998). Wille (1974) characterizes murder into the following categories of murderers: depressive, psychotic, those with brain disorders, passive aggressive, alcoholics, hysterical, or mentally retarded (Hickey, 2002).

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) have described four types of serial murderers. The visionary type hears voices, which command them to commit such horrendous acts. The mission-oriented type believes it is their duty to exterminate the evil people in the world. These "evil" people may include prostitutes or specific ethnic groups. The hedonistic type commits violent acts for the fun of it.

One example of a hedonist was Dorothea Montalvo Puente who killed over ten women in order to collect their social security (Hickey, 2002). A hedonist kills for pure pleasure or some gain. The power type craves being in control (Hickey, 1997). This offender may play predator, while the victim is the prey. An example may be kidnapping and blind folding the victim and letting him or her go in the woods. Although, she assumes she has been set free, she is just an animal being preyed. This type of killer seeks to exert control over their victim. Early behavior known as the "homicidal triad" is one way to recognize power type serial killers. Most exhibit a background of bedwetting, fire starting, and cruelty to animals (Douglas, 1999).

Labels have also been used to determine different motives for murderers. Profit, passion, hatred, power, revenge, fear and desperation are just a few (Hickey, 2002). Other possible motives include greed, jealousy, drugs, and sex (Douglas, 1995).

Organized verses Disorganized

Many law enforcement agencies and the FBI specifically use profiles to aid in the investigation of serial killers. Observing and analyzing the behavior of a killer defines profiling (Egger, 1998). Profiling can provide some sort of direction or insight to the investigation.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation classified serial killers as either organized or disorganized. The organized killer is seen as intelligent, plans their murder, and targets strangers. However, the disorganized killer is not very intelligent, acts on the spur of the moment, and usually knows their victims and the crime scene are sometimes left very sloppy (Hickey, 2002). These classifications help in determining who law enforcement is searching for. Table 1 explains the differences between the two classifications of serial killers.

[Table 1] Serial Killers: Organized vs. Disorganized

<u>Organized</u>   <u>Disorganized</u>

Organized	Disorganized
Intelligent	High School-Uncompleted
Masculine	Immature
Charming	Rarely Dates
Very Social	Lives Alone
Strangers as Targets	Knows the Victims
Likes Media Attention	Dislikes Media Attention
Sexually Capable	Seldom Dates
Controlled Emotions	High Anxiety
Geographically Mobile	Lives/Works Near Crime
Plan Murder	Act on Crime Spontaneously

(Hickey, 2002).

Demographics of Serial Killers

A serial killer is often stereotyped as only male offenders with disorders such as; multiple personalities or drug addictions. Some people may think these killers are psychotic. The last person one may suspect as a serial killer is their neighbor. The truth is that every serial killer has once been a neighbor to someone. Before one starts accusing or suspecting your neighbor, important characteristics of serial killers must be identified.

The majority of serial killers are white males between the ages of 25 to 34. Most cases have occurred in California. African Americans, females, and team killers have also been included in the serial homicide genre. Many of these serial killers are smart and some even charming (Holmes, 1998). These and many other characteristics are discussed further in the following sections.

Male Serial Killers

Before the 1800s serial killers were publicly non-existent. The youngest serial killer, Jesse Pomeroy of South Boston, committed his first killing at age twelve in 1857 (Schechter, 2000). The earliest documentation of an adult male serial killer was Edward Rulloff, AKA, "The Educated Murderer", in 1846. However, it wasn't until 1975 that we saw a dramatic increase (Hickey, 2002).

Serial murders had first become an issue for law

enforcement and scientists in the 1980s. By the 1990s,

special training had been established for law enforcement

and classes on criminal justice and serial killers were

being taught (Hickey, 2002).

A study done by D.K. Rossmo in 1995 showed that males

were involved in over 90% of serial murders. Rossmo found

that the average age for serial killers began at age 27.

His study showed that 73% were white males. 22% were

African American males, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and the last

1% represented other groups (Hickey, 2002). Chicago has

documented three African American serial killers in 2000

(Hickey, 2002).

Mobility classification will differ with each serial

killer. Some male serial killers travel to kill. One-third

of all male killers have killed victims in more then one

state. John Armstrong, age 26, killed 11 victims in over

three states and covered two continents (Hickey, 2002).

Over 50% of male serial killers have stayed in a local

area. Most victims are killed by local offenders. 10% of

serial killers use their very own home (Hickey, 2002).

Jeffrey Dahmer, AKA, "The Milwaukee Wolf Man" and John

Wayne Gacy are prime examples. They used their home or

relatives' home (basement) to drug, kill, and dismember

bodies (Young, 1995). The state with the largest documented

records of serial murder is California. The next top four

states include Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas.

Victims of male serial killers can be ranked into

three categories. The majority of victims involve

strangers. The next most targeted group involves

acquaintances, and finally, family members. Table 2

explains targeted victims in more detail.

[Table 2] Targeted Victims

	Strangers	Acquaintances	Family

1.	Females Alone:
	    Prostitutes
	    Hitchhikers
	    Students
		Women	Wives

2.	Children Alone	Neighbors	In-Laws
3.	People Traveling	Coworkers	Children
4.	Males Alone: Hitchhikers	Children	Mother, Brother, Grandparents

5.	Occupations:
	    Restaurants
	    Gas Stations
		Patients	

6.	Elderly	Roommates	
7.	Patients		
8.	Police		
9.	Racially Picked		

(Hickey, 2002).

With these considerations, we must also keep in mind

serial homicide victims only account for .01% of homicides

in America. This means 99.99% of Americans will die from

non-serial homicidal incidents (Jenkins, 1994). This means

one out of every ten thousand murders in America is created

by a serial killer. Graph 1 shows just how drastic the

statistics are for non-homicidal victims.

[Graph 1]   Percentage of Serial Homicidal Deaths

Serial

.01%

99.99%

Non-Serial
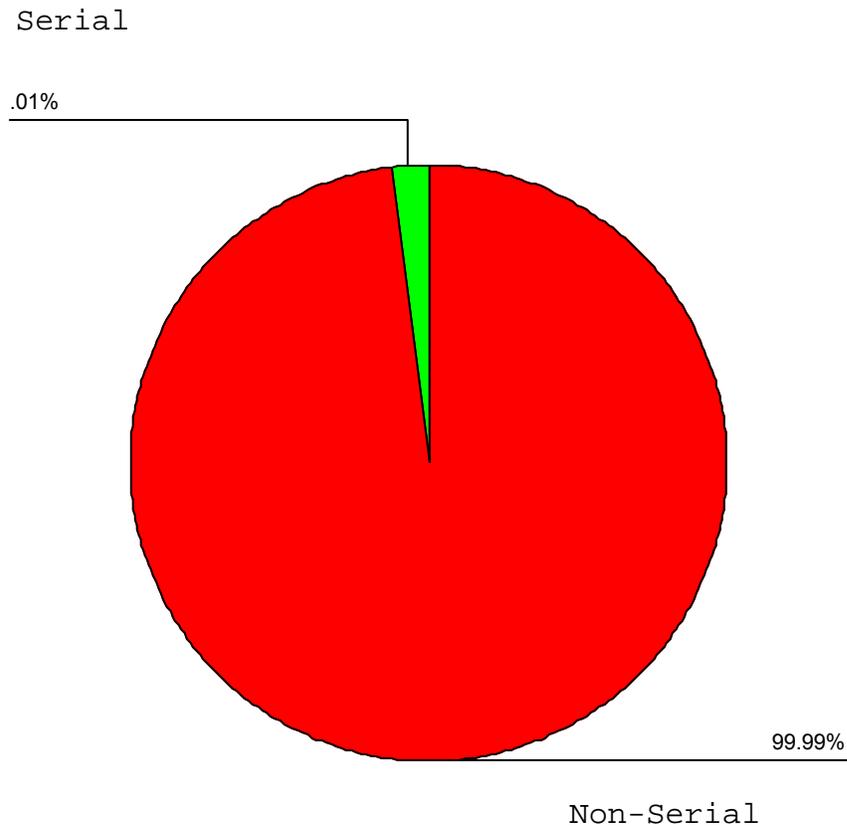
(Jenkins, 1994)

Occupation of Male Serial Killers

The occupation of a male serial killer can vary from a plumber to a physician. Past serial killers have also had such backgrounds in carpentry, bartending, gas attending, painting, music, and postal working. Ted Bundy was even labeled as a law student. Kenneth Bianchi was employed at a variety of different jobs. He worked for an ambulance service, bounced at a local bar, and was hired as a security officer in a department store. Ironically, he was rejected several times for police positions in New York and California. Bianchi held over ten jobs in seven years. John Wayne Gacy worked in a mortuary, a shoe store, a cook in a friend's restaurant, and even dressed as a clown for children's parties (Egger, 1998).

Serial killers have had an assortment of backgrounds. Some male serial killers have had low education levels and did not continue their education after high school. Only a few entered college programs and a small amount attended vocational schools.

Many of the studied serial killers also had a prior criminal history. The prior criminal history of serial killers renders astonishing results. Table 3 lists several crimes committed by 198 studied killers.

[Table 3] Criminal History of Serial Killers

History	Percentage of Offenders
Combination of Offenses	68
Prison or Mental Hospital	67
Property Offenses	45
Sex Crimes	37
Crimes on Children	18
Drugs	17
Fire Starting	14
Homicide	13
Assault	6

(Hickey, 2002)

Methods of Male Serial Killers

More importantly then criminal history is the methods and motives used by serial killers. Eric Hickey studied the methods of 198 serial killers. His study showed that 41% used "some" firearms. "Some firearms" means the serial killer used firearms to kill some of the victims, but used other methods occasionally. Combination of methods is using multiple methods on one person. Table 4 points out that 42% of the serial killers in the study used a combination of methods. 37% used some strangulation and 34% used some stabbing. 26% used some bludgeoning. 19 % used firearms

only, while 13% stabbed only. The last 2% used other means

as methods (Hickey, 2002). Table 5 shows example of methods

used by five serial killers.

[Table 4]   Methods of Male Serial Killers

A bar chart titled with y-axis "Percentage" ranging from 0 to 50. Categories along the x-axis with approximate values: Some Firearms (41), Some Strangulation (37), Some Stabbed (34), Some Bludgeoning (26), Some Poison (10), Some Drowning (4), Firearms Only (19), Stabbed Only (13), Strangulation Only (11), Bludgeoning Only (9), Poison Only (6), Combo of Methods (42).

