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THE LIVES OF CRIMINALLY VIOLENT WOMEN (VOLUMES I AND II) (STRESS, HOMICIDE)

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THE LIVES OF CRIMINALLY VIOLENT WOMEN

Volume I
Chapters 1 through 5

BY

JOHN THEODORE KIRKPATRICK
B.A. (Sociology), Colby College, 1977
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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

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in
Sociology

December 1983
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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Date

September 21, 1963
For Jean, Alice, and Eleanor
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ABSTRACT

THE LIVES OF CRIMINALLY VIOLENT WOMEN

by

John Theodore Kirkpatrick

University of New Hampshire, December, 1983

The purpose of the present study is to better understand why some people kill others. Using the autobiographical accounts of convicted female homicide offenders, this work defines the life experiences behind their violence. Seventy-six women, representing several age and racial groups, were separately interviewed at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women. The life stories these women tell and the ways they recount them offer a unique view of the social worlds where murder and manslaughter occur.

The study's theoretical orientation is built from the literature on life stress. There is strong evidence that an excess of stress can adversely affect behavior. The ways in which people manage everyday tensions may be as important to behavior as the amount of tension we experience. This is why the study relies so heavily upon the autobiographies of women who kill. In their reconstructed pasts, there are clues to developing tendencies that would lead them to their
homicidal acts.

The findings point to injurious sources of stress in childhood, through adolescence and adulthood. Stressful life events, particularly those involving loss of and attack by others, recur in the lives of the study women. The stress extracts its toll from the physical and mental well-being of the women. It also leaves them feeling somewhat apart from and embittered with the people in their everyday lives. The isolation and resentment born of social loss and aggression may figure prominently in lethally violent behavior.

Understanding how these women came to kill others should help to minimize criminal violence. By planning and developing a less stressful society and by helping each other with the inevitable trials of life, we may lessen the risk that more will grow as alone, angry, and as dangerous as the women of this study.
Chapter One

Introduction

This study is about the lives of seventy-six women who have killed other human beings. It is about violent women and the unique and not so unique socially constructed worlds in which they live cut their everyday lives. The study is designed to enlarge our understanding of the life processes that may contribute to criminal violence and to illuminate the personal drama in social interaction. The quantity and quality of events experienced by individuals throughout life and the lines of action developed by individuals to manage those events may bear heavily upon the genesis of deviant behavior.

Everyday Life

Everyday social life may be seen as an ongoing drama with a cast of millions. Each of us plays various parts or roles in this drama. We often juggle a number of roles at any given time: friend, son, daughter, worker, student, lover, group member, and so on. In these roles, we are the actors of everyday life. Since there is no written script, we act out our roles based largely upon how we see others play them, how we played them in the past, what we believe.
to be the demands of the immediate situation, and what we anticipate to be the future consequences of our interpretation. The constellation of these roles gives form to the drama, but the form can be fleeting. The drama is dynamic, with no clear beginning or end; it is never static. Rather, daily social life is perhaps best characterized by change. It is we, the principle actors, who create and adjust to the fluid drama.

The social landscape, the cast, the story line, and the audience of social life can differ among people. We may share similar experiences, but we also have different ones. Building upon the events of our lives, we subjectively and selectively construct the social realities in which we act out our social roles. The subjectively constructed social realities of people are not exactly alike. They may be remarkably similar, but they are not precisely the same. Two people living door-to-door, or even under the same roof, may approach, interpret, and act in the drama of daily living in discrete ways. This is because of the different roles we play and the unique style of acting we bring to our social roles. In all of this, we see a variety of interpretations of the drama; this is the stuff of diverse human interaction.

As actors, we feel at times happy or sad, kind or angry, friendly or distant, and exhilarated or frustrated. Our attitudes can color the styles in which we perform our roles. Certain feelings and particular personal styles can
be triggered by specific life events or abrupt changes in the dramatic scenes of life. Death, divorce, job loss, illness and injury are not often favorably encountered. On the other hand, many of us eagerly anticipate the birth of a child, a job promotion, or marriage.

