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CHAPTER SIX

The Unbearable Straightness of Violence: Queering Serial Murder in True Crime

The other man was none other than the arch-fiend, the monster of monsters himself.
—H. H. Holmes, *Holmes the Arch-Fiend*

The "monster" may sleep, but he only slumbers—waiting for his chance to roam free once more.
—Ann Rule, *Lust Killer*

The frequency and durability of the term "monster" in true-crime narratives suggest that it is an undifferentiated category, effective precisely for its ability to convey many shades of meaning without having to articulate them explicitly. In practice, however, "monstrosity" proves to be an internally diverse category in true-crime discourse. Although it is true that true-crime narratives characteristically use the terms "normality" and "monstrosity" as if their meaning was clear, just as often those narratives give these terms a particular inflection in order to respond to a particular dilemma. When we consider the fact, for example, that the vast majority of serial killers are straight men and the vast majority of their victims are women, it becomes clear that it is not just a gender- or sexuality-neutral "us" that is threatened by an association with the apparently normal serial killer, but more specifically heterosexual men. Consequently, there is a compelling reason for true-crime narratives to assert the "innocence" of straight men by disavowing the implicit link between heterosexual maleness and violence that is suggested by serial killers. One way of doing this, as I described in the previous chapter, is to accentuate the abnormality of the apparently normal serial killer as much as possible by giving him a thoroughly deviant childhood. Another way is to map the terms "normality" and "monstrosity" onto "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality," thus demonizing homosexuality by arguing that it is intimately connected (indeed, almost identical) with violence. In other words, true-crime narratives

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illustrate the supposed lack of connection between heterosexuality and violence by emphasizing just how closely homosexuality and violence are related.

True crime's focus on the violence of homosexuality exemplifies the very selective attention the genre pays to the sexual dimensions of serial murder. In fact, one might argue that such narratives normally ignore sexuality altogether because they want to avoid acknowledging the existence of what Gloria Steinem has described as "supremacy crimes." Writing about mass murder as well as serial murder in a 1999 post to the *Ms. Magazine* Web site, Steinem argues that "these 'senseless' killings begin to seem less mysterious when you consider that they were committed disproportionately by white, non-poor males, the group most likely to become hooked on the drug of superiority. It's a drug pushed by a male-dominant culture that presents dominance as a natural right; a racist hierarchy that falsely elevates whiteness . . . and a homophobic one that empowers only one form of sexuality." And yet, as Steinem points out, there is no acknowledgment of the existence of supremacy crimes in media representations of mass and serial murder. In the context of discussing the Columbine High School killings, Steinem suggests that the links between sexuality and murder become an issue only when the killer and/or the victims are gay: "What if these two young murderers, who were called 'fags' by some of the jocks at Columbine High School actually had been gay? . . . What if they had been lovers? . . . Would we hear as little about their sexuality as we now do?" Steinem's series of rhetorical questions emphasizes the fact that the silence surrounding heterosexuality and violence is purchased at the price of demonizing other sexualities.

Some true-crime writers have denied that the genre is preoccupied by homosexual rather than heterosexual serial killers. Dennis McDougal, for example, in his book on California serial killer Randy Kraft, argues that homosexual serial killers actually get less attention than their heterosexual counterparts because the former are too horrible to contemplate. According to McDougal, "that men could do such things to other men was so far removed from the consciousness of mainstream America that the news media and, by extension, most middle-class Americans chose to ignore it altogether" (362). Ironically, the very existence of McDougal's book contradicts his claim and suggests instead the presence of a definite market for popular cultural representations of homosexual serial killers. Indeed, it would be far more accurate to say that the attention "mainstream America" pays to homosexual serial killers is obsessive. As David Hirsch suggests in summarizing the message of "serial-killer-of-the-week TV movies," this attention is so obsessive precisely because it is always combined with the covert aim of rallying support for heterosexuality: "Isn't it always the same story: missionary style only with your

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legally exogamous, intraracial, intergendered spouse; and woman (fags, dykes, and other transsexuals included), please stay quietly in your domestic closet" (443–44). I will demonstrate in this chapter that true-crime narratives about Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Aileen Wuornos demonstrate exactly how these messages about hetero/homosexuality are articulated. In Bundy's case, the challenge of removing the implication of violence from heterosexuality is especially acute because Bundy was not only apparently normal but, in many ways, mainstream society's golden boy.

The Straight and Narrow: Ted Bundy

A discussion of Ted Bundy has become a standard feature of almost every popular and academic book about serial murder, and that is precisely why I must add to the countless retellings of his case. As Ann Rule has said, the term serial murder "seemed to have been coined for Ted Bundy" (*Stranger* 435), and there is no doubt that Bundy remains the exemplary American serial killer, the individual most likely to come to mind when the term "serial murder" is used. Bundy maintains his status as America's most famous serial killer partly because his exemplarity can be phrased in a variety of ways. For Robert Keppel, one of the investigators into the original "Ted" killings in Seattle in the mid-1970s, Bundy is an exemplary figure for law enforcement: "For police investigative purposes, his case is prototypical. There is no question that it remains the exemplar of what works, and what does not work, when local law-enforcement agencies are faced with the fact that some unknown subject, almost certainly a male, has begun to periodically murder people, usually women and children" (*Signature* v). For feminist critic Jane Caputi, Bundy is an exemplary figure in a very different way: "Just as Jack the Ripper seemed to personify the underside of Victorian England, so too Ted Bundy epitomized his society, presenting a persona of the superficially ideal, all-American boy" ("New" 4). In addition to Bundy's usefulness for law enforcement and his signifying "all-Americanness," there are two additional factors that give Bundy an exemplary role in my own discussion.

The first factor is Bundy's response to his celebrity status. Although he was initially resentful and disturbed by the intense media scrutiny given to his case, there are many signs that Bundy soon came to enjoy the attention. His refusal to consider a plea bargain in his Florida capital murder trial that could have saved his life, for example, along with his decision to represent himself in that trial can be read as a desire to take center stage in a drama in which he was the undisputed star. After his conviction, Bundy became even more conscious of his celebrity status, reportedly boasting to psychologist Dorothy Otnow Lewis, "Do you realize I am the most celebrated inmate on

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death row?" (quoted in Leiby 1). Bearing these points in mind, one cannot help but agree with Joyce Carol Oates when she imagines Bundy taking pride in all the books that have been written about him and "smiling as he reads, on the back of the paperback, that a reviewer for the *New York Times* has called him 'the most fascinating killer in modern American history'" (56).[1] Bundy's self-importance is bizarrely mirrored by the media's emphasis on how accomplished he was in his peculiar field. The unstable combining of admiration and condemnation that characterizes so much of the popular cultural response to Bundy is symptomatic of his second exemplary feature: Bundy presents the puzzling relationship between normality and abnormality in serial killers in a particularly concentrated form because of the apparent extreme contrast between his successful, ambitious, handsome, white, straight, Republican, male, middle-class exterior, and the "monster within."

This so-called contradiction in Bundy was a feature in writing about the case from its very earliest stages. In a December 1978 article in the *New York Times Magazine*, Jon Nordheimer emphasized how Bundy differed from the stereotype of mass killers:

> The stereotype of mass killers—with minds bedeviled by tumors or hallucinations —is all too familiar to the American public. They were the drifters, the malcontents, the failures and the resenters. Ted Bundy, for all appearances, in no way resembled any of them. He had all the personal resources that are prized in America, that guarantee success and respect. He loved children, read poetry, showed courage by chasing down and capturing a purse snatcher on the streets of Seattle, rescued a child from drowning, loved the outdoors, respected his parents, was a college honor student, worked with desperate people at a crisis center and, in the words of one admirer, "Ted could be with any woman he wanted—he was so magnetic!" (111)

The problem for true-crime writers became how to reconcile Bundy's all-American appearance with the fact that he was accused of the brutal murder of dozens of young women in a four-year, cross-country murder binge. As the remark of Ted's "admirer" indicates, the problem was exacerbated by the fact that Bundy was handsome and attractive to women. All through his trials, and even after he was sentenced to death, Bundy was a magnet for women who became known as "Ted groupies," who gave him both moral and financial support, and who claimed undying love for their hero. In other words, it was precisely the extent to which Bundy appeared to be a poster boy for dashing heterosexuality that necessitated a vigorous effort to prove that he was no such thing. His apparent heteronormativity would, paradoxically, become the defining feature of Bundy's deviance.

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Normalizing Deviance/Deviating Normality

Ted Bundy had a complex relationship to the issue of his "normality." Part of him understood that his normality could be a useful disguise in the context of a large-scale murder investigation involving many suspects: "Which one do they pick? Do they pick the law student with no criminal background, who was probably even known by some of the prosecutors working the case? Or are they going to go after the types . . . you know, the guys in the files . . . the real weirdos?" (quoted in Michaud and Aynesworth, *Ted* 137). Although this anecdote suggests that normality is a facade hiding the reality of deviance, Bundy objected strenuously to juridical attempts to describe him in just this way: apparently normal but really deviant. Commenting on a psychological profile drawn up on him while in prison that described him as defensive, insecure, passive-aggressive, and dependent on women, Bundy argued that "there are probably tens of thousands of people in the city walking around . . . more or less like me. And as you told me, these characteristics are not predicted by anyone necessarily, because many people have them and are never violent, and there are many people who are violent who never have those characteristics" (quoted in Winn and Merrill 168). In emphasizing the relative nature of the concepts of "normality" and "deviance," Bundy hoped to avoid being classified by such terms.