(Hickey, 2002)

23
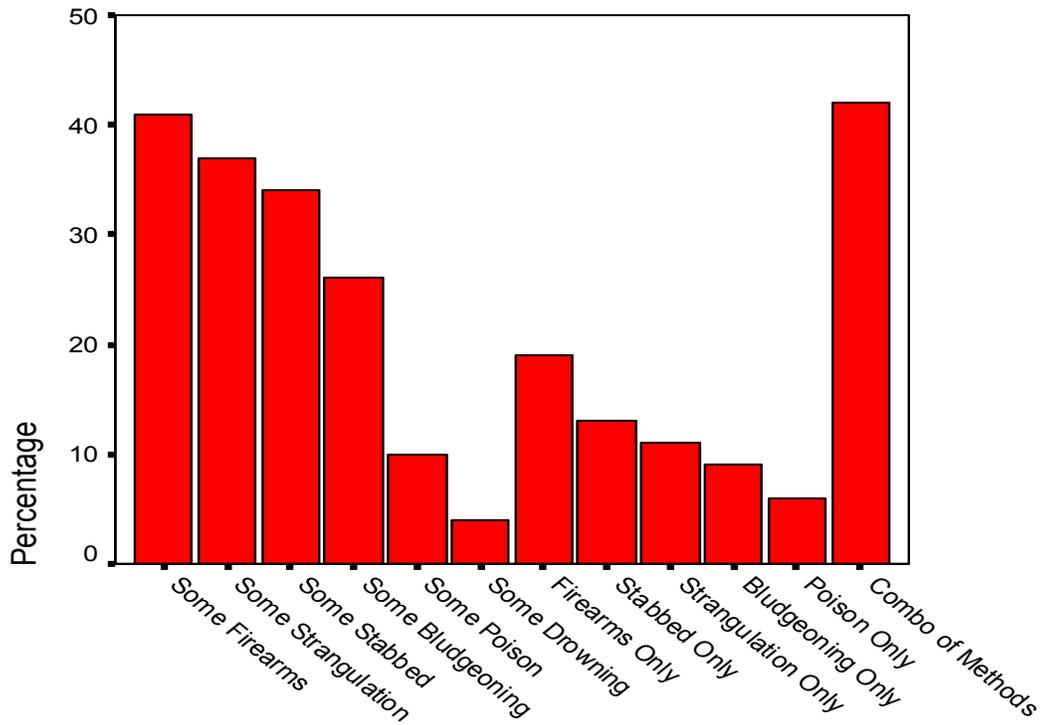
[Table 5] Example: Male Serial Killers with Most Frequent Method

Serial Killer	Most Frequent Method
➢ Albert DeSalvo	Strangulation
➢ Ed Kemper	Shooting
➢ Carlton Gary	Strangulation
➢ Robert Long	Combination
➢ Kenneth Bianchi	Strangulation

(Hickey, 2002; Egger, 1998).

Motives of Male Serial Killers

The motives of male serial killers have been studied and analyzed by many scientists. There are so many possibilities or reasons to why these killers commit such horrendous acts. One can only speculate as to what motivates a rage so powerful to take human lives.

Motivations of serial killers can be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Holmes, 1998). Intrinsic refers to those who kill for psychological gain, while extrinsic refers to those who kill for material gain.

Sex, control, money, racism, hatred and mental problems may all classify as potential motives. Of the 198 male serial killers in which Hickey studied, sex was the

highest ranked motive for killing (Hickey, 2002). Sex homicides include rape, sodomy and methods of torture. Control and money were next in rank. One in five of every serial killer accounts money as their motive. Combinations of these motives are also very frequent. A motive of some may also be revenge or even lie in the psychopath region.

Trauma experienced in childhood may also be a motive. A parent who rejected or neglected their child may act as the underlining cause for traumatization. 48% of the studied offenders admitted having some form of rejection in their childhood (Simpson, 2000; Hickey, 2002). Other forms of trauma may include an unstable home, physical abuse, mental or emotional abuse, an alcoholic parent, poverty or a mother involved in prostitution (Hickey, 2002).

Disposition of Male Serial Killers

The disposition of male serial killers is very similar. The majority of offenders were given prison sentences. Only 38 states currently impose the death penalty. 28 offenders received death. Of the 198 studied killers, 45% received prison sentences (Hickey, 2002). Table 6 displays the details of disposition given to the offenders. They include prison, death, pending in court, suicide, killed, mental institution, escaped or free.

[Table 6] Disposition of Male Serial Killers

Disposition	Percentage of Offenders
➢ Prison	45
➢ Death Penalty	28
➢ Pending in court	5
➢ Suicide	3
➢ Killed	3
➢ Mental Institution	3
➢ Escaped	1
➢ Free	1

(Hickey, 2002)

Female Serial Killers

Contrary to popular belief female serial killers do exist. Evidence will show that women are indeed capable of murder. Females are often dismissed as serial killers because of the feminist stereotype. Females carry the image of the nurturing and caring type. The public does not think of their mothers and sisters having the capability of murder (Holmes, 1998). However, 10 to 15 percent of American serial killers have been women (Jenkins, 1994). Females can be as cruel and uncompassionate as male serial killers (Abbott et al., 2001). They have proven to be more

deadly, strong-minded and harder to capture than males (Kelleher et al., 1998).

The FBI labeled Aileen Wuornos as the first female serial killer after killing seven men by shooting them in the torso in 1989 (Egger, 1998). It was probably her unique method, which labeled her as such. Eric Hickey identifies 62 of the serial killers in his study as female. This accounts for 16% of his studied serial killers (Hickey, 2002).

Documentation of female serial killers goes back to the 1800s. There have been 31 cases of female serial killers between the years of 1826 to 1969. From 1970 to 1995, there have been 28; giving us a total of 59 documented cases. The number of victims within this time frame is over 834 (Hickey, 2002). Some female serial killers appear to lead an average busy life. According to Hickey's study, 32% of female serial killers have been homemakers. 18% have been nurses and only 15% have had prior criminal activity (Holmes, 1998). The majority have been white and the average age is 30.

Victims of female serial killers as well as male serial killers can be ranked into three categories. The majority, like male serial killers, involves strangers followed by family members and acquaintances. The most

targeted strangers are children, patients, and elderly.

The majority of family victims are husbands. Acquaintances

may involve friends or even neighbors (Hickey, 2002).

Like male serial killers, female killers are mainly

local killers. Approximately one-third of the females

studied, were place-specific killers. This means they used

the same spot continually to kill. Detection was unlikely,

which gave initiative to kill repeatedly.

Methods of Female Serial Killers

The methods of female serial killers, like male

killers, will vary extensively from case to case. Table 7

will detail methods by categorizing "some", meaning not

limited to, as mentioned previously. A method may have been

used but did not act as the primary reason for death. Some

of the methods include poison, shooting, bludgeoning,

suffocation, stabbing, and a combination of methods. As

table 7 points out, 45% of female serial killers in

Hickey's study used some poison, however, 35% used poison

only. 20% used some shooting, while 16% used some

bludgeoning. The last 10% used shooting and stabbing only.

33%, not shown here, used a combination of methods (Hickey,

2002).

[Table 7]   Methods of Female Serial Killers
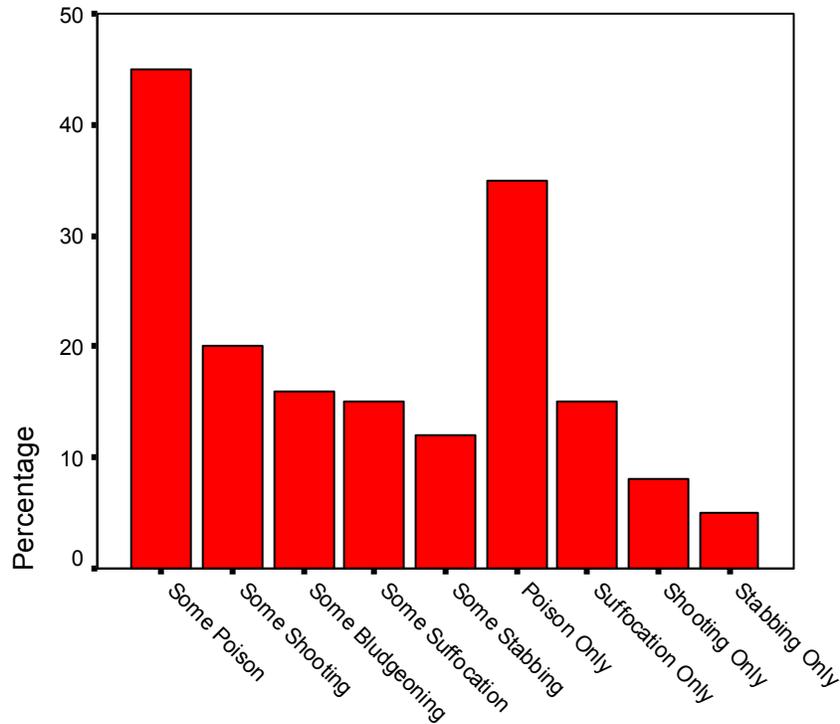
(Hickey, 2002)

Case studies have shown that poison has been the most frequently used method by female killers. Arsenic, potassium chloride and succinylcholine are examples of poison used to kill their victims. Nurses have access to many muscle relaxers. In 1984, Nurse Genene Jones injected succinylcholine in a baby which paralyzed the muscles, causing the baby's death. When used in high doses the drug stops the chest from functioning properly and initially

stops the breathing process (Hickey, 2002). Most of the

females who poisoned their victims acted alone.

Other killers with accomplices used more violent means,

such as bludgeoning (striking with a blunt object),

shooting, or stabbing (Holmes, 1998). Table 8 describes the

methods of seven female serial killers.

[Table 8] Examples: Female Serial Killers with Most
Frequent Method

Serial Killer	Most Frequent Method
➢ Margie Barfield	Poison
➢ Aileen Wuornos	Shooting
➢ Lydia Sherman	Poison
➢ Nannie Doss	Poison
➢ Christine Falling	Suffocation
➢ Terri Rachals	Poison
➢ Genene Jones	Poison

(Egger, 1998; Jenkins, 1994; Holmes, 1998; Hickey, 2002)

Motives of Female Serial Killers

Motives of female killers may vary from situation to

situation. The majority of cases have involved money in

some aspect or another. Dorothea Montalvo Puente killed

her tenants in order to cash their social security checks.

Another powerful motive is control. Some female serial

killers will kill their husbands, children, or other

relatives to achieve some sort of control. These are known as the "Black Widows". Nannie Doss admitted she had killed four of her husbands. Her killing spree lasted over twenty years (Hickey, 2002). Other motives consist of sex, drugs, cults, revenge and feelings of inadequacy. Terri Rachals recalls her motive for poisoning her patients was revenge. She believes the molestation by her father caused her to commit such acts.

Female serial killers are not discussed as often as they should be. The media may take every opportunity to sensationalize a recent event involving a male serial killer. However, they are missing the big picture. The majority of Hollywood films portray males as serial killers, with few exceptions. *Black Widow* is one example portraying a female serial killer.

Disposition of Female Serial Killers

The disposition of female serial killers differs in some aspects from male serial killers. 64% had a prison sentence as compared to the male percentage of 45%. Table 9 explains the details of the disposition given to female serial killers in Hickey's study. The dispositions included prison, death, pending in court, suicide, killed, mental institution, escaped, or never caught.

[Table 9] Disposition of Female Serial Killers

	Disposition	Percentage of Offenders
➢	Prison	64
➢	Death	18
➢	Pending in Court	3
➢	Suicide	0
➢	Killed	4
➢	Mental Institution	5
➢	Escaped	0
➢	Never Caught	6

(Hickey, 2002)

Team Serial Killers

Hickey's research (2002) studied 110 offenders of 47 different team serial killer cases. Most teams comprised of two people, however, one team contained five offenders. Power, control, domination, and sex are all potential motives for group killing. 17 out of 47 cases studied involved females. 74% of team serial killers have been white, 25% African American, and 1% Asian.