Regardless of the affective rating of a life event, the event necessitates a reaction on our part. We add a new role or discard another. We alter the way we act in a given role or steadfastly hold to old styles that have suited us in the past. Changes in social life, positive and negative, create stress. Stress may be seen as those forces that require the individual actor or the entire ensemble to adapt or adjust their role-playing to new life situations. Stress can be situational, a change required at a given time, or chronic, a continuing condition that requires the actor or actors to constantly meet often adverse social pressures. A divorce may be a situational stressor; the demands of the role of divorcee may be a chronic stressor.

**Consequences of life stress**

People react to stressful change differently. Some actors are rigid, while others seem to thrive on the constant challenge of life change. The loss of a loved one sends some actors into deep depression. An extreme literary example, Juliet could not bear the death of her lover Romeo and subsequently took her own life. Still others, while profoundly affected by the death of someone close, manage a resilient reaffirmation of life. Several reporters of the
American political scene believe that the deep compassion of Robert Kennedy for the underprivileged emerged after the death of his brother John. So it is with an illness or injury. Governor George Wallace's political career slowed with the assassination attempt that left him in a wheelchair, but Franklin Delano Roosevelt was determined that polio would not spell a similar fate for him. In many ways, the diversity of adjustments to life change is a riddle of the human story. The subjective interpretations of everyday social life could be powerful tools in understanding discriminant reactions to life change.

Stress pioneer Hans Selye (1956) believes that an overabundance of life change does not bode well for the mental and physical health of the individual. Actors may be asked too many times to draw upon their resources and adapt to a new situation. Change taps the store of adaptive energy. Constant change drains this energy and individuals can become physically or emotionally taxed. Over time, undesirable physical conditions, such as hypertension, ulcers, or migraines, may result. Maladaptive affective states, such as depression or neurosis, may also develop in response to high stress levels. Dollard and his colleagues (1939) suggested that repeated frustration in the acting out of out roles in everyday life can lead to the display of aggressive behavior. Palmer (1960) demonstrates that this frustration may contribute to the murder of one actor by another. In social life, actors may be physically or
psychically harmed through their own doing, at the hands of others, or through a combination of the two. Physical wounds tend to heal more quickly and completely than emotional ones. Emotional wounds often become festering psychic sores, not always readily apparent to others.

If an actor is subjected to repeated frustration in the acting out of social roles, if an actor perceives that most attempts meet with some resistance or end in failure, the actor may come to see him/herself as a largely unsuccessful actor in the drama. Through a process that psychologist Alfred Adler (1946) calls a fictional finalism, and that sociologist Robert Merton (1957) terms a self-fulfilling prophecy, the actor comes to see all future action as doomed to frustrate. In a sense, actors may even begin to seek out frustrating situations since they define themselves as the object of abject conditions or situations.

It is the general thesis of this study that the compounding of psychic and physical wounds that result from stressful life changes and conditions interferes with successful role-playing and generates high levels of frustration. In turn, severe frustration may contribute to the display of other-directed aggression. Murder, the forced and lasting exit of an actor from the stage of human drama, is one type of other-directed aggression.
A study of the lives of women who kill

The chief concern of this study is the empathetic and rational understanding of the lives of women who have killed. The general thesis is premised by the work of social scientists who have linked life stress and criminal violence. Straus (1978), for example, defines stress as a function of the interaction of the subjectively-defined demands of a situation and the capabilities of an individual or group to respond to these demands. According to Straus, stress is present when there is an inconsistency between the subjectively defined situational demands and the response capabilities. Palmer and Humphrey (1977, 1982), a research team that has extensively investigated the link between stress and criminal violence, report that violent offenders encounter higher levels of life stress than do non-violent offenders. Further, they suggest that extreme life stress may contribute to outwardly-directed aggressor. In an examination of the sex differences in the stress-violence connection, Ketner and Humphrey (1980) suggest that female criminal homicide offenders are likely to experience high stress levels in their familial roles while male criminal homicide offenders are likely to encounter high stress in occupational roles. Relying on this research as a foundation, this study is an investigation into the subjective interpretations of life events among a selected group of incarcerated female criminal homicide offenders.
The first task of the study was to catalogue the stressful life events of these women as they recalled them. Second was to elicit some assessment by these women as to their role performances prior to the murder and to listen for the life experiences that they believed to be problematic. The original belief, confirmed upon the completion of this research, was that these women characterize their lives as extremely taxing and that they see themselves as unwilling participants in an unending flow of difficult adjustment to daily social life. Murder can be seen as a socially constructed response to a rather desperate life.