Nevertheless, the longer Bundy remained in prison, the more resigned he became to being portrayed as superlatively deviant: "Because of my association with all these crimes, the experts refuse to perceive me as being, uh, even remotely—you know, anything that approaches being normal" (quoted in Michaud and Aynesworth, *Ted* 258). Although such comments demonstrate that Bundy was perceptive, to some extent at least, in identifying how the judicial system constructed him as a deviant subject, he apparently did not realize that the production of such deviance was based not on denying his normality, but rather on exaggerating that normality to the point where nothing could seem more deviant. What we might call the hyperbolizing of Bundy's normality was necessary because he appeared to be so ordinary; his ordinariness had to be turned into the most compelling evidence of his difference from "really" ordinary men. I discussed in the previous chapter the techniques true-crime narratives have developed to turn the ordinary into the monstrous, and these are exactly the techniques used in true-crime work on Bundy. The "mask of sanity" image, for example, is omnipresent in writing about the Bundy case, as in this example from Myra McPherson: "Most serial killers are white, male, above average in intelligence, and adroit at wearing a mask of charm and sanity . . . Bundy wore the mask even better than most" (273).

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Similarly, the strategy of searching for an originary sign of deviance in the serial killer's childhood can also be found in work on Bundy, where such signs establish the "fact" that the combination of a "surface" normality with a "real" deviance was Bundy's ultimate defining feature. In McPherson's work, the originary incident consisted of the three-year-old Bundy's slipping knives into his aunt's bed, an anecdote that I discussed in the previous chapter. When McPherson quotes the reaction of Dr. Dorothy Otnow Lewis when she heard this anecdote, we can see how valuable such an incident is to the effort of making Bundy unambiguously, always-already, deviant: "I was astonished that someone finally revealed how disturbed he'd been. We had been looking and looking for signs of pathology. I mean, you don't get this way by accident" (276). Although not all true-crime writers on Bundy zero in on a particular incident from his childhood, they all assume that the secret to Bundy is to be found in his earliest years.

For Ann Rule, the answer to the mystery represented by Bundy can be found by emphasizing how unusual and unstable his childhood was. Bundy was born out of wedlock to a mother who moved frequently, pretended to be his older sister, and had changed her son's name by both deed poll and her marriage before he was five years old. Rule argues that such a background contributed to what Bundy would become. According to Michaud and Aynesworth, by the time Bundy was a small child the die was already cast. Although Bundy "looked and acted like" other children, in fact "he was haunted by something else: a fear, a doubt . . . that inhabited his mind with the subtlety of a cat. He felt it for years and years, but he didn't recognize it for what it was until much later. By then this flaw, the rip in his psyche, had become the locus of a cold homicidal rage" (*Only* 47). When Michaud and Aynesworth go on to argue that Bundy's "critical challenge from his teen years onward was the perfection and maintenance of a credible public persona, his mask of sanity" (57), we see how the various strategies true-crime narratives use to make normality the best evidence of deviance work together to achieve this end. Although references to a knife-wielding three-year-old and a "mask of sanity" might seem to connote nothing but deviance, in fact these references work together to produce a powerful, albeit paradoxical, image of deviance that is defined by its appearance of normality.

One might feel that the "smoking gun" in Bundy's childhood that apparently explains his subsequent pathology is so vague in these true-crime narratives as to be practically nonexistent, but as Michaud and Aynesworth admit in a moment of unusual honesty in one of their two books about Bundy, *The Only Living Witness*, if no evidence of Bundy's monstrosity existed, true-crime writers simply would have to invent it. At one point in their account,

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Michaud and Aynesworth quote Bob Dekle, the Florida assistant state's attorney who prosecuted Bundy for the murder of twelve-year-old Kimberly Leach, as saying, "People . . . think a criminal is a hunchbacked, cross-eyed little monster slithering through the dark, leaving a trail of slime. They're human beings" (*Only* 6). Michaud and Aynesworth attempt to undermine Dekle's assertion of Bundy's humanity by arguing that "within Ted Bundy, human being, that slithering hunchback lives . . . In Ted, the cross-eyed creature lurks on a different plane of existence and can only be seen by means of a tautology; its presence must be inferred before it can be found" (6). Michaud and Aynesworth's remarks are typical of true-crime accounts of Bundy in that the only way they can get around the problem of Bundy's ordinariness is to assume the presence of the extraordinary, of the monstrous, and then go looking for it, comforted by the thought that Bundy's apparent normality is just that, an apparition, with no stability next to the reliable solidity of the monster.[2]

The insistence on Bundy's monstrosity in true-crime narratives about his case has the same function as the carnivalesque atmosphere that surrounded his execution in January 1989. As the scheduled time for the execution approached, a large crowd gathered outside the prison, laughing, cheering, and waving banners bearing slogans such as "Bundy BBQ," "I like my Ted well done," and "Fry, Bundy, Fry." Jane Caputi has explained the intensity of the hatred directed toward Bundy as a consequence of his doing "the supremely unmanly thing of confessing to his crimes and manifesting fear of death" ("New" 5), but I find Joseph Grixti's interpretation of the celebratory crowd more persuasive: "The crowd, echoing as it did some of the symbolic functions performed by the torch-waving crowds that so frequently rose to destroy the monster at the climax of horror movies in the 1930s, partly reflected a firm determination not to lose sight of the murderer as outsider—an unnatural growth that society had finally recognized for what it was and was now dealing with accordingly" (89). Bundy is the contemporary equivalent of Frankenstein's monster: something we have made that has to be destroyed to protect ourselves from the knowledge of our own involvement in the creation of monsters.

Although it is important to emphasize the ways in which Bundy was vilified, the public and true-crime reaction to Ted Bundy was not exclusively condemnatory. Indeed, when we look at the ways in which the public expressed its admiration for Bundy, we will see much more clearly why his apparent normality seemed to have particularly troubling implications for normative heterosexuality, for the public often perceived Bundy as an especially roguish example of that classic straight stereotype: the ladies' man. For example, when Bundy escaped from jail in Aspen, Colorado, in 1977, where he was awaiting trial for a series of murders, having already been convicted of attempted

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kidnapping in Utah, "T-shirts appeared reading: 'Ted Bundy is a One Night Stand.' Radio KSNO programmed a Ted Bundy Request Hour, playing songs like 'Ain't No Way to Treat a Lady.' A local restaurant offered a 'Bundyburger' consisting of nothing more than a plain roll. 'Open it and see the meat has fled,' explained a sign" (Caputi, *Age* 50–51). These reactions illustrate how many were tempted to identify with Bundy's outlaw-like exploits, or at least to make light of them. Given the extent to which Bundy was being identified as a representative (that is, hypersexual, irresponsible, exploitative in his relationships with women, contemptuous of the law) straight man, it became imperative for true-crime narratives to compensate for the public reaction by proving that he was no such thing, and to emphasize instead that Ted Bundy was an aberration that told us nothing about heterosexuality at all.

Expertise and/in Serial Killing

Not all examples of admiration for Bundy were as direct as those seen in Colorado. A more indirect and much more frequent type of admiration is a common feature of true-crime narratives about the case, namely, the tendency to regard Bundy as a, perhaps the, expert on serial murder. There is evidence that Bundy thought of himself in this way from an early stage of his protracted journey through the legal system. Nordheimer, in his 1978 article, quotes from a letter written by Bundy in which he says, "Prosecutors, policemen, journalists, old girlfriends, friends and family of 'the victims,' psychologists, psychiatrists, ex-roommates, former teachers and defense attorneys have all ventured opinions, observations and assorted drivel about this mysterious creature. I think it's my turn. I am, after all, the ultimate Bundy expert" (111). At this point, Bundy was a self-appointed expert and little more, but by the time he reached the end of his capital trial in Florida, he was already in the process of being rehabilitated, in a manner of speaking, by the representatives of law and order. Immediately after sentencing him to death, Judge Edward Cowart addressed the following extraordinary remarks to Bundy: "You're a bright young man. You'd have made a good lawyer, and I'd have loved to have you practice in front of me—but you went another way, partner. Take care of yourself. I don't have any animosity to you. I want you to know that" (quoted in Rule, *Stranger* 394). Despite the fact that he had just sentenced Bundy to death for the brutal murders he committed in the Chi Omega Sorority House, and despite the fact that Bundy had been a conspicuous failure as a law student and had made errors during his trial that undoubtedly damaged his defense, Cowart could not resist the temptation to do a little male bonding before Bundy was taken to death row. In particular, Cowart's comment about Bundy's

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promise as a lawyer was just the first sign of the authority that Bundy would arrogate to himself and be given by others while he waited to be executed.

Appropriately, true-crime writers played a central role in bestowing expert status upon Bundy. This expert status existed in a mutually supportive relationship with Bundy's fame. In other words, Bundy's fame was another contributing factor in his acquisition of expert status, and his status as an expert increased his fame even more. What role did true-crime narratives play in creating this pernicious dialectic? In their 1989 book *Ted Bundy: Conversations with a Killer*, Michaud and Aynesworth describe how they came up with the idea of having Bundy talk about his crimes in the third person, in an attempt to get him to be more forthcoming about those crimes. Michaud and Aynesworth hoped that by enabling him to distance himself from his acts, this grammatical sleight of hand would encourage Bundy to open up to them. But Michaud and Aynesworth were also aware that their plan pandered to Bundy's inflated sense of self-importance, and this is exactly what they used as a selling point for the idea when they explained it to Bundy: "You're the expert, Ted. You know the cases. You know the investigations. You're the suspect. Who else is in a better position to pull this all together?" (59). Not surprisingly, the idea appealed to Bundy, and although some might argue that allowing Bundy to assume the role of expert was a small price to pay for the information he shared about his crimes, others might argue that granting someone like Bundy expert status licenses him to take pride in his grisly "accomplishments."