The team killers sensationalized by the media have been the Zebra Killers and the Moor Murderers.

Other team killers have included the Lonely Hearts Killers, .22-Caliber Killers, and the Hillside Stranglers (Hickey, 2002).

Team killers can be traced back to 1875, consisting of both male and female offenders. Teams have consisted of relatives and non-relatives. Participating relative teams have consisted of spouses, father and son, brothers, mother and son, cousins, or entire family. Participating non-relative teams have consisted of lesbians, gays, heterosexual partners, and friends (Hickey, 2002).

Henry Lee Lucas and Ottis Toole are an example of friend and lover team killers. They also included Ottis Toole's niece and nephew. They are the lead suspects in over 100 unsolved cases across the country. Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono, AKA, The Hillside Stranglers, are an example of relative based team killers. This pair of cousins tortured and killed over ten girls within a year (Egger, 1998).

Most team killers have had non-professional career backgrounds. The majority have been criminals, bartenders, carpenters, or waitresses. Other occupations included farmers, ministers, military personnel, shoemakers, and truck drivers (Hickey, 2002).

The majority of team serial killers have targeted strangers, such as hitchhikers and students. Acquaintances are the second most targeted. The category least targeted is family members. Both genders were killed. At least one female was murdered in over 70% of the cases. Almost one-fifth of the cases involved children (Hickey, 2002).

Methods and Motives of Team Serial Killers

Most team serial killers have used a combination of methods for killing their victims. The method used most frequently is firearms. Strangulation, stabbing, and bludgeoning are also ways of fulfilling their urges. Like other serial killers, money, sex and control may act as potential motives (Hickey, 2002).

Dispositions of team serial killers are similar to male and female loner serial killers. 69% of team killers are given prison sentences. 23% are given death row and 4% are killed before trial (Hickey, 2002).

Although all of these statistics of male, female and team serial killers are available to the public in many books, the more likely source will filter through the media. Most of what we know is gathered from newspapers and film. Research has shown that all aspects of the media, including newspapers significantly contribute to the

public's perceptions (Entman, 1989). The effect can be a negative one. The stories heard through the media are often embellished upon and become what is called a myth.

<center>Crime and Criminal Justice Myths</center>

A trained eye may distinguish the difference between a myth, or exaggerated information, and truth. Crime myths are created through sensationalized stories. Much like gossip, these stories are told and embellished upon, and produce an inaccurate truth for many who will listen. Myths are so influential that they may start to mold our thoughts and perceptions of crime or the entire criminal justice system (Kappler, 2000; Blumberg, 2000; Potter, 2000). An isolated event may become so focused upon that it makes newspaper or television headlines. The crime may then be seen as a national problem. This may trigger a reaction of fear to a problem that may or may not even exist. Once a myth is established as truth it allows for another door to open and thus filling in the gaps to the next story.

Media cannot be ignored or escaped. It is part of every day life. It can be seen or heard through three methods. Newspaper, radio and television provide the heart and soul of providing information into the homes of America. Myth becomes reality (Hickey, 2002).

<center>35</center>

The media takes advantage of the public's vulnerability and uses fear to shape opinions. Serial homicide is the most intriguing and fascinating, yet horrifying and shocking crime. It is one of the most intensified subjects within the medium.

The media-based serial killer pollutes our environment. One must be made aware of the negative consequences in which a myth carries with it. The average citizen may look at oneself as a good and law abiding citizen. However, criminals may not even be seen by the public as human beings. Criminals may be seen only as evil and abnormal which causes a distorted reality. Crime myths allow for proposed crime control policies. The statistics of high crime rates and "nothing works" attitude causes a feeling of failure. The public may feel as though there is no possible solution.

Crime myths can also cause stereotyping in law enforcement and corrections creating a bias. The amount of discretion involved in police officers decisions can result in this bias. This bias is then transferred to the courts, then to the judge and finally corrections. Myths can travel at an alarming speed. However, the most disconcerting consequence of myths is the over whelming amount of fear instilled in the American public (Bohm, 1986).

Mythmakers in Criminal Justice

     Many issues can reach public attention through several
ways. The media, government officials, law enforcement
agencies, and interest groups are just a few. The dominant
and most influential mythmaker is the media (Kappler, 2000;
Blumberg, 2000; Potter, 2000). Technology has grown
throughout the years and provides the central gateway for
information to reach large amounts of the population. The
media, or Hollywood big screen motion pictures in this
case, may set standards for certain beliefs in society.

     Myths can be spread very swiftly by means of the
media. Media can take an overlooked crime story, take it
out of context and embellish upon it, hence, providing a
myth. Media can also establish a myth by not updating a
story, which was later proven to be false.
Unfortunately, there is no law requiring the media to
retract their statements.

     Myths also require large mass media involvement. This
was the case to some isolated events in the news.
Some examples of highly celebrated isolated events include
recorded beatings, highway incidents and confrontations,
celebrity cases, and serial killings (Surette, 1998).
The most horrific events can now be seen and replayed over
and over again for the viewing public through means of the

television. The news, courtroom celebrity cases, and reality based shows provide the illusion of authenticity. The general public may often believe what they see on television. However, many events are overstated for shock value. Many television shows provide graphic reenactments, documentaries, or even ride alongs which may even inspire the filming of big screen movies (Surette, 1998).

In print media, these sensationalized stories are known as "yellow" journalism (Kappeler et al., 2000). These shocking descriptions and dreadful images of actual crime scenes, criminals, and victims can remain in the memory of the public over time. This in turn, may cause the reaction of fear. According to Edwin Sutherland, fear through myths, is "produced more readily in the modern community than it was earlier in our history because of increased publicity" (Kappler et al., 2000).

Media has used certain techniques to reach a desired reaction. A targeted audience must first be established. The audience consists of a variety of diverse cultures within the public. Second, there must be a villain to propose threat to society. A serial killer who instills fear may act as villain.

Third, there must be a victim and finally a hero. (Kappler et al., 2000). In order for a myth to be successful, these four characteristics must be present.

Other techniques include the generation of stereotypes, as mentioned previously, presenting false facts and labeling. Excluding important facts or manipulating events can also occur (Kappler et al., 2000). It may be a good idea for the viewer to be aware of these traits in order to prevent a myth from traveling any further.

The entertainment media portrays characteristics of serial killers in a consistent fashion throughout most films, providing a sense of truth or comfort level in attempting to understand these killers. Some of these traits include: cruelty, violence, adventure, courage, masculinity, and danger. These traits alone keep the audience begging for more (Rafter, 2000). The film industry has used many movies to capture the enjoyment and enthusiasm of the public and horror film fanatics. Movies such as, *Copycat, Seven* and *Along Came a Spider* perpetuate these myths which keep this aspect of the film industry in business.

Many movies involve a story line based on the true life of serial killers. Many people may not even know the

killer's real name. However, the media makes sure no one can forget a name like "Son of Sam". The surging nicknames associated with serial killers bring another level of enjoyment to not only the fanatics, but to the serial killers themselves. It gives the serial killers a feeling of importance. John Wayne Gacy took advantage of the fascination by others and wrote to over 23,000 people (Lester, 1995). Table 10 provides examples of these sensationalized nicknames, or monikers.

[Table 10] Serial Killer Nicknames

	Serial Killer	Nick Name
1	Kenneth Bianchi & Angelo Buono	Hillside Stranglers
2	Wayne Williams	Atlanta Child Murderer
3	Richard Ramirez	Night Stalker
4	Albert Fish	Cannibal Killer
5	Ed Kemper	The Coed Killer
6	Richard Angelo	The Angel of Death
7	David Berkowitz	Son of Sam
8	John Wayne Gacy	Chicago's Killer Clown
9	Albert DeSalvo	The Boston Strangler
10	Harry Powers	The American Bluebeard

(Hickey, 2002)

40

These nicknames alone can cause fear and put chills up your
spine. However, the general public may be fascinated by
them.

Myths About Serial Homicides and Serial Killers

Many high profile serial killers and Hollywood films
have greatly contributed to myth of serial killers.
According to Egger, there are several myths which surround
the phenomenon of serial killers. Table 11 details common
myths of serial killers.

[Table 11] Common Myths of Serial Killers

    1. All serial killers were sexually abused as
       children
    2. Serial killers look different from the
       average person
    3. Anyone who crosses their path becomes a
       victim
    4. Sex hungry
    5. Smart and can avoid police
    6. They are all white
    7. They are all male
    8. They are all insane
    9. They have a high mobility
   10. They kill dozens of victims

(Egger, 1998; Hickey, 2002)

These myths alone can damage or create a struggle for many
officers working a serial murder case. Many myths are hard
to dismiss once they have been instilled in the public's

mind. This is one reason why it is important to distinguish a myth from reality. Table 12 explains the facts.

[Table 12] Facts of Serial Killers

1. There are many motives to kill other then past sexual abuse: rejection, anger etc…
2. They look like an average person
3. Many victims are strangers
4. Several cases don't involve sex at all
5. Most are of average or below average intelligence
6. One in five killers are African American
7. Almost 17% of serial killers are female
8. Only 2-4% are legally insane
9. Most stay in a local area
10. Most kill fewer than 10 victims

(Hickey, 2002)

Portrayal of Serial Killers in American Film

History of Crime Films

The history of crime in films can be dated back to the silent film era which dated from 1897 to 1927 (Todd, 2000). Crime grew to a concern during the progressive era and the early 1930s, allowing film makers to interpret and improvise on life events making longer and more fascinating films. Gangsters, bootlegging, and corrupt government officials allowed for interesting stories and became the origin of crime in films.

Three of history's first gangster films included *Little Caesar, Public Enemy,* and *Scarface* (Todd, 2000).

Alfred Hitchcock added a new twist to film in the 1950s with his psychological and abnormal thrillers. The 1960s through the 1980s brought us such crime films as *Bonnie and Clyde, The Godfather* and *The Shining* (Todd, 2000).

The fascination of crime within the public was noted by Hollywood. Serial killer movies made their debut during the 1980s and have continued to grow in popularity ever since. Almost 300 serial killer films had been made. Some of the best selling and most profitable movies include titles such as *Natural Born Killers, Along Came a Spider, Seven,* and *Hannibal.*

<center>Reality of Crime Flicks</center>

There are consequences much like the negative factors of myth mentioned previously, that are associated with the reality of crime flicks. Some may think one massive consequence of these films is the violence aftermath. Movies like *Natural Born Killers* have been blamed for violent attacks. In 1995, a team of killers, after watching the movie went on a shooting spree. The two killers held the movie responsible for their actions (McCarthy, 1999). These movies also seem to give us a higher tolerance for crime (Massing, 1999). What we see in the news everyday presents a sense of normality, providing us with tolerance.

<center>43</center>

Distorted reality and a feeling of fear are also

consequences from watching serial killer flicks (Rafter,

2000). One may have images of crime and criminals which

originated from these movies. Movies can allow for

character flashbacks detailing the motives of a killer

(Rafter, 2000). Killers don't walk around with a biography

of one's life. Therefore, the public draws its own

conclusions on the why, what, how, and when of serial

killers.