The autobiographical accounts of 76 women who have killed are the objects of intuitive and contemplative study. Since this volume concerns the manners in which the women make sense of everyday currents, their lives are catalogued only as they recount them. The life experiences they encounter, their performances in the roles they play, their expectations, and their realities are each given considerable attention in these pages. The reader may find these women to be rather ordinary people who repeatedly meet with extraordinary circumstance. Perhaps more than most of us, these women have had enormous difficulty acting out their social roles. For them, the stress of existence periodically combined and seemed not to ease. They carry with them the physical and psychological scars incurred from their interaction with others. The separate killings by the
women are signs that the scars, particularly those upon the psyche, are pronounced and hurtful.

Most of the research took place in North Carolina throughout the fall and winter of 1981-1982. Seventy-six women incarcerated for murder at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women in Raleigh were interviewed separately. Each had been convicted and sentenced for criminal homicide. The sample of female criminal homicide offenders is not a random one, however. It does not include parolees, women convicted of criminal homicide in North Carolina but sentenced elsewhere, or women who killed but were exonerated through a ruling of justifiable homicide. Neither is it a random sample of the women incarcerated for murder at the correctional center. At the outset of the research, a list of 115 women serving time at the center was provided. Some of those were paroled during the course of the research before they could be interviewed. Others were eliminated by the prison administration for health and disciplinary reasons. Still others did not want to participate in the research. Of the 115, 76 agreed to participate. Despite the limitations of the sample, it provides a broad cross-section of female criminal homicide offenders by race, age, murder type, weapon use, and victim-offender relationship. The exact dimensions of the sample are discussed in Chapter Five.
Each woman was interviewed separately in a confidential setting at the prison. Drawing upon the work of Holmes and Rahe (1974) and Dohrenwend et al. (1978), an interview schedule was designed to record the variety of stress in the lives of these women, from birth to the time of the murder. Each woman was asked questions about specific events that may or may not have happened to them. The aim was to compose a fairly accurate portrait of their lives based upon their selective recall and subjective interpretations of their life stories. Once all seventy-six women were interviewed, the data were coded and analyzed to discern life patterns particular to this group of criminally violent women. Later, taped follow-up interviews were conducted at the prison with nine of the women from the initial sample. The oral accounts of their lives were transcribed and are used extensively throughout this work to afford the reader a better understanding of how these women see themselves and their social worlds.

 Appropriately, the study relies heavily upon the self-report of life events by women who have killed. As these women recall their life stories, we may find a key to the ways in which they construct their realities. Murder may be a very real consequence of their subjective definition of life situations. Admittedly, recall is not always strictly accurate. Retrospective interpretation and the intentional or unintentional distortion of facts are processes that are undoubtedly at play. Yet selective
interpretation and retrieval are important components of human interaction. Nonetheless, in general, the life accounts of the sample tended to agree with much of the information about them found in their prison record files. If anything, the women tended to underreport, rather than overreport, stressful life events. What is also striking is the consistency of the nine women interviewed twice in the telling of their life stories. At the very least, the stories they tell are the soft impressions of their personal reconciliation with the social worlds surrounding them prior to their separate murders.

The reader must understand that, in a study of this sort, the role of the investigator is a difficult and complex one. In this instance, he is a measurement instrument. He is also a mediator between the reader and the seventy-six women of the study. In the role, the investigator is a likely victim of cultural bias and interviewer fatigue. Misunderstandings and inaccurate translations are a distinct possibility in a study of this kind. A reader is reassured by an investigator's awareness of potential problems and constant vigilance to fend off their intrusion into a study. In the superintendent's office at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women there hangs a sign which reads "I know you believe what you think I said but I am not sure you realize what you heard is not what I meant." The cautionary message lingered through the months of this research.
The chapters ahead

The volume is divided into two parts, several chapters, and numerous sections. Part One includes Chapters One through Five. Chapter Two is devoted to a selective history of criminological attention to women. An assessment of studies of female offenders, from Lombroso's to those of contemporary selection bias theorists, is presented. An acquaintance with such criminological literature provides the reader with a backdrop of accumulated knowledge regarding women and crime. The present study is, in part, a product of the existing criminological research on women.