Thanks partly to such arrangements, in the twelve years he spent on death row before his execution in 1989, Bundy "enjoyed his assumed status as the world's foremost authority on serial murder. It flattered his outsized ego that so many psychiatrists, reporters, and writers were interested in interviewing him" (*Serial* 42). How can we explain this intense interest in Bundy's thoughts about serial murder and his elevation to a position of authority about the subject? In his lecture on the "dangerous individual," Michel Foucault describes the necessity for the dangerous criminal to produce a certain kind of discourse about himself: "Beyond admission, there must be confession, self-examination, explanation of oneself, revelation of what one is . . . The magistrates and the jurors, the lawyers too, and the department of the public prosecutor, cannot really play their role unless they are provided with another type of discourse, the one given by the accused about himself, or the one which he makes possible for others, through his confessions, memories, intimate disclosures, etc." (126–27). From this perspective, we could argue that an individual such as Bundy is encouraged to produce discourse about himself and others of his kind both to increase public knowledge about the issue of

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serial murder and to emphasize how necessary it is to punish such a dangerous criminal. Allowing Bundy to become an expert, in other words, functions as an indirect way of producing justifications of why he must be put to death. It is certainly true that Bundy's expert status did not always work in his favor. Robert Keppel, for example, has described how he was able to use Bundy's arrogance about his supreme status among serial killers to extract valuable information from him, both about his own murders and about other ongoing cases, such as the Green River murders (*Riverman* 216, 225). In a similar vein, Polly Nelson, Bundy's death penalty appeal lawyer, has claimed that her attempts to defend Bundy were hampered by his cooperation with the FBI (159ff.). Clearly, Bundy was seduced by the notion that the FBI would come to him for help, and he agreed to work with them even though it hurt his case.

Although it is tempting to argue that Bundy was encouraged to consider himself an expert on serial murder in order to create situations where he might confess unambiguously to his crimes (something he never did), I think it far more accurate to claim that Bundy's authoritative status expressed the indirect admiration of law enforcement personnel, true-crime writers, and many of their readers for an individual who occupied a superlative place in the pantheon of serial killers. Indeed, this veiled admiration for serial killers is a feature not just of true-crime narratives about Ted Bundy but of true-crime narratives about serial murder in general, many examples of which feature an emphasis on the superlative aspects of a killer's crimes.[3] In many instances, this emphasis on superlativeness, on individual serial killers as the best or greatest of their kind, extends even to homosexual serial killers, in the process often canceling out the genre's generally condemnatory attitude toward homosexuality. In *Angel of Darkness*, for example, Dennis McDougal is at pains to emphasize that Randy Kraft killed so many men that he deserves the title of the most prolific, and therefore the worst, serial killer ever. Similarly, Joel Norris has argued that Jeffrey Dahmer is much worse than other serial killers, almost as if serial murder was a competition. With this said, it must also be emphasized that gay and lesbian serial killers are never allowed to have the same expert status as someone like Bundy, or, to put it another way, gay and lesbian serial killers are not allowed the same kind of fame as straight serial killers like Bundy.

This claim can be demonstrated by a brief discussion of Andrew Cunanan, whose murder of fashion designer Gianni Versace in 1997 made headlines around the world and set off an avalanche of media coverage. With so much attention paid to the manhunt for Cunanan, which came to an end when he was found dead in a houseboat in Miami, he could not help but become a star, but a star of a very particular kind. As with Jeffrey Dahmer, as we will see in more

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detail later, the vast majority of media coverage of Cunanan was framed by an assumed connection between homosexuality and violence. Matthew Soar explains: "Common references to Cunanan as the 'gay serial killer' . . . and even a 'homicidal homosexual' . . . were emblematic of a slew of claims that articulated Cunanan's sexuality with his violent actions, often through conspicuous references to sadomasochistic sex" (50). We should certainly not be surprised by this feature of media coverage about the case, but the coverage of Gianni Versace was much more complex. As Soar puts it, "the *murderer's* gayness was treated as uniformly and overwhelmingly problematic, *the* core factor in his descent," whereas "one victim's gayness, when articulated to wealth, would be seen as thoroughly innocuous, if not innocent" (49, original emphasis). The fact that Versace was already famous when he was murdered protected him from being blamed, like so many other gay murder victims, for contributing to his own death. As a consequence, not only was Cunanan's fame diminished, becoming something much more akin to notoriety (as Gary Indiana has put it, media coverage of the case tended to follow the pattern established by the Kennedy assassination, "world's most important person slain by world's least important person" [241]), but also Cunanan's other victims tended to be ignored, their deaths seen as relatively unimportant next to that of Versace. In this way, "the narrative made it clear that only celebrities have real lives" (Indiana 242).

But although Versace's wealth and fame saved him from condemnation as a gay murder victim, this does not mean that his gayness survived unscathed. Rebecca Farley explains that, in order for Versace to signify as an "innocent" victim, his gayness had to be eliminated: "In life, Versace's (gay) body was transgressive; in death it was mutilated. By leaving the (transgressive, dead) body out altogether, Versace's narrative became a prosocial tale of capitalist success, a handsome, benign family man destroyed by the 'evil' of a perverted gay lifestyle" (2). In this way, the association between gayness and perverted violence could be reinforced. At the same time, and to the extent that, as I argued in the introduction, celebrity and transgression are always connected, Cunanan's murder of Versace sent the comforting message that "such violent deaths do not occur in our everyday reality, but rather can safely be relegated to a realm beyond the normal—to the world of fashion rock stars and celebrity killers" (Bronfen, "Celebrating" 178). Fame thus maintains its complexly ambivalent status as both desirable goal and social dysfunction in contemporary American culture.

These efforts to demonize Cunanan and exonerate Versace were greatly facilitated by Cunanan's suicide, and the same might be said of Dahmer's murder in prison in November 1994. Even before his death, however, it must

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be emphasized that Dahmer's fame was qualitatively different from Bundy's. The collective unwillingness to turn Dahmer into an expert on serial murder meant that, like Cunanan, Dahmer was more notorious than famous, and this explains the widespread perception that poetic justice, at least, had been served when Dahmer was killed. Perhaps we will not allow killers like Dahmer to become experts on serial murder because we do not want to hear what they have to tell us, or perhaps it is because we assume that whatever they have to say would pertain only to queerness and thus have no relevance to an implicitly straight "us." The corollary to this assumption, of course, is that Bundy is allowed to be famous and to be an expert because we assume that what he says applies not to heterosexuality in general but rather only to the thoroughly aberrant, individualized mutation of heterosexuality personified by Bundy. And so, by a somewhat circuitous route, we have come back to the necessity for asserting the mutual exclusivity of heterosexuality and violence in true-crime narratives about serial murder.

The assertion of this mutual exclusivity can take a number of forms. One is a denial of the hatred of women as a motive for serial murder, because admitting the existence of such a motive would make it more difficult to distinguish serial killers from other groups of men who commit crimes of violence against women.[4] In *To Kill Again*, for example, Donald Sears claims that "it is somewhat misleading . . . to say that serial killers commit their crimes because of a hatred of women" (72). In a similar vein, Kathy McCarthy quotes psychologist Helen Morrison in the course of arguing that "the killer's motive—and an internal motive exists—is 'highly irrational, highly disorganized,' never so simple as 'I hate women' or 'I hate prostitutes'" (24). In developing a more "accurate" sense of a straight serial killer's motive, true-crime writers do not necessarily come up with something excessively outré; rather, their inclination is to choose ordinary motives that can be safely individualized. In accounts of Ted Bundy, for example, the motives most often adduced as explanations for his behavior are resentment at being illegitimate and being rejected by a woman he was in love with. The accuracy of these motives is, in a sense, beside the point; what is most germane about them from the true-crime writer's point of view is that they apply only to Ted Bundy's individual life circumstances and thus cannot be applied to all heterosexual men. In the process, any suggestion that Bundy might represent a "type," that is, heterosexual men, is rigorously removed from the discourse of true crime. In true-crime narratives, Bundy never represents anyone other than himself—only in this way can he be rendered safe for consumption by the straight male reader.

If "ordinary" heterosexual men appear at all in true crime, it is in the guise of the police. Their horrified reactions to serial murder allow them to stand

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in for "normal" heterosexual men, thereby further distancing serial killers from that norm. In *Lust Killer*, for example, Ann Rule argues that "what had happened to Linda Salee enraged normal men. Especially police officers. If they could not have saved her, they would now find her killer and hand him over to the judicial system" (90). At such moments in true-crime narratives, the police are figured as men with a properly chivalrous and protective attitude toward women. It is also important to establish a relationship between the victim and the police because, as Richard Tithecott has argued, "when, as in the case of Ted Bundy, the victims and killer are assumed to be heterosexual, our tendency is not to group victim and killer together and exclude them from us, but to figure the victim as representative of our world, our civilization, and to figure the killer as a senseless monster from without or below" (73). The police therefore do double duty in true-crime accounts of straight serial killers: they represent ordinary men and they also rescue the victim from any imputation that she facilitated her own murder (except, of course, if the victim is a prostitute, in which case, male attitudes toward the victim are markedly less chivalrous).

Although the true-crime techniques I have discussed thus far are important ones in asserting the mutual exclusivity of heterosexuality and violence, by far the most successful technique is simply not mentioning heterosexuality at all. It is truly extraordinary that the heterosexuality of straight serial killers is never commented on by true-crime writers. Instead, as Tithecott argues, although the actions of "'straight killers' are considered to arise from an inability to control themselves sexually . . . because heterosexuality is naturalized, it is the (individual) killer's inability to control himself which is condemned, not his sexuality and not the 'lifestyles' which are considered as essential to that sexuality. The heterosexuality of a 'heterosexual killer' mostly *goes without saying*" (73, original emphasis). The true-crime treatment of Jeffrey Dahmer presents a very different situation. In Dahmer's case, as with other "gay killers," it is precisely his sexuality and the "gay lifestyle" that are condemned for contributing to and in many ways being practically identical with serial murder.[5]

Queerness and/as Violence

Richard Tithecott has neatly summarized the appeal of the Dahmer case to a heteronormative culture: "For a heterosexual culture, the Dahmer case represents an opportunity to explain acts of savagery by referring to his putative homosexuality, to confuse homicidal with homosexual tendencies, confuse 'sexual homicide' with homo sex" (73). True crime is one of the most influential media in which this association of homosexuality with violence takes place in contemporary American society, but obviously it did not inaugurate this

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association. True crime is just the latest instance of a long and ignoble history of equating homosexuality and violence, and I want to reconstruct some of the main points of this history before going on to demonstrate how true-crime coverage of the Dahmer case represents a continuation of this history.