Movies contain one of four criminality explanations,

or motives of the killers. These four factors blame crime

on; subcultures, mental illness, greed, or genetics

(Rafter, 2000). Subculture was the motive in *Boyz in the

Hood*. A high crime neighborhood provided crime by

association. Mental illness is seen as the motive in a

number of movies. Some of these movies include *Natural Born

Killers, American Psycho, Click,* and *Dressed to Kill.*

Greed is seen in *Seven*. Genetic explanations have been seen

in such movies as *Born to Kill* and *The Bad Seed*. The movies

blame trauma experienced in childhood as the key motive.

Serial killers seem to have replaced the older model

villains such as; vampires, werewolves and demons. Serial

killer movies follow a general pattern of the neo-Gothic,

the detective procedural, the psycho profile, and the

mytho-apocalyptic (Simpson, 2000). Gothic can be defined as chaotic, ornate, perverted, and representing exaggeration. The serial killer portrayed as a "human monster" in *Kiss the Girls* is an example of a Gothic character (Simpson, 2000). The movie portrayed two serial killers competing for the most victims.

The detective procedural emphasizes the detective's role in catching the killer as well as the killer. This can be seen in *Striking Distance, Silence of the Lambs,* and *Along Came a Spider.*

Silence of the Lambs portrays a pattern of the psycho profile. This movie was based on FBI research, theories, and databases involving serial murder allowing profiles of certain serial killers.

Mytho-apocalyptic killers are those who possess a demonic trait in which they use to interpret or deliver some message to the sinners of the world. *Natural Born Killers, Kalifornia,* and *Seven* are examples of this pattern. More specifically, *Seven* portrays a sadistic serial killer whose motive is to rid the world of sin by making examples of his victims. *American Psycho* is another example of a demonic serial killer who savagely kills his victims. These movies may repulse some audiences to the point of never wanting to see another serial killer movie.

Frustration and disgust by the audience may be a public

service to the community (Simpson, 2000). To put an end to

these movies may put an end to the serial killer myth.

Movies have been a huge part of American culture since

the early twentieth century (Rafter, 2000). The public

carries with it, the images, perceptions, and myth

originated from film. In order to determine if the media

accurately portrays serial homicide, certain aspects, such

as demographics of victim and offender and statistical

information must be clearly examined.

Conclusion and Overview

The research has shown that there exists many issues

between myth of serial killers and reality of serial

killers. The serial killer phenomena has emerged in the

last twenty years.

Male serial killers most dominated method for killing

their victims is firearms, while females preferred method

is poison. The number one ranked motive for males is sex,

while money is the motivation for females (Hickey, 2002).

Both male and female killers prefer to kill in a local

area. The state ranked with the highest statistics of

serial homicides is California.

Many serial killer stories are embellished as they are

told over time. This produces myth. Media may be

responsible for the production of some myths regarding serial homicide and must be held accountable (Egger, 1998). Given the first amendment right to freedom of speech, this may be hard to accomplish. The media has a tendency to exaggerate, misquote, or sensationalize certain events (Lasky, 2000).

The film industry allows the vulnerability of the public to be their moneymaker. Since the 1920s, over 300 serial killer themed films have been produced creating myths about serial homicide and serial killers (Hickey, 2002). Myth of serial killers can be seen in such movies as *Kiss the Girls, The Watcher,* and *Copycat.*

Some myths associated with serial killers are that they were all sexually abused as children, sex hungry and are all white males. However, the facts show many motives other than sexual abuse. Other statistics show one in five killers are black and almost 17% are female (Hickey, 2002).

The following research will examine the reality, or lack thereof, of the most recent films involving a serial killing theme. A content analysis of the fifty top grossing serial killer movies made between 1980 and 2001 is used for this examination. This case study will hopefully answer the question of whether or not popular entertainment media accurately portrays serial homicide in American films.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This research examines whether or not the popular entertainment media accurately portrays serial homicide in American film. Therefore, the null hypothesis states that the media does accurately portray serial homicide. The research hypothesis states that the media does not accurately portray aspects of serial killers. The top fifty grossing serial killer movies made between 1980 and 2001 are analyzed, coded, and compared to real life data involving serial killers. Statistical tests and comparisons are made in order to test the hypothesis.

A content analysis is the preferred testing measure. This is the best way to conduct the study for several reasons. The greatest advantage is the unlimited time span and low costs. This allows one to study processes which have occurred over a lengthy amount of time. One person alone can conduct the analysis. There is no pressure of outside involvement. The study can be conducted right from home. There is no special equipment needed. The study is not restricted in any way. The last advantage is that is it unobtrusive. This means it won't affect what is being

studied. There is no negative outcome if there is no physical subject (Babbie, 1998).

The best way to acquire a current list of serial killers movies is by using the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB). The IMDB is used because of the availability and current information. The chosen movies are then rented from local movie rental stores. The appropriate movies are viewed and coded by using a statistical data program. The variables coded include sex, race, age, marital status, mobility classification, methods, motives, occupation, loner or team killer, disposition, and number of victims. The variables of the victims include the same as the killer in the movies. Other variables included are; date of movie release, city the killings occurred in, budget and gross of the movie at U.S. cinemas. The purpose of the content analysis is to determine how accurate the popular media is in defining characteristics of serial killers and victims.

Selection of Variables and Questionnaire Construction

Variables for the content analysis were selected based on several criteria. First and foremost, the analysis set out to verify to accuracy or realism of the portrayal of serial homicide in American film. Therefore, a source of data for baseline comparisons was drawn from Hickey's research (2002). Hence, the variables selected came directly from the Hickey book.

Second, although Hickey's research presents a variety of data, certain variables were excluded due to the limits of their portrayal in films. For example, Hickey discusses the prior social, medical and criminal history of serial killers in his research. Typically, the childhood and prior history of the killers in movies is not portrayed. These two fundamental criteria guided the variables used to construct the coding instrument (See Appendix A). The coding sheet (appendix A) was designed to simply circle the answers which apply while viewing the prospected movies. Fifty copies were originally made of the coding sheet for keeping back up files to code into the PC. However, more coding sheets were made after viewing the movies due to filtering errors. Some movies slipped through the initial selection and elimination process. These were discarded.

Some which were watched were discarded, such as *Fallen* and *Freeway.*

Concepts are measured through a series of questions. The coding sheet asks questions for killer 1 and killer 2 (in the event there is more then one killer). The number of victims may be fairly high, giving a coding of 1-10 for victim variables. Some of the variables definitions speak for themselves, such as gender or race. Some may not be as apparent, such as mobility. Mobility can be classified as local, travel or place specific. Local refers to the homicide occurring in a local area only. Travel refers to homicide taking place in a variety of places while traveling, or killing while moving state to state or country to country. Place specific keeps the homicide stationed in a particular location. The individual listing of variables and their codes are presented in Table 13.

[Table 13] Variables and Coding

	Variable	Coding
1	Age of Killer(s)	1. Teenager 2. 20's 3. 30's 4. 40's 5. 50's or over
2	Race of Killer(s)	1. White 2. Black 3. Hispanic 4. Other

3	Gender of Killer(s)	1. Male
		2. Female
4	Marital Status of Killer(s)	1. Married
		2. Single
		3. Unknown
		4. N/A
5	Methods of Killer(s)	1. Firearms
		2. Strangled
		3. Stabbed
		4. Bludgeoned
		5. Poisoned
		6. Drowned
		7. Combination
		8. Other
6	Motives of Killer(s)	1. Sex
		2. Money
		3. Racism
		4. Hatred
		5. Control
		6. Mental Problems
		7. Combination
		8. Other
7	Mobility Classification of Killer(s)	1. Local
		2. Travel
		3. Place Specific
8	Occupation of Killer(s)	Coded While Viewing
9	Loner or Team Killer(s)	1. Loner
		2. Team
10	Disposition of Killer(s)	1. Suicide
		2. Prison
		3. Killed
		4. Unknown
11	Number of Victims	Coded While Viewing
12	Race of Victims	1. White
		2. Black
		3. Hispanic
		4. Other
13	Age of Victims	1. Teenager
		2. 20's
		3. 30's
		4. 40's
		5. 50's or over

14	Gender of Victims	1. Male 2. Female
15	Marital Status of Victims	1. Married 2. Single 3. Unknown 4. N/A

The city in which the killings occurred was also coded
while viewing the film. All these variables were used for
this study because they reflect true statistics given by
Hickey in previous research. This allows for comparing and
contrasting in order to reach final results needed in
answering the research question.

Selection of the Sample

The author of this study first went to the internet
web site IMDB. The power search included movies made in
America dating from the years 1980 to 2001 with the keyword
serial-killer and serial homicide. International films were
excluded so the study could reflect only American society
and film. All TV movies were excluded from the search
because they typically involved documentaries or were based
on a true story. The study emphasizes how serial killers
are portrayed in film, not real life. The hyperlinks were
instructed to go directly to the main details page. The
results brought up a total of 268 movies involving serial
killers between the specified years.

The author then proceeded to click on each of the 268 movies individually in order to make sure these movies were in the realm of reality. Many had to be excluded based on fantasy or other non-qualifying attributes. These fantasy based movies were excluded because the author is looking for features which can be compared to real life. The movies had to portray or be about serial killers. A list was made to keep records of the excluded and included. Fifty-two of the movies had to be discarded due to fantasy-based characteristics that were given on the internet data base.

The exclusion factors were based on movies containing: documentaries, possessed body parts, androids, vampires, qualities of controlling people's thoughts, the undead, possessed dolls, psychic powers, mutants, demons, dream killers, electrified souls, adult porn, gnomes, sci-fi, and those based on a true story. Eight more movies then had to be discarded because of insufficient information listed on the search. There was not enough information to conclude they were based on serial killing. Table 14 contains the fifty most popular movies which were chosen. Table 15 shows examples of some movies which were discarded and why they were discarded.