Chapter Three reviews the existing research on sex differences and aggression. How do men and women differ in the display of aggression? How are they alike? Drawing upon research on this matter, partial answers are offered in Chapter Three. Also in that chapter, existing studies of women and murder are considered. The reader may approach the present study in light of the findings of past studies of women and murder.

Chapter Four, The Stress of Everyday Life, lays the theoretical groundwork for this study. The purpose of the study is twofold. First, it is an investigation into the structure and dynamics of the lives of women who have killed. Second, it is intended to be a general sociology of everyday life. The women whose lives are described in these pages have met with enormous difficulty in acting out their social roles. Numerous negative life events seem to have
interfered with successful role playing. Importantly, the women see themselves as largely unsuccessful actors in daily life and with good reason. Perhaps more than most of us, they encountered frustration and pain at various points in their lives. But their lives are, in a sense, exaggerations of our own lives. This is to say that we may see pieces of ourselves in the narratives of these women. Most of us, however, have not killed anyone. How these women came to kill is an important question in this study and the work presents two main themes designed to provide a partial answer. First, the subjective construction and interpretation of social reality are given special attention, as are their consequences. A phenomenological approach is borrowed from the works of Douglas and Palmer, among others. Second, the link between life stress and aggression is pursued at length. The extensive research of Palmer and Humphrey on the stress-criminal violence relationship is the springboard of the present study. Chapter Four develops the general thesis of the study. In a few words, the thesis attempts to trace the connection between repeated stressful life events, particularly those involving aggression, and later lethally-violent aggression.

Chapter Five spells out the research design and method of study. A description of the research setting, a detailing of the sample, the development of the interview schedule, the data collection, and the data analysis are all set forth. The inherent problems and liabilities of the
research design are also noted.

Part Two of the volume directly concerns the lives of the sample women. Chapters Six through Ten present the findings of the study. The lives of the women in the sample have been broken down into life stages and arenas and discussed at length. Childhood, adolescence, marriage and work are a few examples. The life characteristics and experiences of the sample group as a whole are delineated and several within-group comparisons by race and type of homicide are made. These chapters are intercut with the words of a few of the women who talk about the events of their lives and how they feel about them. An illustrative case study follows each chapter.

Chapter Ten offers a summary portrait of how these seventy-six women generally view themselves and their place in the world - as The Only Ones. In a sense, the concept of The Only Ones is a contradiction in terms. Only implies a singular case; ones implicates many. This is an important paradox that accurately describes the self-assessment of these women as to their lot in life. While the problems of these women are likely to be shared by many, they generally believe that they are the sole possessors of such problems. What would seemingly be problems that would merit public attention remain the very private troubles of these women. They tend to guard these troubles from others for a variety of reasons: embarrassment, lack of resources, psychic pain, or perceived social and cultural pressures. As this work
will illustrate, an Only One develops from frequent and continued experience with loss and aggression in everyday life. Through such exposure, isolation and resentment take root, mature, and harden. The firm encampment of both sentiments is to an Only One's physical and mental detriment and, ultimately, it may be to the physical detriment of others.

Also in the final chapter, possible areas for future research on the sociology of everyday life are implicated. Policy recommendations designed to alleviate, or at least reduce, the pressure and motivation to aggress toward others, are also set forth.
Chapter Two

A Selective History of
Women in Crime and
in Criminology

The study of women in crime is not new. The relative attention to the topic in scholarly journals and books at present gives the appearance that the discipline of criminology has "discovered" a new area of empirical and theoretical concentration. This appearance is not an entirely accurate appraisal of the discipline. Admittedly, criminology has preoccupied itself with an understanding of the participation of men in crime. The critical argument that accuses the discipline of a scientific posture dominated by men and characterized by an exclusive devotion to the study of men in crime is not without merit. However, the criminological preoccupation with men, while not excusable, is understandable.