In *Death, Desire, and Loss in Western Culture*, Jonathan Dollimore comments that "notions of death have been at the heart of nearly every historical construction of same-sex desire" (329–30). Although the association between homosexuality, violence, and death is ancient, it is possible to distinguish forces that have been particularly influential in developing this association in modern America. One such force is psychoanalysis, which developed a sharp, moralistic disapproval of homosexuality, particularly after 1945. As Henry Abelove has noted, Freud's position on homosexuality was in many ways quite liberal. He did not believe it was an illness; he did not think homosexuals should be prosecuted or that homosexuality should be regarded as a disgrace, and he argued that "no homosexual needed to be treated psychoanalytically unless he also, and quite incidentally, happened to be neurotic" (59–60). Although Freud's opinions about homosexuality were not adopted enthusiastically by any of his followers, it was in America that opposition was most intense: "From the very beginning of the transplantation of psychoanalysis onto these shores, American analysts have tended to view homosexuality with disapproval and have actually wanted to get rid of it altogether" (Abelove 62).

Most frequently, American psychoanalysts express this disapproval by finding a variety of ways to associate homosexuality with violence, whether it is by noting aggressive behavior in passive effeminate boys (MacDonald), by finding a "natural" association between homosexuality and crime (McHenry), by viewing homosexuality as a form of psychic masochism or welcoming of aggression (Bergler), or by claiming that the homosexual has a "natural" propensity toward violence, as in this comment from Charles Berg and Clifford Allen's 1958 book *The Problem of Homosexuality*: "The homosexual, by the very nature of his psychological make-up, his unresolved Oedipus complex and so on, has a great deal of aggression which is normally repressed but which, given suitable circumstances, will burst out into unexpected violence" (59). But as Abelove explains, by far the most detailed American psychoanalytic demonization of homosexuality can be found in the work of Charles Socarides:

> He argued, in a series of pieces published mostly in the 1960s, that homosexuality was in fact a severe illness, accompanied often by such psychotic manifestations as schizophrenia or manic-depressive mood swings. While heterosexual pairings could make for "cooperation, solace, stimulation, enrichment, healthy challenge and fulfillment," homosexual pairings could bring only "destruction, mutual defeat,

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> exploitation of the partner and the self, oral-sadistic incorporation, aggressive onslaughts, attempts to alleviate anxiety, and a pseudo-solution to the aggressive and libidinal urges which dominate and torture the individual." (67)[6]

Such views influenced American opinion about homosexuality well outside the narrow circles of psychoanalytic practitioners. For example, in a 1951 exposé entitled *Terror in the Streets*, designed to maximize public panic about an epidemic of violent crime in American cities, Howard Whitman describes the problem of the "homosexual prowler": "he is, if you will, the sex-deviated version of what we colloquially call the 'wolf.' Instead of going on the prowl for females, he goes on the prowl for boys and men. He accosts and inveigles them in the cheap movie houses; he makes a flagrant display of himself in the public lavatories; he infests the most beautiful public parks, making them repugnant and fearsome to decent citizens. Police know that such men are dangerous—that when trapped, they may kill" (147–48). Although Whitman later distinguishes the prowlers from the "many thousands of homosexuals who lead their own, private, unaggressive lives" (163), it is reasonable to assume that it is the vivid picture of the vampiric, wolflike, altogether monstrous prowler that will stick in the straight reader's mind as a representative homosexual.[7]

Although psychoanalytic discourse about homosexuality is one influence on the tendency of true crime to link homosexuality and violence, a more recent and more virulent (in every sense) influence is the AIDS epidemic, which has provided writers with a potent metaphor for the lethality of gay men, enabling the linking together of homosexuality, AIDS, and violence in an associative chain.[8] Part of the power of this chain and part of the reason that it came together so quickly is the fact that, as Simon Watney has put it, "Aids has been mobilised to a prior agenda of issues concerning the kind of society we wish to inhabit" (*Policing* 3). To the extent that gay men are always-already abject in a heterosexual culture, linking them with death seemed the natural thing to do. In this sense, representations of deadly gay AIDS carriers, while appearing to be novel, are in fact nothing of the kind. As Ellis Hanson explains, a peculiarly late-Victorian conception of vampirism drives many of the representations of gay men with AIDS: "I am talking about essentialist representations of gay men as vampiric: as sexually exotic, alien, unnatural, oral, anal, compulsive, violent, protean, polymorphic, polysemous, invisible, soulless, transient, superhumanly mobile, infectious, murderous, suicidal, and a threat to wife, children, home, and phallus" (325). In short, as Leo Bersani has argued, "Nothing has made gay men more visible than AIDS" (19), a pathologized visibility that has cast gay men in heterosexual culture as sick, infected, wasted bodies, the object of a fascinated and horrified straight gaze.[9]

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Dahmer's Closet

The straight gaze that assumes a correlation between homosexuality and violence takes many forms in true-crime narratives about Jeffrey Dahmer, some more subtle than others. For example, the assumption appears in a description of Dahmer's apartment where the physical proximity between evidence of his sexual preference and evidence of his murders is taken to stand for the proximity of homosexuality and violence: "In the bathroom, where, Dahmer confessed, he had dismembered many of his victims, a picture of a nude male was taped next to the mirror. In the bedroom, on top of a dresser, were a television, a beer can, and a pornographic male homosexual videotape. The top dresser drawer contained about thirty Polaroid photos taken by Dahmer at various stages of his victims' deaths" (A. Schwartz 9). This juxtaposition of homosexuality and violence can be found in other accounts of serial murderers of men, as in Jack Olsen's description of the 1973 Dean Corll–Elmer Wayne Henley murders in Houston, Texas. At one point, Olsen reports a conversation between Lieutenant Breck Porter and Dorothy Hilligeist, in which Porter tells Hilligeist that her son David has been found buried along with many other victims, "'Well, what's *happening* out there?' the shocked woman asked. 'It looks like a homosexual thing,' Lieutenant Porter said. 'We haven't even figured it out ourself yet, but it looks like these clowns were molestin' young boys and then killin' 'em'" (118, original emphasis). It is fair to assume that if the police had found the bodies of young women, they would not have referred to the murders as a "heterosexual thing."

Part of the reason for this linking of homosexuality and violence in true crime is that true-crime writers often adopt a law enforcement perspective when discussing queer lifestyles and cultures. Richard Tithecott has described this perspective as "anthropological" (67), and the term is apt because it captures the fact that the audience for true crime is assumed to be both straight and receptive to a presentation of gay culture as outlandishly different.[10] For an example of the law enforcement perspective, consider Anne Schwartz's account of one of the most infamous incidents surrounding the Dahmer case, namely, the police's inadvertent return of one of Dahmer's victims, a Laotian boy named Konerak Sinthasomphone, to Dahmer. Sinthasomphone had escaped from Dahmer's apartment when Dahmer went out to get some beer, and neighbors saw Sinthasomphone running down the street, naked and bleeding. The police were called and they arrived at about the same time that Dahmer returned with his beer. After talking with Dahmer (Sinthasomphone was too incoherent to speak, because Dahmer had drugged him), the officers concluded that this was nothing more than a gay lovers' tiff, and they returned Sinthasomphone to Dahmer, who murdered him later that night.

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When this incident was made public, community activists charged that it typified the inferior quality of police service given to the minority and queer populations of Milwaukee. In discussing this incident, Schwartz (who, perhaps not incidentally, is married to a Milwaukee police officer) argues that the officers did nothing wrong and that there was no reason to suspect any foul play on Dahmer's part. Schwartz explains the notorious radio message, "My partner's gonna get deloused at the station," sent by one of the police officers to the precinct station after Sinthasomphone had been returned to Dahmer, as being literally true, explaining that police officers often do need to get cleaned up and even deloused during a shift (93–94). Because of her uncritical adoption of the law enforcement point of view, Schwartz neither accepts that the remark could possibly have been motivated by racism and homophobia nor challenges the view that a drugged and bleeding adolescent is a common and unexceptionable part of a "gay lovers' tiff."

The assumption that extreme violence is a normal part of homosexuality can also be found in true-crime accounts of serial killers other than Dahmer. For example, in their book *Murder in Mind*, Clark and Morley describe approvingly the unwillingness of a police officer investigating accusations against Kansas City serial killer Robert Berdella to assume foul play, even though there was abundant evidence to do so: "Cole admitted that he was not sure at the time whether they were not simply looking at a homosexual lovers' quarrel that had gone too far. The scars to the man's body indicated torture, but he may have consented to that torture as part of a sado-masochistic relationship, or he might even have been paid for it as a prostitute. This functional detective would not believe anything, unless it was proved to him beyond a shadow of a doubt" (254–55). Incredibly, Clark and Morley go on to describe how this "functional detective" realized the seriousness of the case only when they dug up a human skull in the backyard: "I thought, yeah, there probably is something more to this than just a lovers' quarrel" (256). Such remarks speak volumes about the level of violence that is assumed to be an ordinary part of homosexuality.