[Table 14] Final List of 50 Movies Used in Case Study

1	Along Came a Spider	26	Lisa
2	American Psycho	27	Manhunter
3	Basic Instinct	28	Mercy
4	Black Widow	29	The Minus Man
5	Blink	30	Murphy's Law
6	Blue Steel	31	Natural Born Killers
7	Bone Collector	32	Night Watch
8	Clay Pigeons	33	Out for Justice
9	Click	34	Relentless
10	Cobra	35	Resurrection
11	Copycat	36	Scream
12	Cutting Class	37	Scream 2
13	The Dead Pool	38	Scream 3
14	Dressed to Kill	39	Seven
15	Eye of the Beholder	40	Sea of Love
16	Felicia's Journey	41	Serial Mom
17	Hannibal	42	Silence of the Lambs
18	The Hard Way	43	So I Married an Axe Murderer
19	The Hitcher	44	Striking Distance
20	I Know What You Did Last Summer	45	Sudden Impact
21	I Still Know What You Did Last Summer	46	Switchback
22	Jennifer Eight	47	Tightrope
23	Kalifornia	48	Urban Legend
24	Kiss the Girls	49	Urban Legend;Final Cut
25	The Last Supper	50	The Watcher

[Table 15] Discarded Movies and Reason Why Discarded

	Movie	Reason Discarded
1	Addicted To Murder	Vampire
2	Aileen Wuornos: Selling of A Serial Killer	Documentary
3	Candyman	Fantasy
4	The Cell	Sci-Fi
5	Childs Play	Possessed Doll
6	Confessions of a Serial Killer	Henry Lee Lucas-documentary
7	Friday the 13th	Rises from the dead

8	Halloween II	Rises from the dead
9	The Hand	Sci-fi
10	Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer	Documentary
11	In the Light of the Moon	Ed Gein-Documentary
12	Jeepers Creepers	Demons
13	Nightbreed	Mutants
14	Nightmare on Elm Street	Dream Killer
15	The Pandora Directive	Mutants
16	Skinner	Mutilated revengeful victim

The number of sequels for each movie was individually researched by using the "search" key on the home page of AOL. After the discarding of 60 movies, 208 remained. It was then decided to use the top most popular 50 of the 208 movies in the sample. The most popular and top grossed movies and those with the most votes were selected for the study. Each of the 268 movies had a number of votes which were counted as favorites of online users. The IMDB uses a "STARmeter" and "MOVIEmeter" to determine the popularity of film. Over 12 million people visit this website per month. The votes are calculated by what the online users looked at, quality votes and by Box office receipts. The quality votes are based on a scale from 1 to 10. The users vote on their favorite films and the votes are updated on a weekly basis. The film voted best horror film by online users was *Silence of the Lambs*. This particular film had over 47,000 votes. An interesting fact is that over 26,000 of these voters were male. Only about 5,000 were female. The

remaining voters did not disclose their gender. Besides the MOVIEmeter ranking, the IMDB also contained information on the date of the movie release, city in which the killings occurred and the budget and gross at U.S. cinemas. Gross of these movies confirms the popularity. All 50 movies were found in local movie rental stores. The sections in which the movies were located were adventure, horror, mystery or even comedy. The cost for the study amounts to a little over one-hundred and fifty dollars. The author of the study then proceeded to view the selected movies.

Coding Process into SPSS

After the information is taken from the movies to the coding sheet, it is then put into the PC in an SPSS file for statistical use. This is the most time consuming part. The movies are listed as the "data" and characteristics and coding as "variables". The SPSS data editor requires different variable information be filled out before continuing. Each variable must be labeled accordingly by what it describes. The type is classified as numeric, while the measures are ordinal, nominal, or scale. The ordinal measure is used when measuring age or types of social classes. Nominal measures race or gender. A scale is used for numeric data. This is not used for this data.

The values are then coded by numbers. For example, age is coded: "1" for Teen, "2" for 20's, "3" for 30's and so on. This is done for each variable. The dataset is complete once all available information is entered into the system. The dataset is a representative sample of American serial killer films made between 1980 and 2001. Testing procedures for this study include running crosstabs and T-tests. A crosstab is a matrix, or grid, that gives the distributions of one variable compared with a second variable. Essentially, one is crossing two variables. This is also referred to as a two-way frequency.

The T-test is used for testing differences between means. A mean is a measure of central tendency. It is the average of what is being studied. These tests are run to measure whether or not the data is statistically significant. These tests are based on a sample not the entire population. Therefore, there could be error.

<center>Limitations</center>

There are various limitations within the methods used for this analysis. This can cause problems for future researchers. This research allows for analysis of true serial killers and serial killers within the media. The problem with this may lie within the scope of analysis.

This study may not be representative for all serial killers. It is impossible to study every serial killer that has been in existence. Some may already be dead or have not yet entered the criminal justice system. There may be some serial killers whom have not yet been caught or whom we have no information. Those whom can be interviewed are liable to validity questions. They may lie to please the interviewee or to gain media attention or may claim their innocence.

Movies which were researched throughout this study have been limited by several means. The movies were made between the years of 1980-2001. Therefore, this puts limitations on the scope of the media's portrayal of serial killers. This case study covered a period of twenty-one years only. The movies were classified by actors/actresses filmed in the United States only.
This may not be representative for all countries.

There are also methodological problems which limit the study. There are issues with coding. For instance, coding of age, marital status, motives, and mobility classification may conflict with future researchers. Definitions for analyzing serial killers may be misunderstood. Different coders may see certain aspects, such as age, differently than the author. Problems exist in

unit of analysis also. Content analysis has its advantages

but also disadvantages. This study is limited to recorded

information. Research is restricted to movies. However, for

this particular study, these methods may prove to be the

best approach to illustrate accuracy of whether or not the

media portrays serial killers with precision.

Reliability

This particular type of study is unique in nature.

The hypothesis is one in which has not yet been studied in

this depth previously. The coding system is one of detail

and used in order to test accuracy of true life and media

based serial killers. There are no open observations in

this study. Bias is, therefore, not an issue. This does not

leave much room for gray areas. The killer/victim was male

or female, black, white, Hispanic or other, etc. This

leaves not much room for discussion. For attempting

precision purposes, age is defined by a ten year bracket.

This provides the amount of accuracy for the appropriate

coding. Overall, the variables and characteristics give

sufficient data for these comparison and analyzing

procedures. If someone else watches these same movies and

follows the same guidelines given for coding the variables,

results should be the same.

This study may not be completely error proof. Problems in reliability could fall in the coding arena. A coder could miss an important trait of the killer(s) or miscount victims (The number of victims used in the study refers to the amount quoted in each movie). This means the viewer may not actually see each homicide. Even if the characteristics of race, age, etc., are not told or seen, the number of victims is still recorded as being such. One could easily miss it.

The coder may also code age differently from another coder. It may difficult to pin point someone's age in these movies. The author may believe the killer or victim(s) is in their twenties. However, a different coder may believe the appropriate category falls in the thirties.

Mobility classification results may differ if coded by a new coder. The new coder may see travel as a traveling killer only. However, the author sees travel as having two definitions. The first, being the obvious, the killer is an interstate type killer. The second definition states that the killer had moved from state to state. It must be noted that if the killer traveled from state to state and also had a specific location, it was coded travel all the same. Therefore, if either one applied, travel was the appropriate coding for mobility classification.

The motives, if not clearly stated in the movie, was coded by the author's opinion. Again, a different coder may differ in their opinion of what constitutes the motive. Marital status is coded as married, single, unknown, or N/A. If the status is not obvious, mentioned, or a wedding ring is seen, it is coded as unknown. The problem may lie within the coder's perception.

Coding results for race, gender, methods, occupation, disposition of killer(s), loner or team killer, and number of victims for this case study should remain the same for future researchers. However, there could be different results in some variables for future researchers.

Validity

Validity refers to the degree in which an experimental or observed measure reflects the meaning of the concept. There are three ways to measure for validity. This includes face validity, construct validity and content validity. The research contained in this study measures what it says it will measure. The measures and variables have previously been defined and limited. This allows the study face validity. There may be room for disagreement in construct and content validity.

Research for this study was taken from numerous authors. Statistical information originated from

information provided by Eric Hickey. The concept was measured using this data. The research design allows the ability for answering the research question. The analysis measures what it intended to measure and that is the portrayal of serial killers in American film. This is achieved through the established movies, comparison features, variables and appropriate coding procedures. However, there are problems establishing internal and external validity due to the comparison feature of the analysis. For purposes of this study the research is reliable and valid.

Conclusion

There are limitations within this case study. Problems may lie within the scope of analysis. It may not be representative for all serial killers. The study is limited to only English speaking films made between the years of 1980 and 2001. This restricts movies made in other countries. There may also me problems with future coding issues. Time frames on the age of serial killers in film are sketchy and hard to pin point. The study is unique in nature, in that it has not been done previously. Therefore, no tests may be run for comparison. The study allows for face validity due to measures and variables having been

63

mentioned and defined. The observed measures reflect the true meaning of the concept. Statistical data was used for conducting the research and show reliable and valid information.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results of the analysis reveal an overall consistent portrayal of serial killer characteristics in American film between 1980 and 2001. The majority of these films were produced in the 1990s. The typical movie-based serial killer is a white male in his thirties who kills in California or New York. The majority of the serial killers killed locally using a variety of methods and targeted mostly strangers. Victims consisted of both genders. Serial killers in film have various motives which push them to commit murder. Motives included revenge, sex, money, control or even mental problems. The majority of serial killer films ended the movie with the death of the serial killer. These movies, whether accurately portrayed or not, produced large sums of revenue for the film industry. The average film grossed 50.38 million dollars. As long as the revenue continues to grow the film industry will continue to produce these films. Interestingly, the movie serial killer is largely different from real serial killers.

Budgetary and Ranking Information of Serial Killer Movies

The average budget to make a serial killer film is 26.18 million dollars, while the gross profit is 50.38 million. *Dressed to Kill*, released in 1980, contained the smallest budget of 6.5 million. However, the movie grossed 32 million. *Hannibal*, released in 2001, had the highest budget of 87 million and grossed over 160 million. No controls were made to adjust for inflation. Table 16 lists the movies by release date and includes the MOVIEmeter ranking along with budget and gross profits in millions.

The average MOVIEmeter ranking of the fifty movies was 3027. The MOVIEmeter ranks the movies most or least viewed by online users. The lower the number, the higher the ranking. The MOVIEmeter ranking ranged from 138 to 15,847. The minimum ranking of 138 went to *Hannibal* while the maximum rank went to *Relentless*, which was released in 1989. The ranking is skewed due to the popularity of more recent films.

The grossed dollar amount had a range from .5 to 352 million dollars. The two movies which grossed the least amount, .50 million, included *The Last Supper*, released in 1995, and Minus Man which was released in 1999. *Basic Instinct* grossed the largest amount. The 13 movies produced in the 1980s have grossed over 300 million. Between 2000 and 2001 the combined serial killer films together grossed

over 400 million dollars. Table 17 gives an overview or
detailed account of these statistics by average MOVIEmeter
ranking, budget and dollar gross of the fifty serial killer
films.

[Table 16] Selected Movies Sorted by Release Date with
Rankings, Budget, and Gross

Movie	Release Date	Movie Meter Ranking	Budget (in millions)	Gross (in millions)
Dressed to Kill	1980	2180.00	6.50	32.00
Sudden Impact	1983	2394.00	*	68.00
Tightrope	1984	5506.00	*	23.00
Cobra	1986	2107.00	*	49.00
The Hitcher	1986	2568.00	*	5.80
Manhunter	1986	208.00	*	9.00
Murphy's Law	1986	10208.00	*	10.00
Black Widow	1987	5717.00	*	25.00
The Dead Pool	1988	2357.00	*	38.00
Cutting Class	1989	7833.00	*	*
January Man	1989	6305.00	*	4.60
Relentless	1989	15847.00	*	7.00
Sea of Love	1989	2212.00	*	59.00
Blue Steel	1990	5273.00	*	8.00
Lisa	1990	9591.00	*	4.00
The Hard Way	1991	3064.00	*	26.00
Out for Justice	1991	4385.00	*	40.00
Silence of the Lambs	1991	187.00	22.00	131.00
Basic Instinct	1992	477.00	49.00	352.00
Jennifer Eight	1992	3484.00	*	11.00
Kalifornia	1993	1817.00	9.00	2.00
So I Married an Axe Murderer	1993	1661.00	*	12.00
Striking Distance	1993	2258.00	*	24.00
Blink	1994	6555.00	*	17.00
Natural Born Killers	1994	421.00	50.00	51.00
Serial Mom	1994	2548.00	13.00	8.00
Copycat	1995	2680.00	20.00	32.00

The Last Supper	1995	3991.00	*	.50
Seven	1995	155.00	30.00	316.00
Scream	1996	301.00	15.00	103.00
I Know What You Did Last Summer	1997	764.00	17.00	72.00
Kiss the Girls	1997	1256.00	27.00	61.00
Scream 2	1997	626.00	24.00	101.00
Switchback	1997	4603.00	38.00	7.00
Clay Pigeons	1998	3364.00	8.00	2.00
I Still Know What You Did Last Summer	1998	1416.00	24.00	40.00
Nightwatch	1998	2145.00	*	*
Urban Legend	1998	1322.00	14.00	38.00
Bone Collector	1999	1020.00	48.00	67.00
Eye of the Beholder	1999	1198.00	15.00	17.00
The Minus Man	1999	4313.00	*	.50
Resurrection	1999	4764.00	*	*
American Psycho	2000	140.00	8.00	15.00
Cherry Falls	2000	1248.00	14.00	*
Mercy	2000	4368.00	*	*
Scream 3	2000	362.00	40.00	89.00
Urban Legend; The Final Cut	2000	1880.00	15.00	22.00
The Watcher	2000	1430.00	33.00	29.00
Along Came a Spider	2001	715.00	28.00	74.00
Hannibal	2001	138.00	87.00	165.00

*Movies which budget or gross were not listed on IMDB.

[Table 17] Average Ranking, Budget, and Gross

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
MOVIEmeter Ranking	50	3027.24	3037.695	138	15847
Budget of the Movie (millions)	25	26.18	18.2545	6.5	87
Dollar Gross of Movie (millions)	45	50.38667	71.98936	0.5	352

As mentioned previously, table 17 displays the statistics
explaining mean and standard deviation. The standard
deviation of the MOVIEmeter ranking is 3037.69. The

standard deviation of the budget is 18.25 million dollars,
while it is 71.98 million dollars for the dollar gross.

The results of this analysis show a dramatic increase
in popular serial killer films since the 1980s. Only 13 of
the fifty viewed films were produced in the 1980s, while 29
films were made in the 1990s (See Table 18). Between 2000
and 2001, 8 movies ranked in the top 50 serial killer
films. Table 18 details the frequency, or number of films,
and individual year of release for each of the fifty serial
killer films viewed for analysis.

[Table 18] Dates of Released Top Fifty Serial Killer Flicks

Date of Movie Release	Frequency
1980	1
1983	1
1984	1
1986	4
1987	1
1988	1
1989	4
1990	2
1991	3
1992	2
1993	3
1994	3
1995	3
1996	1
1997	4
1998	4
1999	4

2000	6
2001	2
TOTAL	50
1980s	13
1990s	29
2000-2001	8

Settings of Serial Killer Flicks

The majority of the movies were set in California (23).
The next top ranked state was New York (10). Other states
included Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Illinois, Virginia,
and the District of Columbia. According to Hickey's
research, the majority of killings also occurs in
California, and is followed by Florida, Illinois, and New
York. However, the District of Columbia was never mentioned
in Hickey's research. Texas is also the setting for many
killings, according to Hickey. The viewed films contained
no murders which took place in Texas. (See Table 19 for a
detailed account of the frequency of the states in which
murder occurred and for comparison to Hickey's research in
order of rank).

[Table 19] Setting of Movie with Comparison to Rank of
State in Hickey on Number of Cases

State Murders Occur In	Frequency	Hickey Rank

California	23	1
New York	10	2
Illinois	5	5
District of Columbia	4	*
North Carolina	3	12
Pennsylvania	3	16
Georgia	2	7
Massachusetts	2	15
Virginia	2	38
Arizona	1	28
Colorado	1	21
Florida	1	4
Indiana	1	18
Louisiana	1	23
Maryland	1	40
Montana	1	26
Ohio	1	6
Tennessee	1	24
Utah	1	20
Texas	0	3
Washington	1	7

*Hickey did not classify District of Columbia.

The Serial Killers

The analysis revealed that over 98% of serial killers are white. The remaining 2% are African-Americans. There is no mention of any other race. Hickey's research shows that 73% are white and 22% are African-American. According to the research, over 74% of serial killers are male and 26% are female, which is an overrepresentation of females. According to Hickey's research, 83% of serial killers are male and 17% are female. Almost 50% of these killers were

71

in their thirties. Killers in their fifties or older

accounted for only 7% of the study. An accurate age for the

majority of serial killers is really between 25 and 34.

Table 20 identifies the gender of serial killers based on

the sample and compares to Hickey's research.

[Table 20] Gender of Killers in Movies and Hickey

Gender of
Killer(s)   Sample   Hickey

	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Male	45	74%	423	83%
Female	16	26%	86	17%

The serial killers in this analysis had a variety of

different occupations. The majority held professional

careers such as (a); CEO on Wall street, Stock Broker,

Doctor, Scientist, Health Practitioner, and policemen.

Others included; students, fishermen, drifters, parolee's,

plumbers or the unemployed. Some were full time criminals

or con-artists. According to Hickey's research, the

majority of serial killers have held blue-collar jobs. Few

held such positions as teachers, doctors, and musicians.

The majority of film-based serial killers were loners,

as was Hickey's research. 84% of killers were shown as

loners, while only 16% were part of a team. Table 21

details the percentages on many loner and team killers there are in serial killer flicks as compared to Hickey data. Team killers were seen in such movies as; *Cobra, I Still Know What You Did Last Summer, Scream,* and *Natural Born Killers.*

[Table 21] Classification of Killer—Loner or Team

	Percent	Hickey
Loner	84%	81%
Team	16%	19%

The Victims

According to film, victims of serial killers generally include both genders (See Table 22). Sixteen percent of the victims were male only, while 10% were females only. Hickey's research also shows the majority of victims include both genders. However, over 30% include females only as opposed to only 10% in film. True statistics also tells us that over 20% of victims are male only. Less than 20% of victims in film are males only. *Natural Born Killers* had the largest number of victims (39) and killed both genders.

[Table 22] Gender of Victims Selected

Gender	Sample	Hickey
Males only	16%	22%
Females only	10%	35%
Both genders	74%	42%

All film-based serial killers killed at least one
adult. The next ranked victim included at least one elder
followed by teenagers. The largest percentage of
combination of victims included adults and teens. Only 2%
of the victims were children. According to Hickey, at least
one child accounted for over 20% of those killed by serial
killers. Table 23 details the age characteristics of
victims selected by serial killers defined by age only. At
least one and combinations of victims are listed.

[Table 23] Age of Victims Selected by Killers

	Sample	Hickey
Age Only	Percent	Percent
Children	0%	6%
Teens	0%	5%
Adults	78%	33%
Elderly	0%	5%
At Least One		
Child	2%	23%
Teen	20%	39%
Adult	100%	77%
Elderly	46%	17%

Combinations		
Adults and children	0%	23%
Adults and teens	20%	60%
Teens and Children	0%	10%
All Age Groups	2%	7%

According to film and Hickey's research, the majority of victims are strangers. Hickey's research shows the majority of strangers include single female prostitutes, hitch-hikers, and students (See Table 2). The least targeted victims in serial killer films are family members. However, family based homicides account for over 15% of serial killings in America (See Table 24).

[Table 24] Relationship of Offender to Victims

Relationship	Sample	Hickey
Strangers	67%	76%
Acquaintances	31%	26%
Family	2%	16%

The Killings

According to film, a combination of methods is preferred by serial killers. Over 40% of serial killers in film used some firearms. If only one weapon in the films, stabbing was most common. Stabbing was used as the

preferred method in movies such as; *Basic Instinct, Clay Pigeons, Mercy,* and *Dressed to Kill.* The method least used was poison or bludgeoning. However, over 30% used another form or method not mentioned. According to Hickey, a combination of methods was used in a majority of the killings (See Table 4 and Table 7). Table 25 gives a detailed comparison of the methods used by serial killers in film and true statistics.

[Table 25] Method Used by Killer

Method	Sample	Hickey
Firearms only	10%	19%
Strangled only	10%	9%
Stabbed only	20%	9%
Poisoned only	4%	8%
Bludgeoned only	0%	6%
Some firearms	42%	42%
Some strangulation	28%	35%
Some stabbing	70%	32%
Some poisoning	14%	11%
Some bludgeoning	22%	26%
Some drowning	8%	3%
Other	34%	1%
Combination of Methods	56%	42%

In the fifty viewed films, the most common motive for killing was for control. Control was the preferred motive in *Copycat.* The next ranked was a combination of motives. Mental problems accounted for 44% of the motives by serial killers. Mental problems were the motive in movies such

as; *American Psycho, Relentless, Resurrection, and The Minus Man.*

Sex was ranked as the least contributing factor for motive. None of the fifty movies placed racism as a motive. However, according to Hickey, racism accounts for 7% of serial killings and sex was the number one motive. Revenge was not mentioned in the true statistics, while over 38% of killers in film killed for revenge. Table 26 gives a detailed account of the motives of killers as compared to Hickey's research.

[Table 26] Motives of Killers

Motives	Sample		Hickey	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Sex only	2	4%	30	6%
Money only	1	2%	41	8%
Hatred	11	22%	14	3%
Mental Problems	22	44%	20	4%
Revenge	19	38%	**	**
Racism	0	0%	33	7%
Enjoyment only	5	10%	8	2%
Enjoyment sometimes	19	38%	77	16%
Sex sometimes	9	18%	203	41%
Money sometimes	6	12%	125	25%
Control sometimes	27	54%	133	27%
Combination of Motives	26	52%	235	47%

**Hickey did not specifically code revenge; however it was a common theme in several of the movies.

According to Hickey, over 50% of serial killers can be classified as local killers. According to film, over 70% are local, 26% travel to kill, and under 5% kill in a specific place (See Table 27). Serial killers who traveled to kill were in such movies as; *Black Widow, Kalifornia, Natural Born Killers, silence of the Lambs,* and *The Watcher.* Place specific killings were used in movies such as *Kiss the Girls* and *The Last Supper.*

[Table 27] Mobility of Killers

Mobility Classification	Sample	Hickey
Local	70%	52%
Travel	26%	34%
Place Specific	4%	14%

The disposition of serial killers is classified into five categories. The final disposition a killer can have is either prison, killed, suicide, admitted to a psychiatric hospital, or unknown. According to the analysis, the majority of serial killers are killed. Less than 5% were sentenced to prison. None of the killers committed suicide or were admitted to hospitals. According to Hickey's research, over 80% of serial killers are captured and sentenced to prison. Only 3% are killed or sent to a psychiatric hospital. (See Tables 6 & 9 for dispositions of

78

male and female serial killers). Table 28 details the disposition of killers based on film and hickey's research.