Such perspectives on homosexuality, although disturbing, can seem positively benign compared with moments in true-crime work when homosexuality and homosexuals are explicitly demonized and vilified, both as murderers and as victims. The assumed link between homosexuality and violence is often invoked to explain why male-on-male murders are so much worse than "regular" murders of women by men.[11] In his book on Randy Kraft, McDougal explains that heterosexual murderers "beat up on each other, shot each other, stabbed and strangled and slapped each other. But they rarely went in for torture or dismemberment," qualities that McDougal claims define gay

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murders (81). But worse than this, according to McDougal, is the fact that, in gay murders, the dividing line between sexual activity and murder is so fragile: "Heterosexuals did it too, of course: tying each other up and going through crazy rituals of submission and punishment . . . But when it came to body dumps of nude young males, raped and maimed at the hands of another, it could generally be traced back to a lover whose anger or ecstasy—or both—got out of hand" (81).[12]

This argument that not only is there a link between homosexuality and violence but homosexual sexual activity is *by definition* either closely related to, or actually is, violence is encapsulated by one of the most controversial aspects of the Dahmer case—the use of the term "homosexual overkill" to describe Dahmer's murders. This term, originally coined by Milwaukee County medical examiner Jeffrey M. Jentzen in 1990 to describe another local murder case, was supposedly meant to indicate the "objective" fact that Dahmer used more force than was necessary to kill his victims, but it is clear that the term says more about social attitudes toward homosexuality than about Dahmer's killing methods. In fact, Dahmer's characteristic method of first drugging his victims into unconsciousness, then strangling and dismembering them is relatively humane compared with the extreme sexual sadism that characterizes many serial murderers of women. Moreover, it is in fact more accurate to use the term "homosexual overkill" to describe murders of gay men or lesbians that are motivated by homophobia. Gary David Comstock notes that homicides with homosexual victims often show "evidence of overkill and excessive mutilation. In a study of autopsy findings by physicians, one psychiatrist stated that 'multiple and extensive wounds are not uncommon in the fury of' anti-homosexual murder" (47).[13] These points indicate how inconsistently the term "overkill" is applied. As the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force asked, in a statement issued a week after Dahmer's arrest, "When, for example, has the term 'heterosexual overkill' been used to describe the serial killing of women by a male perpetrator?" (quoted in A. Schwartz 174).

The Guilty Victims

The demonization of queerness in true-crime work on male-on-male murders is not limited to the perpetrators but also extends to the victims of these crimes. Blaming the victim is a time-honored tradition in true-crime work about the serial murder of women, especially where the victims are prostitutes, working-class, poor women and/or women of color, and this tradition has carried over to discussions of the male victims of male serial murderers. For example, Anne Schwartz argues that "all of Jeffrey Dahmer's victims facilitated him in some way" and that "their life-styles and unnecessary risk-taking

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contributed to their deaths." Schwartz, rather than feeling some compassion for the victims or understanding of the social milieu they inhabited, states that "the youths who left gay bars with men they didn't know were leading lives full of risks and, in the end, were killed as a result of their own negligence and recklessness. They were looking for nameless, faceless sex" (115). One could not find a clearer example of the relative exoneration of the murderer and the placing of responsibility on the shoulders of the victims for their own deaths.

The issue of how the victims of male-on-male serial murders are represented, however, is more complicated than Schwartz's remarks suggest. Even though we find true-crime writers blaming Dahmer's victims, homosexuality is apparently thought to be so bad, to be such a stigma on one's character, that we also find these same writers attempting to relieve some of the victims from the taint of homosexuality. For example, Ed Baumann in his account of the Dahmer case, *Step into My Parlor*, describes one of Dahmer's victims, Oliver Lacy, as being "all boy," an ambiguous phrase under the circumstances (65). At another point, Baumann is assured by the girlfriend of another victim, David Thomas, that Thomas was not homosexual, "'No way,' she insisted. 'That's not David'" (162). A corollary of this attitude is that a male-on-male serial murder case becomes more serious when there are heterosexual victims. For example, when McDougal discusses Randy Kraft's murder of Ronnie Wiebe, who was "definitely not a homosexual," he claims that Wiebe's death "took the entire investigation out of the realm of gays killing gays and put it into a more general arena: anybody who happened to be male, young, and naive enough to get sucked into whatever scam these killers were laying on their prey was susceptible" (83). These kinds of attitudes are no improvement over blaming the victim. Writers such as Baumann and McDougal would probably still find gay victims culpable, while at the same time exonerating heterosexual victims.

The problem with the way that homosexuality and violence are represented in true-crime work is that such work rarely gives more positive representations of gay lifestyles and cultures. The closest that many true-crime accounts of Dahmer come to presenting a more sympathetic perspective on homosexuality is when they discuss the impact of Dahmer's murders on Milwaukee's gay community.[14] However, even if true crime does occasionally elucidate the climate of prejudice that exists in Milwaukee toward queer communities, there is still a tendency for this work to divorce Dahmer himself from these social dynamics and instead to present him as essentially mysterious. Dvorchak and Holewa, in a chapter of their book *Milwaukee Massacre* revealingly entitled "Mystery Man," claim that "no one may ever know how a man who worked and mingled among the masses could script his own real-life *Silence of the Lambs*

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and do things that might startle the fictional Hannibal the Cannibal" (28). Similarly, Joel Norris writes that "the mystery that Jeffrey Dahmer embodied when he was arrested the previous year would still remain a mystery as Dahmer was escorted out of the courtroom by the officers" (8).

This emphasis on mystery is clearly designed to foreclose the possibility of putting forward an interpretation of serial murder that focuses on how our understanding of it is produced by complex interactions of institutional and discursive social practices that together make up the overdetermined phenomenon of serial murder. Instead, the emphasis on mystery encourages a view of serial murder as the individualized expression of an aberrant personality. What is especially interesting in Dahmer's case (and in the cases of other serial murderers of men) is that it is his homosexuality, and the precise relation of his homosexuality to his murders, that is left a mystery by true-crime writers. For example, it is notable that in a discussion that is distinguished by a high degree of detail about such areas of Dahmer's life as his childhood, Norris is curiously reticent about Dahmer's homosexuality and his deep ambivalence about it. According to the reports of his probation officer and Brother John Paul Ranieri, who at the time Dahmer was arrested ran an informal counseling service for gay people in a bar called the Wreck Room in Milwaukee, Dahmer was deeply conflicted about his sexual preference and agonized about whether or not he was really gay (J. Norris 241). One might argue that by mentioning this point Norris acknowledges, albeit implicitly, the role of internalized homophobia in the Dahmer case, but he does so in an extremely limited sense. Even if true-crime writers identify Dahmer's guilt about his homosexuality as a motive for the murders, they do so in a way that is appealing to a homophobic audience. The unspoken argument is that to be homosexual is so disgusting and traumatic that of course one would murder again and again in order to assuage one's guilt about being gay.

A more productive, and less homophobic, aim for true crime would be to explain why Dahmer felt ambivalent about his homosexuality or why he hated other homosexuals. Examination of these issues in true crime has the potential to correct some of the biases of the genre, but rarely does, simply because gay self-hatred can be acknowledged but never analyzed in detail. Instead, true-crime writers such as Norris present Dahmer's conflicted sense of gayness as a fait accompli and imply that it therefore requires no comment. The reason for this silence is that to explore the sources of Dahmer's conflicted homosexuality would involve acknowledging both the familial (Dahmer's father was virulently homophobic) and social context of widespread homophobia. If anything, true-crime narratives imply that self-loathing is a perfectly understandable

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feeling in a homosexual (indeed, this feeling is the closest many true-crime writers come to empathizing with their subjects). Thus, the treatment of gay self-hatred in true crime contributes to the genre's tendency to place the killer's homosexuality at the very center of why they kill, whereas heterosexuality is never implicated in the same way.

These failings in true crime are even more serious given the fact that there is evidence to suggest that many "gay serial killers" share both Dahmer's ambivalence about being homosexual and his growing up in a homophobic environment. John Wayne Gacy's insistence on being bisexual, not homosexual, for instance, may have something to do with the fact that "when Gacy was arrested for the murders, his mother told the police that if her husband had known that his son had sex with men he would have killed him" (Wilkinson 61). Similarly, in *Freed to Kill*, her book about Larry Eyler, a serial killer active in the mid-1980s, Gera-Lind Kolarik describes how, upon his initial arrest in 1983, Eyler was far more willing to talk about murder than about his homosexuality (96, 98). David Bergman has pointed out that "within the patriarchy, violence between men is more acceptable than affection between them" (143), and this seems to be an attitude many "gay serial killers" have internalized.

Reading between the lines, one can infer from Kolarik's account that the police interviewing Eyler also felt more comfortable discussing his violence than his sexual orientation. Despite the many differences in how true crime represents "straight" and "gay" male serial killers, there is a common thread, a further unspoken assumption: a violent man occasions no surprise in our culture. Although the explanations for that violence vary according to the man's sexual orientation, true-crime narratives take for granted the fact that men have the potential to be violent in much the same way that they take the heterosexuality of straight serial killers for granted. If we now turn to a discussion of Aileen Wuornos, we will see that part of the intensely negative reaction to Wuornos (a reaction that continued right up until her execution in October 2002) can be explained by another example of an assumed mutual exclusivity, not between heterosexuality and violence, but between femininity and violence.

Aileen Wuornos Is Not a Woman

Thanks to the assumption that women and violence are mutually exclusive, when women do act violently, they are often rhetorically excluded from womanhood, especially when they murder (their own) children. Similarly, to the extent that hegemonic definitions of womanhood are heterosexual, a lesbian also violates the code of womanhood, and consequently a violent lesbian violates that code even more seriously. Bearing these points of mind, we can

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begin to see how overdetermined the popular and true-crime response to the crimes of Aileen Wuornos was, but this is just part of the story, because even among the relatively small population of violent (lesbian) women, Wuornos was highly unusual.

In general, violent women have attracted nothing but punishment in American culture, and very often disproportionate punishment. L. Kay Gillespie has described how capital punishment for women in the United States dates back to executions of women aboard ships bound for the colonies in the 1600s. Although executions usually involved hanging, women, as a rule, were not hanged. Rather, Gillespie explains, "boiling, garroting, burning, and other means were believed to be far better methods of execution for women since it was believed women were less sensitive to pain and required something more drastic" (1). For many years, lesbians were not singled out for especially vicious treatment simply because the category of lesbianism did not exist. With that said, there is abundant evidence to suggest that, just as with the association of homosexuality and violence, the assertion of a correlation between lesbianism and violence has a long history.