[Table 28] Disposition of Killers

Disposition of Killer	Percent	Hickey
Prison	4%	85%
Killed	80%	3%
Unknown	32%	0%
Suicide	0%	2%
Psych hospital	0%	3%

Conclusion and Summary

The film industry has made millions with their interpretations of serial homicide. Research has shown that these movies grossed over 400 million dollars in 2000 and 2001. The production of these movies has grown tremendously since the 1980s. Online users have shown which movies are their favorites by voting on the IMDB. According to the IMDB, the budget of these fifty films ranged from 6.5 to 87 million. The dollar gross ranged from .5 to 352 million.

Film places the setting in which the majority of serial homicides take place as California. The next ranked is New York. The majority of serial killers in film are white males who are in their thirties. The killers are loners and generally stick to local areas. Those who travel

to kill visited such places as; Hawaii, Seattle, Washington D.C., Atlanta, and Chicago.

The victims include both genders and generally include adults or a combination of victims by age. According to film the majority of victims are strangers. A combination of methods is used in the majority of killings. If one weapon is used, firearms were the most preferred. Control, revenge, mental problems or a combination of motives were the top motives for killing. The disposition of serial killers was divided into five categories; prison, killed, unknown, suicide, or committed to a psychiatric hospital. According to film, a large majority of killers were killed. None of the killers committed suicide and none were committed to a hospital. The results from the analysis differ somewhat than that of Hickey's research. These misconceptions are what contribute to the creation of myths about serial killers. As long as the film industry continues to produce these serial killer movies, the never-ending circle of myth versus reality will also continue.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The thesis gives some support to the media in the accuracy of portraying serial homicide in American films. Some serial killer and victim characteristics in film are very similar to the statistics in Hickey's research. This may have been foreseen given the exclusions within the study. Since some of the films had to be excluded based on non-reality features, such as; demonic powers, the undead, vampires, androids and sci-fi, this leaves all human possibilities open (See Table 15). If the study analyzed movies such as; *Nightmare on Elm Street, Halloween,* or *Friday the 13th,* the outcome would have been obvious. The outcome would have concluded the media does not portray serial homicide accurately. The films which were analyzed involved human qualities and human possibilities. This aspect allows for a more accurate finding. Although the films portrayed some similar aspects in comparison to true statistics, there were many differences also. The variables for comparison include race, gender and age of serial killer and victims, mobility classification, occupation, setting in which murders took place, disposition etc… (See Table 13). The following will detail the similarities and

differences of serial killer and victim characteristics
that exist between American films and the Hickey's
research. Some variables may show both a similarity and a
difference among the same aspect.

Similarities

Some similarities existed between film and Hickey's
research. The average serial killer was a male in his
thirties (See table 20). According to Hickey, serial
killers are between the ages of 25 and 34. Almost 50% of
serial killers in film were in their thirties. However,
less than 20% were in their twenties. The numbers are not
precise, but are similar. The majority of serial killers in
film and statistical data are both male. According to film,
74% are male and over 26% are female. According to Hickey,
males account for 83% of the serial killer population,
while the remaining 17% are female. These numbers were
surprisingly similar.

The setting for the killings in film was somewhat
similar to past research. The majority of killings in film
took place in California. New York was the second highest
in rank, followed by Illinois and the District of Columbia.
The settings are similar; however, there were states which
were not included in film that are ranked within Hickey's

research. For instance, Table 19 shows Texas was listed in Hickey's research, while the District of Columbia was not.

The majority of victims portrayed in film were single and had no relationship to the killer. However, the percentages of victims which included family members were higher in Hickey's research (See Table 24). Table 22 shows that the results were similar for the gender of victims, in that, a majority of serial killers claimed victims of both genders. The methods most used by killers in film and past research indicated a combination of methods (See Table 25).

The two main similarities have included gender and age of serial killers. Film-based serial killers may be accurate to some degree for several reasons. One, myth follows myth. The present entertainment media didn't design the male as a killer. The origin of film did. Crime in film can be dated back to the silent era. For example, gangster movies portrayed white males as the masculine and powerful killer. Males have been portrayed as the domineering type ever since. Two, women never played the role of killer until the present era. Three, it would have been taboo to portray a child as a killer. This may be why the present entertainment media has portrayed the typical serial killer as a white male in his thirties.

Differences

The results also reveal many differences between serial killers which are portrayed in film and those shown in Hickey's research. The films portrayed over 98% of serial killers as white. The remaining 2% were African American. According to Hickey, 73% are white, 22% are African American, 3% are Hispanic, and Asians account for the last 1%. There was no mention of any race other than white and African American within the viewed films. The percentage of local-based killers was almost 20% higher in film (See Table 21 and 27). The setting for the killings had some similarities, but also had differences. As mentioned previously, two states were common in both film and past research; however, some states were excluded or included in film in which were never mentioned in Hickey's research and vice versa. For instance, the District of Columbia was listed as a setting in film, but not in Hickey's research. Texas is a setting in Hickey's research but not in film.

There were also differences, along with similarities, within the mobility classification of serial killers. The majority are local based killers; however, Hickey shows there is a larger percentage of place-specific killers than is shown in film. The majority of film-based serial

killers held professional jobs, while research shows the killers generally held blue-collar jobs.

There also exists differences within the victims' gender, age, race, and relationship to the killer. Family members as victims are not portrayed accurately in film. Table 24 shows that only 2% of victims are family members, when in actuality the percentage is almost 20%. Children are victims much more in real life than portrayed in film. According to film, only 2% of victims involve children, while statistics show a much higher percentage (See Table 23). At least one child was a victim in almost 25% of the cases studied by Hickey. However, adults accounted for the majority of victims in film and past research. Females alone accounted for over 35% of victims according to Hickey, while only 10% were portrayed as the primary victim in film. The majority of victims included both genders, however, there is a difference portrayed in film than in Hickey's research.

Although the most common method for film-based serial killers and those in Hickey's research involved a combination of methods, there are also differences in other methods. Hickey categorizes the most common methods in Table 25. The majority of serial killers used a combination of methods. Firearms and strangulation were a common

combination. Victims were stabbed much more in film than in true statistics. According to Hickey, only 1% of serial killers used another form of method which was listed as "other". Torture is one method which was not listed. Film had almost 35% of serial killers which used a method not listed in the sample. For example, some such methods of torture were; steaming the victim to death, leaving rats to dispose of the victim's body, tying the bloody victims to trees and leaving them to die, raping victims with razors, forcing a man to eat until his stomach exploded, cannibalism, dismembering body parts and so on. Torture was used in many of these films.

There were also differences in motives exhibited between film and Hickey's research (See Table 26). According to film, the most common motives were control, combination of motives, revenge, and mental problems. According to Hickey, the most common motives for serial killers include sex or a combination of motives. Revenge was not even listed by Hickey as a motive. Mental problems accounted for the motive in over ten of the fifty viewed films. According to Hickey, only 4% of studied serial killers suffered from mental problems.

The disposition of serial killers (See Table 28) were very different in film than in the Hickey's research. 80%

of film-based serial killers were killed at the end of the movie. According to Hickey, almost 90% of serial killers are captured and sentenced to prison. This is an example of an extreme difference exhibited in film.

Some traits which were mentioned in Hickey, were not mentioned in film, therefore, could not be analyzed. Monikers, or nicknames, and criminal history are two examples. The differences between film and statistical data which have been demonstrated throughout this research are also specific indicators of where myths may originate. These differences are mirror images of what has been described previously as myth. Table 11 described common myths of serial killers.

One myth is that serial killers may look different from the average person. An average person may be described as normal, or one who conforms within society. Buffalo Bill, portrayed in *Silence of the Lambs*, is seen as a cross-dressing maniac who acts and looks differently than the average person. A serial killer portrayed as a white male can be seen in 41 of the 50 films. Another myth is that they are all insane. Forty-four percent of the films portrayed mental problems as the primary motive. Almost all of the serial killers portrayed in film were able to avoid the police, which coincide with one of the myths about

serial killers. Yet another myth stated that anyone who

crossed their path becomes a victim. The majority of the

victims were strangers picked at random. If Hollywood had a

"myth guideline" to follow, they would succeed in their

goal. These films have greatly contributed to myth of

serial killers. Given these previous factors, this

analysis, therefore, supports the research on crime myth,

serial killers, and the media.

Similarities between film and Hickey's research

included variables such as; age of serial killer, gender of

serial killer, and classification of killer as loner. The

variables which had differences were; race of serial

killer, setting of killings, mobility classification,

relationship to victims, gender of victims, age of victims,

methods, motives, and disposition of the killer. Although

there are some similar aspects, the differences between

film-based serial killers and that of true data clearly out

weigh the similarities. Therefore, according to this study,

the media, or film industry, did not accurately portray all

aspects of serial killers in American film between the

years of 1980 and 2001.

For the most part, the films are very unrealistic.

Some of the movies for this research had exaggerated and

unbelievable characteristics. For example, the choices of

victims portrayed in the movies are highly improbable. According to the analysis, the victims were mostly affluent women. Victims were primarily attractive, wealthy women which were chosen at random. A perfect example is the portrayal of randomly selected victims in *Natural Born Killers.* The victims are generally female prostitutes, hitchhikers, or students, according to Hickey.

The number of victims portrayed in *Natural Born Killers* (39), *Cobra* (30), *The Watcher* (19), and *The Hitcher* (18) was extremely excessive. According to Hickey, the victim count is generally less than ten. However, there are exceptions.

Some scenarios were too outlandish even for film. *American Psycho, Natural Born Killers, Hannibal, The Last Supper* and *Seven* are examples of extreme portrayals of serial killers by the film industry. These movies are a good example of the film industry's desire to produce movies that have shock value. *Seven*, in particular, has a story line which is hard to forget. A natural reaction after watching this movie for the first time would be complete shock. It is the type of film which leaves the audience discussing the plot hours after they have seen it. This film was created from myth, transfers myth to the

public, and is fed right back to the media for production of other films just like it.

Cult-like and mission bound killers which were portrayed in *Cobra* and *Resurrection* are also examples of eccentric films which may contribute to myth building. Many of these films can contribute to myth.

There are certain effects which result from this phenomenon. The negative consequences of myth may include fear, a perception of failure due to unsuccessful crime control policies, and stereotyping within the criminal justice system. The public may perceive crime control policies as imperative to society and when it is unsuccessful, the "nothing works" attitude may result in loss of faith in the system. Stereotyping by the criminal justice system, as mentioned previously, also creates myth. A common reaction in watching these fifty films can be fear-based. A response may be sleeping with the lights on, checking the locks, looking under the bed or in the closets, or even installing an alarm system. The goal of these films is to create fear or thrills; however, these films, especially when characterized as real, can also reinforce misperceptions and cause myth. These misconceptions may begin to shape the way people think

about crime and criminals. As for the good effects of this phenomenon, there are none.

The author of this analysis perceived serial killers exactly as they were portrayed in the film. Movies had a huge effect on perception. It wasn't until after this thesis that the author realized that everything which was believed up until now was completely false. Therefore, the author had first hand experience of being tricked into believing myth which was initially produced by the media, or film industry. These findings will hopefully close some of the doors which create the myth behind the serial killer phenomenon.