In *Sapphic Slashers*, her study of the murder of Freda Ward by her lover, Alice Mitchell, in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1892, Lisa Duggan demonstrates how the case, even though it featured "neither clearly 'lesbian' characters nor explicitly sexual relations between women," was still "sold" as a "lesbian love murder story" (153). According to Duggan, the Mitchell case "marked the emergence of a new recognizably American type—the mannish lesbian or invert" (154). The Mitchell case lent itself well to sensationalist treatment, partly because of the brutality of the crime (Mitchell slashed Ward's throat in broad daylight in downtown Memphis), partly because prominent families were involved, but mostly because of the involvement of two women, a phenomenon that "presented an astonishing and confusing twist that confounded the gendered roles of villain and victim" (46). The fact that the press was able to find and resurrect similar cases from the past lent even more credence to the idea that Mitchell represented a type, rather than being an aberrational individual, and when Lizzie Borden was arrested and charged with the murder of her father and stepmother on the day Mitchell left for the Tennessee state asylum, it was the final ingredient that assured widespread dissemination of news about the Mitchell case and intense speculation about what had caused the sudden outbreak of violent women.

Alice Mitchell represents an example of the earliest stages of the conflation of lesbianism and violence. Estelle Freedman provides us with a more recent example taken, not coincidentally, from the 1950s, a decade of acute concern about the fragility of traditional gender roles for women. Freedman describes

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how the image of the aggressive female homosexual was initially associated with African American women, but after World War II the image was extended to include white working-class prisoners. Particularly influential during this period was a series of Hollywood-produced women's prison films (such as *Caged* [1950]) that depicted "a dangerously aggressive lesbian criminal" who "threatened the innocence of young women" (404). Freedman argues that the "association of lesbianism and criminality may have served as a warning to women who might be tempted to acknowledge their homosexual desires. To do so meant, in part, to become part of a criminal underworld, to lose both class, and, for white women, race privilege" (415). The image of a dangerously aggressive lesbian criminal certainly comes close to describing how Wuornos signifies in true-crime narratives, but it is unclear how much class or race privilege Wuornos as a poor, working-class white woman ever had to lose. Perhaps a more relevant context in which to situate Wuornos is the history of American female murderers. As we will see, even in this group, Wuornos stands out as unusual.

One of the most common features in true-crime narratives about Wuornos is the description of her as the "first female serial killer." A cursory glance at a reference book such as Kerry Segrave's *Women Serial and Mass Murderers* will confirm that, technically speaking, this is a nonsensical claim, as there were many women before Wuornos who killed serially.[15] However, when Segrave describes some of the significant differences between male and female serial murderers, Wuornos's "originary" status becomes a little more plausible:

> Only a handful of the women profiled employed more typically "male" methods of aggressive murder; the few women who worked with men in some fashion tended to use "male" methods. It is only among these that we can find examples of women who murdered at a place other than their residence, the victim's residence, or their place of employment. Still, there are no female murderers like Richard Speck, Ted Bundy, the sniper who killed from the Texas tower, or the man who killed in the McDonalds near San Diego. There are no female counterparts to a Bundy or a Gacy, to whom sex or sexual violence is part of the murder pattern. (4–5)

Wuornos was unusual compared with other female serial killers in that Wuornos seemed to kill "like a man": she killed outdoors rather than at home; she used a gun rather than poison; she killed strangers rather than friends or family members; whatever her motive was, it was definitely not financial. Not surprisingly, these are the elements of the Wuornos case that true-crime narratives focus on, but, as I will demonstrate, their reasons for doing so are suspect. Rather than attempting to establish an objective account of what Wuornos did and why, true-crime narratives about her instead emphasize her

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difference from other female serial killers in order to demonize lesbianism, to turn Wuornos into a bloodthirsty monster, to exonerate her victims, and to gain a competitive advantage in the extraordinary media feeding frenzy that erupted around Wuornos, of which true-crime narratives were one small part.

Because Wuornos acted alone,[16] she cannot be located in other roles frequently reserved for women in true-crime narratives about serial murder. Frequently, true-crime narratives blame women for murders committed by men. These women are either the "seductive" victims or "emasculating" mothers or wives of the murderer.[17] Women also appear as the "helpmates" of serial murderers, and this role can take a variety of forms. Rule notes that Ted Bundy "would always have at least one woman entranced with him" in the years leading up to his eventual execution (*Stranger* 170). In *The Phantom Prince*, Bundy's longtime lover, Elizabeth Kendall, speaks of her willingness to act as a "cover" for Bundy in order to "counteract the image of 'freak' he had been given by the press" and says that she was "willing to play whatever game it was if I could stay by his side" (121). Sheila Isenberg has described the phenomenon of women who form relationships with and often marry convicted murderers *after* their conviction, noting that serial murderers appear to be especially attractive to these women. In fact, "Hillside Strangler" Kenneth Bianchi was able to persuade Veronica Lynn Compton to attempt to commit a murder in the manner of the "Strangler" on his behalf, in order to fool the police into thinking that the real "Hillside Strangler" was still at large (Isenberg 57–58).

The case of Veronica Compton indicates that women can also appear in true-crime discourse about serial murder as accomplices to male murderers. Women involved in serial murder with a man are seen either as the passive victim and abused partner of their male accomplice or as the dominant and far more deviant partner, with the narrative emphasis of most true-crime accounts falling on the latter alternative. In the case of Carol Bundy, convicted with her partner, Douglas Clark, of serial killings in California in the 1980s, the emphasis is on passivity: "If they were caught, Doug promised to take the rap and Carol would get off. Her defense would be that she was that Los Angeles stereotype: the dumb, station-wagon-driving housewife. A housewife mesmerized by Douglas Clark's charm" (L. Farr 108). Because Wuornos did not rely on these stereotypes of femininity in order to explain the murders she committed, her case does not resemble that of Carol Bundy, but is more closely related to that of Judith Ann Neeley, sentenced to death in Tennessee in 1988 for the murder of several children. In Neeley's case, we see the same dialectic between passive victim/dominant partner as in the Bundy/Clark case, only this time it is Judith Ann Neeley who is represented as the evil, dominant

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partner, while her husband, Alvin, is portrayed as a wimp. Interestingly, the qualities that are resented in Judith Neeley (and, by extension, in Wuornos) are the same qualities that are admired in men—dominance, independence, aggressiveness, and sexual self-confidence. This indicates that a murdering woman is often perceived as a threat to the predominant sex/gender system.

The threat that the woman who murders represents becomes even more acute when the murderer does not accept that she has done wrong but instead justifies what she has done. Wuornos's version of events was that her victims were all men who picked her up from where she was standing by the side of freeways, with the intent of having sex with her.[18] Wuornos claimed that after the financial arrangements had been made, sexual intercourse started, which is when the men became violent and abusive. Eventually, Wuornos said, she was forced to kill these men to protect herself: "I killed 'em because they got violent with me and I decided to defend myself. I wasn't gonna let 'em beat the shit outta me or kill me, either" (D. Kennedy 62). Far from apologizing for what she did, Wuornos claimed that "what I did is what anybody else had a right to do" and that she felt "like a hero. 'Cause I've done some good. I'm a killer of rapists" (Reynolds 235–36).

Murder as Resistance

Wuornos's assertion of her right to defend herself as a prostitute being attacked by abusive clients raises the question of whether her actions could be better understood by being placed in a tradition of women's resistance to male violence. This tradition must be acknowledged alongside the recognition of how often women appear in legal discourse as the victims or sidekicks of male serial murderers. Women's resistance to male violence can take many forms. It can involve organized feminist actions protesting the media's coverage of the Hillside Strangler case, such as Suzanne Lacy's performance piece "In Mourning and in Rage" (Delacoste and Newman 278). It can involve the work of the US PROStitutes Collective in forming the Black Coalition Fighting Black Serial Murders to protest the lack of attention given to the "Southside Slayings," the deaths of at least seventeen black women over a three-year period in South Central Los Angeles (Delacoste and Alexander 284–89). It can involve drawing attention to the lack of concern about and/or attention to the victims of serial murderers when those victims are working-class women, lesbians, women of color, or prostitutes (see the Combahee River Collective's "Twelve Black Women: Why Did They Die?" in Delacoste and Newman 68–70). It can involve direct action against those institutions that encourage violence against women (see "Actions Against *Hustler*" by The Preying Mantis Women's Brigade, in Delacoste and Newman 264–65).

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Perhaps the most significant act of resistance is recognizing women's own capacity for violence: "Those who at first thought seem 'deviant' ('violent women') may be numerous enough to redefine 'the norm.' When we find many of us doing something only men are supposed to do; and nearly all of us expressing in some form what is supposed to be male behavior, maybe we need to enlarge our notion of who *we* are" (Uccella and Kaye 321, original emphasis). In *When She Was Bad*, Patricia Pearson discusses why feminists have often been reluctant to face up to the existence of violent women, and she describes the consequences "of our refusal to concede female contributions to violence":

> It affects our capacity to promote ourselves as autonomous and responsible beings. It affects our ability to develop a literature about ourselves that encompasses the full array of human emotion and experience. It demeans the right our victims have to be valued. And it radically impedes our ability to recognize dimensions of power that have nothing to do with formal structures of patriarchy. Perhaps above all, the denial of women's aggression profoundly undermines our attempt as a culture to understand violence, to trace its causes and to quell them. (243)

Being honest about Wuornos's status as a violent woman and locating Wuornos's murders within a tradition of resistance to violence against women open up a consideration of her murders as a political act, as an act of protest.[19] Not surprisingly, both true-crime work on the case and the judicial system in general have proved to be extremely resistant to such an interpretation of Wuornos's crimes. The attitude of Wuornos's arresting officers to her argument of self-defense was disbelief, and this disbelief is never seriously challenged by true-crime accounts of the case, which tend merely to reflect the law enforcement perspective. Such disbelief is conditioned by certain narrow attitudes and points of view that characterize discussion of the case. For example, at several points it is suggested that Wuornos's claim that she killed the men as a way of defending herself from attempted rapes must be false, because it is not possible to rape prostitutes.[20] In Michael Reynolds's book about the case, *Dead Ends*, Wuornos's account of the attack she suffered at the hands of her first victim, Richard Mallory, brings the following response (it is not clear whether this response comes from Reynolds, or whether it is his transcription of the reaction of the police officers interviewing Wuornos): "Lee sounded more like an offended deb on prom night than the 'professional prostitute' she claimed to be" (201–2).

This assumption that a prostitute cannot be raped or mistreated at the hands of a client is also encouraged by a persistent habit of viewing the situations that Wuornos described from a "male" point of view and judging

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Wuornos's actions on that basis. For example, during Wuornos's interrogation, one of the investigating officers asked Wuornos why, once she had trained her gun on her victim, she did not escape, as she was "in control" of the situation. Wuornos pointed out that she and her attacker were normally in an extremely isolated area and that she was usually completely nude. The investigating officer's response to this was still to insist that she could have got dressed while keeping the gun on the man and then run off to safety (Reynolds 222–23). The law enforcement perspective on Wuornos exhibits not only a failure to understand the situation that Wuornos claimed she was in, but also an inability or unwillingness to appreciate that a woman's assessment of the degree of danger in a particular situation may be very different from that of a man.

Because of the unwillingness of police and true-crime work on the case to accept Wuornos's explanation of self-defense, other motives and explanations must perforce be found. This search is complicated by the fact that, as I have explained, Wuornos differed from other female serial killers in the type of weapon she used, the location of the crimes, the type of victim, and above all motive. The vast majority of female serial killers murder for economic reasons, usually to collect insurance money on family members. Ann Jones has even gone so far as to suggest that murder for these women, particularly those who lived in the early decades of the twentieth century, was actually a form of entrepreneurship in a society that offered very few opportunities for women to practice and excel in the cutthroat tactics of the business world (136–37, 146). Although Wuornos did take money and possessions from her victims, it is clear that robbery was not her primary motive for the murders. However, to describe Wuornos, as police did after her arrest, as a "killer who robs, not a robber who kills" (Reynolds 232) is also wide of the mark. This description of Wuornos, rather than being simply mistaken, however, is a crucial element in how true-crime accounts of Wuornos respond to her anomalous status among female serial killers. This response can be summed up by the police's confident pronouncement after Wuornos's arrest that she "pretty much meets the guidelines of a serial killer"; that is, Wuornos killed like a man (Reynolds 232).

In order to demonstrate that Wuornos was not an "ordinary" female multiple murderer, quietly poisoning family members, but something far more dangerous and threatening, a female serial murderer, true-crime accounts of the case must demonstrate that Wuornos not only killed the seven men but enjoyed doing so:

> A pattern was emerging—not a pattern of robbery, but of killing. Stranger-on-stranger homicide. No apparent motive; the robberies seemed to be merely opportunistic. Following the killing, the murderer just took the money. The crimes had

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> occurred almost monthly, with a "cooling off" period between them. They seem calculated, enjoyed. Not content with one shot or two, the killer had lavished four, six, nine rounds on the torsos. This most recent one, Humphreys, had a new wrinkle, the shot to the head. There was a definite escalation to the killing. And Humphreys' shot close to the heart suggested an intimacy. Enjoyment, humiliation, control. All the red flags that mark a serial killer. (Reynolds 90)

Although Reynolds claims that the state of her victims' bodies showed how much Wuornos enjoyed killing, in fact her crime scenes were relatively mild compared with those of many serial killers. The murders committed by Ted Bundy, the Hillside Stranglers, and many other male serial murderers, for example, were characterized by extreme degrees of sexual sadism, including violent sexual assault, torture, and both pre- and postmortem mutilation of the victims' bodies, bodies that were then often posed publicly in humiliating and degrading positions. Nothing of this kind was found to have taken place with Wuornos's victims, and this is consistent with the claim that "there are no female counterparts to a Bundy or a Gacy, to whom sex or sexual violence is part of a murder pattern" (Segrave 4). The absence of persuasive evidence regarding Wuornos's "enjoyment" of her murders is an example of the double standard that emerges when male and female murderers are compared. Even though the murdering methods of the women may be relatively mild compared with those of their male counterparts, the women are still much more likely to be described as vicious sadists, while the men are rarely described as such. It is clear that descriptions of women in this context, and of Wuornos as enjoying her crimes, are "projections of a sexual double standard, which judges women not by 'objective' criteria but by an idealized stereotype of feminine gentleness" (Cameron and Frazer 23).

These questions of enjoyment and sexual sadism are important because these elements are seen as integral characteristics of a serial murderer. Even though true-crime work never seriously challenges the description of Wuornos as a vicious serial murderer, it does represent those who disagree with this description. Alexander Schauss, a forensic researcher from Seattle, claims that if Wuornos was a serial murderer, she would have killed more victims, being unable to resist the compulsion that drove her to kill. Wuornos's attorney, Tricia Jenkins, defines serial murder as being committed for pleasure, and says that this crucial element was missing in Wuornos's case. Former FBI agent Robert Ressler argues that "if Wuornos is said to be a serial killer . . . we have to rewrite the rules" (quoted in D. Kennedy 66, 67).

Despite such caveats to the description of Wuornos as a serial murderer, this is still the label that law enforcement and true-crime writers adhere to,

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even in the face of evidence that would give credence to Wuornos's claim of self-defense, evidence that at least one of her victims was a heavy consumer of pornography and had a history of violence against women (Reynolds 18; D. Kennedy 4, 129). Far from accepting Wuornos's claims that her victims attacked her, however, true-crime narratives about her unproblematically reflect and reinforce the positive image of Wuornos's victims given by the law enforcement system. In marked contrast to the victims in the other cases we have discussed, who are characteristically blamed and criticized, Wuornos's victims, all middle-aged white men, are treated solicitously. For example, during the search for the body of one of Wuornos's victims, Peter Siems, a national police teletype described the missing man as "a devout Christian and family man [who] has no history of mental instability" (Reynolds 60). The implication is clear—such a man could not bear any responsibility for his disappearance. Instead, he must have been victimized by the suspects, whom the teletype described as "two W/Fs [white females] who appeared to be lesbians" (60). In order to bolster the image of Wuornos as a "predatory prostitute" (D. Kennedy 140) who victimized her clients, even the suggestion that the victims picked up Wuornos with the intention of having sex with her must be resisted. As one police officer said when confronted with this theory, "I hate to say it because you've had too many family people who've been killed and their wives are mourning enough already" (Schmich 19–20). It is hard to imagine the families of Jeffrey Dahmer's victims being treated with such consideration.

Lesbian Man Haters

While the evidence that supports Wuornos's claim of self-defense is inconclusive and subjective at best, we might still well ask why the reaction to Wuornos has been so intense and why most true-crime writers are so certain that she was in fact a serial murderer who enjoyed killing men. In her analysis of the links between masculinity and violence, *Boys Will Be Boys*, Myriam Miedzian asks us to imagine a reversal of the current situation where 90 percent of violent crimes are committed by men:

> Imagine the reaction if close to 90 per cent of all violent crimes were committed by women! If tabloid headlines carried stories, with some regularity, of man-hating women leaving behind them cross-country trails of murdered men's bodies; of ex-wives, driven by fits of jealousy, killing their former husbands and their children; of groups of women killing each other in rival gang fights. Imagine the scorn that would be heaped on women for killing *each other* off at such high rates! How quickly such behavior would be perceived as an aberration, a deviation from the norm of male behavior, a "women's problem" to be dealt with urgently! (11–12)

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Wuornos's murders raise precisely the specter of this "aberration" among law enforcement personnel and true-crime writers, the specter of a man-hating woman cutting a swathe across Florida and leaving "respectable" family men in her wake. Curiously, hatred of men is accepted in true-crime accounts of Wuornos as a sufficient motive for women to become murderers (see Segrave 4), while it is precisely this relation between men and hatred of women that is denied in the case of a serial murderer like Ted Bundy. This says something revealing about deeply rooted male insecurities and guilt about their relations with and treatment of women.

Even more suggestive is the fact that Wuornos's lesbianism is used by true-crime narratives about her to confirm the link between man hating and female murderers. Just as true-crime narratives assume a relationship between Dahmer's homosexuality and his homicidal violence, they also automatically equate lesbianism with hating men and wishing violence against them. For example, when police set up a computer program to coordinate leads resulting from the release of composite sketches of the two female suspects in the series of murders, "in the middle of December 1990, leads no. 5, 243, 297 and 361 identified the sketches as two women, lesbian man-haters, capable of violence" (D. Kennedy 35–36). Some writers even lean on the authority of the FBI to establish their point about lesbianism. In an article written for *Glamour* magazine, Susan Edmiston quotes Robert Ressler as saying, "There may be an intrinsic hatred of males here, as well as an identification with male violence which helped push her across the line into what has been considered a 'male' crime" (325). In stark contrast to the complex motives attributed to male serial murderers, and the evocation of those male murderers as essentially unsolvable mysteries, Wuornos's motives are presented with absolute clarity: she is a lesbian; *therefore* she hates men and *therefore* she killed them.

This understanding of Wuornos's lesbianism as a sufficient motive for her murders explains both the intensity of the reaction of a predominantly male judicial system to her, and the persistence of belief both in her guilt and in her enjoyment of the murders. Wuornos knew, even before she was arrested, that she would be dismissed as a man hater, in spite of her argument about what really happened immediately preceding the murders she committed: "One night in September [1990] they [Tyria Moore and Wuornos] had been watching Roseanne doing a comedy special on the TV. Roseanne was a hoot. She was doing this routine about serial killers, about how they were always men who were psychos; but if one of them turned out to be a woman, everybody would just call her a man-hater, and Lee had just burst out, 'That's me she's talking about!'" (Reynolds 95). The question remains, what impact did

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Wuornos's portrayal as a violent, man-hating lesbian have on her treatment by the judicial system? Did the prejudicial image of her in the media contribute to her being given the death penalty?