APPENDIX A

Coding of Serial Killers and the Media

Name of movie_____

AGEK1	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over			
AGEK2	TEEN	20'S	30's	40'S	50's or over			
RACEK1	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER				
RACEK2	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER				
GENDERK1	MALE	FEMALE						
GENDERK2	MALE	FEMALE						
METHODS	FIREA	STRANGLE	STABBED	BLUDGEONED	POISONED	DROWNING	COMBO	OTHER
MOTIVES	SEX	MONEY	RACISM	HATRED	CONTROL	MENTAL PROBLEMS	COMBO	OTHER
MARITAL STATUSK1	MARR	SINGLE	Unknown	N/A				
MARITAL STATUSK2	MARR	SINGLE	Unknown	N/A				
MOBILITY CLASSIFICATION	LOCAL	TRAVEL	Place Specific					
OCCUPK1								
OCCUPK2								
LONER OR TEAM KILLER	LONER	TEAM						
DISPOSITK1	SUICIDE	PRISON	KILLED	UNKNOWN				
DISPOSITK2	SUICIDE	PRISON	KILLED	UNKNOWN				
NUMBER OF VICTIMS								
RACEV1	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV2	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV3	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV4	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV5	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV6	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV7	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV8	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV9	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
RACEV10	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	OTHER	N/A			
AGEV1	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV2	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV3	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV4	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV5	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV6	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV7	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV8	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV9	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
AGEV10	TEEN	20's	30's	40's	50's or over	OTHER	N/A	
GENDERV1	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV2	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV3	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV4	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV5	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV6	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					

GENDERV7	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV8	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV9	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
GENDERV10	MALE	FEMALE	N/A					
MARITALV1	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV2	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV3	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV4	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV5	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV6	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV7	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV8	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV9	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				
MARITALV10	MAR	SINGLE	UNKN	N/A				

REFERENCES

1. Abbott, C. and J. Zaleski. 2001. Women who kill.
      Publisher's Weekly, May 21, pp.97.

2. Babbie, Earl. 1998. *The practice of social research.*
      Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

3. Bohm, Robert M. 1986. Crime, criminal and crime
      control policy myths. *Justice Quarterly.*
      3(2):193-214.

4. Caputi, Jane. 1993. *American psychos: The serial*
      killer in contemporary film. Albuquerque:
      University of New Mexico.

5. Douglas, John and M. Olshaker. 1999. *The anatomy of*
      motive. New York: Scribner.

6. Egger, Steven A., 1998. *The killers among us:*
      examination of serial murder and its
      investigation. Belmont: Prentice Hall Trade.

7. Entman, R.M. 1989. How the media affect what people
      think: An information processing approach.
      Journal of Politics 51:347-370.

8. Hickey, E.W. 2002. *Serial murderers and their*
      victims. Fresno: Wadsworth Group.

9. Holmes, R. and S. Holmes. 1998. *Contemporary*
      perspectives on serial murder. Thousand Oaks:
      Sage Publications.

10. Jenkins, Philip. 1994*. Using murder: The social*
      construction of serial homicide. New York:
      Walter de Gruyter, Inc.

11. Kappler, Victor E., M. Blumberg, and G. Potter. 2000.
      The mythology of crime and criminal justice.
      Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

12. Kelleher, Michael D. and C.L. Kelleher. 1998.
      Murder most rare: The female serial killer.
      Westport: Praeger.

95

13. Lane, B. and W. Gregg. 1995. *The encyclopedia of serial killers.* New York: Berkeley Publishing.

14. Lasky, M.J. 2000. *The language of journalism*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

15. Lester, David. 1995. *Serial killers: The insatiable passion.* Philadelphia: Charles Press.

16. Massing, Michael. 1999. Violence in the media contributes to the violence in society. Pp. 32-36 in *Violence in the media*, edited by James D. Torr. Greenhaven Press, Inc.

17. McCarthy, John P., 1999. The entertainment industry should be held liable for the effects of media violence. Pp. 114 in *Violence in the media*, edited by James D. Torr. Greenhaven Press, Inc.

18. Rafter, Nicole. 2000. *Shots in the mirror: Crime films in society*. Oxford: University Press.

19. Robinson, Matthew. 2000. The construction and reinforcement of myths of race and crime. *Journal of contemporary criminal justice. 16:*133-156.

20. Schechter, Harold. 2000. *Fiend: The shocking true story of america's youngest serial killer*. New Jersey: Pocket Books, 2000.

21. Siegel, L.J. 1998. *Criminology: Theories, patterns, and typologies.* Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

22. Simpson, Philip L. 2000. *Psycho paths: Tracking the serial killer through contemporary American film and fiction.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

23. Surette, Ray. 1998. *Media, crime, and criminal justice: Images and realities.* Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

24. Tithecott, Richard. 1997. *Of men and monsters: Jeffrey Dahmer and the construction of the serial*

killer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

25. Young, Sandra H. and E. Rowland. *Destined for murder: Profiles of six serial killers.* St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications.

FILM REFERENCES

1. Apted, M. (Director). (1994). *Blink* [Motion picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

2. Badman, J. (Director). (1991). *The hard way* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal.

3. Barker, C. (Director). (1990). *Nightbreed* [Motion Picture]. United States: 20th Century Fox.

4. Beasley, W. (Producer). (1992). *Basic instinct* [Motion picture]. United States: Tristar Pictures.

5. Bigelow, K. (Writer/Director). (1990). *Blue steel* [Motion picture]. United States: MGM.

     Blair, M. (Director). (1985). *Confessions of a serial killer* [Motion picture]. United States: Eagle Entertainment.

6. Blanks, J. (Director). (1998). *Urban legend* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

7. Bornedal, O. (Director). (1998). *Nightwatch* [Motion picture]. United States: Dimension.

8. Bregman, M. (Producer). (1989). *Sea of love* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal.

9. Bright, M. (Director). (1996). *Freeway* [Motion picture]. United States: August Entertainment.

10. Broomfield, N. (Director). *Aileen Wuornos: The selling of a serial killer* [Motion picture]. U.K.: Strand Releasing.

11. Brown, D. (Producer) & Wizan, J. (Producer). (2001). *Along came a spider* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

12. Brown, J. (Producer) & Kahn, M. (Producer). (1997). *Kiss the girls* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

13. Cannon, D. (Director). (1998). *I still know what you did last summer* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

14. Carlyle, P. (Producer). (1995). *Seven* [Motion picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

15. Charbanic, J. (Director). (2000). *The watcher* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal.

16. Cosmatos, G. (Director). (1986). *Cobra* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

17. Craven, W. (Director). (1984). *Nightmare on elm street* [Motion picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

18. Craven, W. (Director). (1996). *Scream* [Motion picture]. United States: Dimension.

19. Craven, W. (Director). (1997). *Scream 2* [Motion picture]. United States: Dimension.

20. Craven, W. (Director). (2000). *Scream 3* [Motion picture]. United States: Dimension.

21. Cunningham, S. (Director). (1980). *Friday the 13th* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

22. Davey, B. (Producer). (1999). *Felicia's journey* [Motion picture]. United States: Artisian.

23. Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *Silence of the lambs* [Motion picture]. United States: Orion.

24. Eastwood, C. (Producer). (1984). *Tightrope* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

25. Eastwood, C. (Producer). (1988). *The dead pool* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

26. Eastwood, C. (Producer). (1993). *Sudden impact* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

27. Elliott, S. (Director). (1999). *Eye of the beholder* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

28. Fancher, H. (Writer/Director). (1999). *The minus man* [Motion picture]. United States: Artisian.

29. Hagen, R. (Director). (1990). *Click* [Motion picture]. United States: Lynn Werner.

30. Harmon, R. (Director). (1986). *The hitcher* [Motion picture]. United States: Tristar.

31. Harris. D. (Director). (2000). *Mercy* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

32. Herrington, R. (Director). (1993). *Striking distance* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

33. Hewitt, D. (Producer). (1999). *The bone collector* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal.

34. Hoblit, G. (Director). (1998). *Fallen* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

35. Holland, T. (Director). (1988). *Child's play* [Motion picture]. United States: United Artists.

36. Hurd, G. (Producer). (1997). *Switchback* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

37. Katzin, L. (Director). (1989). *Relentless* [Motion picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

38. Lindenmuth, K. (Director). (1995). *Addicted to murder* [Motion picture]. United States: Brimstone Productions.

39. Mann, M. (Director/Producer). (1986). *Manhunter* [Motion picture]. United States: Embassy.

40. McGregor, C. (Producer). (1996). *Pandora detective* [Motion picture]. United States: Access Software.

41. McNaughton, J. (Director). (1986). *Henry: Portrait of a serial killer* [Motion picture]. United States: Filmcat.

42. Milchan, A. (Producer). (1995). *Copycat* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

43. Nagy, Ivan. (Director). (1995). *Skinner* [Motion Picture]. United States: A-Pix Entertainment.

44. Ottman, J. (Director). (2000). *Urban legends: the final cut* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

45. Pallenberg, R. (Director). (1988). *Cutting class* [Motion picture]. United States: Republic Pictures.

46. Palma, B. (Director). (1980). *Dressed to kill* [Motion picture]. United States: Filmways Pictures.

47. Parcello, C. (Director). (2000). *In the light of the Moon* [Motion picture]. United States: First Look Pictures.

48. Petrie, D. (Director). (1980). *Resurrection* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal.

49. Pressman, E. (Producer) & Hanley, C. (Producer). (2000). *American psycho* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal.

50. Robinson, B. (Writer/Director). (1992). *Jennifer eight* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

51. Rose, B. (Director). (1992). *Candyman* [Motion picture]. United States: Polygram Films.

52. Rosenthal, R. (Director). (1981). *Halloween II* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal.

53. Salva, V. (Director). (2001). *Jeepers creepers* [Motion picture]. Germany: United Artists.

54. Schlamme, T. (Director). (1993). *So I married an axe murderer* [Motion picture]. United States: Tristar.

55. Schneider, H. (Producer). (1987). *Black widow* [Motion picture]. United States: 20th Century Fox.

56. Scott, K. (Producer) & Zarpas, C. (Producer). (1998). *Clay pigeons* [Motion picture]. United States: Grameray Pictures.

57. Scott, R. (Director). (2001). *Hannibal* [Motion picture]. United States: MGM.

58. Seagal, S. (Producer). (1991). *Out for justice* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

59. Sena, D. (Director). (1993). *Kalifornia* [Motion picture]. United States: Viacom.

60. Singh, T. (Director). (2000). *The cell* [Motion picture]. Germany: Avery Pix.

61. Stone, O. (Director). (1981). *The hand* [Motion picture]. United States: Orion.

62. Stone, O. (Director). (1994). *Natural born killers* [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

63. Title, S. (Director). (1996). *The last supper* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

64. Thompson, J. (Director). (1986). *Murphy's law* [Motion picture]. United States: Image Entertainment.

65. Waters, J. (Director). (1994). *Serial mom* [Motion picture]. United States: Savoy Pictures.

66. Williamson, K. (Director). (1997). *I know what you did last summer* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Tristar.

67. Yablans, Frank. (Producer). (1990). *Lisa* [Motion picture]. United States: United Artists.