Legal scholars seem to agree that a defendant's lesbianism is not a mitigating circumstance in capital cases, but they remain split on whether it could be an aggravating circumstance (see Robson; Streib). After her conviction, an appeal on Wuornos's behalf was launched by the National Center for Lesbian Rights on the grounds that homophobia had denied her a fair trial; the state of Florida objected, saying that lesbianism was irrelevant (Robson 194). Bearing in mind that the majority of women on death row in the United States are lesbian or bisexual (see Brownworth), Wuornos's lesbianism is certainly not irrelevant. With that said, her sexual preference was just one of a number of circumstances that made the death penalty verdict practically inevitable in Wuornos's case. Those circumstances are described succinctly by Gillespie:

> It could be argued that a woman found guilty of criminal homicide and eligible for the death penalty has a greater likelihood of execution if she is perceived to have an extensive criminal history . . . if she fails to portray the expected societal gender role of a woman (crying, remorse, emotional outbursts, "natural" motherly affection, etc.); if she has an accomplice who is willing to testify against her; if her case has been widely publicized by the press and if the press has given her a derogatory nickname. (99)

Almost all of these circumstances apply to Wuornos, and they illustrate the fact that her lesbianism was just one of the "inappropriate" gender traits she possessed that stacked the deck against her.

The poor quality of Wuornos's legal representation also played a major role, according to Phyllis Chesler, who invites us to compare the treatment given to Wuornos with that given to another serial killer tried by the state of Florida, Ted Bundy. Because Wuornos was indigent she was assigned a public defender who had twelve other ongoing capital cases in addition to Wuornos's and so could not possibly represent her adequately. By contrast, Chesler explains:

> Several lawyers offered to defend Bundy pro bono, an expert advised him on jury selection pro bono; at one point, no fewer than five public defenders assisted Bundy, who insisted on representing himself. (Several lawyers would have defended Wuornos pro bono in the first of five trials, but only if at least $50,000 in expenses could be raised. I became ill and could not raise the funds.) Even more interesting: the State of Florida offered Bundy a life sentence without parole, under the

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> circumstances a sweetheart deal for him; he refused the plea bargain. Wuornos's lawyer tried to set up a similar arrangement for her but one county prosecutor thought she deserved to die and refused to agree to a plea bargain. (122)

Not surprisingly, true-crime narratives about Wuornos do not discuss these issues. Dominated by the perspective of law enforcement, such narratives are complicit in the decision of the judicial process to hold Wuornos to a different standard than either Bundy or Dahmer. The existence of the differential standard can be partly explained by the fact that, in some respects, Dahmer had simply done what was expected of someone like him by being a murderous queer. Although what he had done was horrific, he had not violated any heteronormative assumptions about queerness. Wuornos, on the other hand, although she had apparently confirmed the stereotype of the violent lesbian, was still not exempt from the restrictive codes of womanhood that are applied to all women, regardless of their sexual orientation. Her failure to show remorse and her aggressive defiance in the courtroom made Wuornos a far more controversial and monstrous figure than Dahmer.

Wuornos's refusal to behave in an approved female manner not only increased public hostility toward her but also meant that there were remarkably few individuals or groups fighting for her life once she had declared her determination to be executed. As Sharon Krum has pointed out, even with a murderer as reviled as Timothy McVeigh, "anti-capital punishment groups were campaigning for a stay of execution, petitioning for clemency, holding candlelight vigils, anything to save the man responsible for 156 deaths from the gurney and the needle." In Wuornos's case, "the death penalty protesters were conspicuous by their absence. Not one was in or outside the court demanding that the state save her life." In the morality play that is a capital murder case, there is no mercy for a woman who is seen as refusing her femininity. Indeed, right up to her execution, Wuornos refused to play the role expected of her, and it should come as no surprise that while on death row she changed her story and claimed to have committed the murders not in self-defense but in cold blood: "I want the world to know I killed these men, as cold as ice. I've hated humans for a long time. I am a serial killer. I killed them in cold blood, real nasty" (Burkeman). Wuornos's almost parodically vicious assertion of her extreme, inhuman deviance represents her attempt to seize control of the narratives about her and to become their author, rather than their subject.

Differentiating Monsters and the Difference It Makes

The futility of Wuornos's attempt to seize control of her own story is suggested by the fact that in November 2002, just one month after her execution,

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it was announced that a "biopic" was to be filmed based on Wuornos's life. *Monster*, released in December 2003, was writer/director Patty Jenkins's first feature and starred the glamorous Charlize Theron as Wuornos and Christina Ricci as Wuornos's lesbian lover. *Monster* is the latest in a long line of artistic products inspired by Aileen Wuornos. In some cases, these products self-consciously examine media representations of Wuornos from a feminist and/or queer standpoint, such as Millie Wilson's 1994 installation *Not a Serial Killer*, Tammy Rae Carland's 1995 video *Lady Outlaws and Faggot Wannabes* (see Basilio), and Carla Lucero's 2001 opera *Wuornos* (see *Wuornos*). In other instances, as in the well-known documentaries by Nick Broomfield, *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992) and *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003), Wuornos-related products associate themselves with the tradition of muckraking, determined to get to the "truth" of the case by exposing the shoddy motives of those who tried to exploit Wuornos for their own ends.

Inevitably, there is no guarantee that even such impeccably progressive and well-meaning critiques of the exploitative use of Wuornos may not be exploitative themselves, but at least these products had the virtue of concentrating their attention on Wuornos herself. What was so disturbing about the critical reaction to *Monster*, a reaction that those associated with the film were happy to go along with, was how rapidly attention became focused on Charlize Theron rather than Aileen Wuornos. Not only did reviewers concentrate on outdoing each other in making increasingly hyperbolic claims about Theron's acting abilities (Roger Ebert won this competition hands down by describing Theron's performance as "one of the greatest performances in the history of the cinema"), but also the focus on Theron produced nuggets of information whose grotesque inappropriateness would have been obvious if Wuornos had been on anyone's mind at all, as when Theron announced that her boyfriend "was more than pleased with the weight I gained [to play the role]. Because with everything else that grew, so did my boobs" (Sardis 8).

Ironically, when Wuornos was first contacted, shortly after her arrest, by a Hollywood producer interested in making a film about her, Wuornos pleaded with the producer to "Please don't make me a monster" (MacNamara, "Kiss" 101). Although there has been much debate about whether Jenkins's film demonizes Wuornos, in my opinion the film's title and content are symptomatic not only of the fact that Wuornos's plea to Hollywood fell on deaf ears but also that the category of monstrosity remains the most prevalent and persuasive way of selling serial killers to the American public.

True-crime narratives occupy a relatively small space in the huge market for serial killer popular culture, but as I have demonstrated in this chapter,

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the genre plays an important role in influencing the public's response to serial killers. In the interests of educating their readers about the relation of serial murder to heterosexuality and queerness, true-crime narratives not only diversify the seemingly monolithic concept of "monstrosity" but also perform the related gesture of diversifying the equally monolithic concept of celebrity. A close reading of true-crime narratives about serial killers demonstrates that while Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Aileen Wuornos are all celebrities, only Bundy can be regarded as "famous" in anything close to the conventional sense of that word. Although, as I explain in the introduction to this study, fame in its ancient merit-based sense is now almost entirely dead, it continues to have a strange, shadowy existence as the appropriate way to describe the celebrity enjoyed by a safely individualized heterosexual serial killer such as Ted Bundy. In a similar fashion, to the extent that the concept of "notoriety" still has any meaning at all, it aptly describes the celebrity personified by Jeffrey Dahmer and Aileen Wuornos, both of whom are representative of the equally notorious types of the homicidal homosexual and the man-hating lesbian.

The major role played by heterosexuality and homosexuality in true-crime narratives of serial murder is consistent with what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued about the centrality of the homo-/heterosexual definition in twentieth-century Western culture: "An understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (1). I have attempted in this chapter to contribute to the "critical analysis" Sedgwick speaks of, but my attempt would be incomplete if I did not discuss the crucial issue of whether these representations succeed in their goal. In other words, do true-crime narratives succeed in safely quarantining Ted Bundy from heterosexuality? Moreover, do these narratives succeed in separating heterosexuality and homosexuality from one another, so that heterosexuality may be protected from any contaminating association with an always-already "queered" violence?

There can be no definitive answers to these questions because the answers consist of readers' responses to these true-crime narratives, responses that are extremely difficult to reconstruct or tabulate with any degree of accuracy. I believe there is cautious room for optimism, however, if we remind ourselves that a mutually constitutive relationship exists between heterosexuality and homosexuality, a relationship that means that, no matter what true crime narratives might attempt, they cannot be separated. Diana Fuss has explained how, despite the fact that heterosexuality tries to place homosexuality outside a putatively straight definitional space (on the other side of the virgule separating hetero/homo), such attempts are doomed to fail: "Borders are notoriously

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unstable, and sexual identities rarely secure. Heterosexuality can never fully ignore the close proximity of its terrifying (homo)sexual other, any more than homosexuality can entirely escape the equally insistent social pressures of (hetero)sexual conformity. Each is haunted by the other" ("Inside" 3).

The heterosexual fear of the homosexual "other," Fuss goes on to argue, results in an ambivalent fascination with "the specter of abjection, a certain preoccupation with the figure of the homosexual as specter and phantom, as spirit and revenant, as abject and undead" ("Inside" 3). This tendency of heterosexuality to think of "the homosexual as the abject" ("Inside" 3) is perfectly realized in true-crime narratives about queer serial killers. Indeed, one can argue that this is precisely why such killers are so fascinating to the true-crime genre: they seem to exemplify the homosexual abject to a heterosexual order obsessed by fear of contamination from the other. Although mainstream heterosexist culture would assume that the straight fascination with abject queerness is noncontaminating, I think it much more likely that that fascination creates permeable, rather than absolute, boundaries.

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