In his essay, American Trends (1978), sociologist Lewis Coser suggests that the discipline of sociology in the United States is firmly rooted in the spirit of reform that pervaded nineteenth century social science. Much of social science at that time was informed by the evolutionary
thought of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. The idea that social science should seek not only to understand social order but also to control it gained an increasing audience. Through scientific pursuit, humans could take an active role in social evolution. The development of society could be directed by identifying existing social pathology and by formulating plans to correct that pathology. If Coser is correct, then early American social science was influenced by the social conditions of the time, conditions presumably seen by scientists and the public to be undesirable.

There can be little argument that crime was, and still is, an undesirable element of society. Few are served by its presence while many are victimized, if only by the fear of its presence. It is a reasonable assumption, therefore, to believe that crime is a primary concern to the social scientific community. Coser reports that the nineteenth century American Social Science Association appropriately claimed as one of its objectives the "prevention and repression of crimes." The charters of existing organizations, such as the American Society of Criminology and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences attest to the concerns of social scientists today.

By all measures available, the largest share of crime in the United States and in other countries is committed by men. This was also the case in nineteenth century America, although the difference between male and female crime rates
was likely to be more pronounced. As will be discussed later, a convergence of male and female crime rates has taken place. The gap between the sexes in their criminal participation appears to be narrowing. Since men accounted for far more crime than did women in the nineteenth century and since that difference in criminal participation was probably more pronounced that it is today, it is not altogether surprising that men were the targets of the majority of criminological research. After all, the reform-oriented social scientists of that period were responding to the perceived or felt needs to contain, correct, or control identifiable social pathology. The zeitgeist or spirit of the times was, and to some extent still is, a roadmap for the social sciences. In nineteenth century America, women in crime did not pose the same apparent threat to society as did men in crime. Criminology, an interdisciplinary cousin of sociology, was thus largely concerned with male criminal behavior.

Rising female crime rates spur an increasing interest in the social science community. This interest translates into more and more research devoted to understanding women in crime. A criminological trend of this sort has as its chief benefit an expanding knowledge of female criminal behavior. This is not to say that previous to the current growth of research on women in crime there existed no knowledge of the phenomenon. Rather, the suggestion is that we know more about men and crime than we do about women and
crime. To hold fast to the notion that classical criminologists completely ignored female criminality is to grossly shortchange their contribution to our understanding at present. In truth, and with the benefit of hindsight, several models of female criminality developed by the classicists were overtly sexist and often laced with logical or empirical errors. But when we pronounce their shortcomings, we may overlock their contributions. As heirs to Copernican thought, Kepler's laws, and quantum physics, we scoff at the naivete of the Ptolemaic model of the solar system. In criminology, and in regard to female criminality, Lombroso, Hooton, the Gluecks and others are the posthumous targets of criticism. There is little doubt that their collective works are seriously flawed. We should recognize, however, that each sought to understand female criminality through the spectacles of his/her times just as Ptolemy sought to define the cosmic order through the conceptual prism of his day. When we do so, we can begin to see that some of the classical theorists in criminology set forth some rather radical ideas for their time and that these ideas form the foundation of much of the current research on women in crime.*1

1. Thomas Kuhn (1962) develops a strong argument that scientific knowledge is not necessarily cumulative. This is to say that science is often marked by revolutionary shifts in paradigmatic thought. The works of Copernicus and Einstein are good examples of shifts in physical scientific thought. Models of reality are often discarded when anomalies surface, mount, and the initial models prove no longer accurate or useful.
This study explores the subjective construction of life events through the minds of women convicted of a crime, specifically of a violent crime, particularly of murder. Its value might be better assessed against a backdrop of past and present knowledge of female criminality in general. The contributions of classical criminological theorists are noted first.

The Classical Theorists

Cesare Lombroso and his peers

Italian criminologists Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero's comprehensive work, *The Female Offender*, was published in the United States in 1898. A large share of this work focused upon the various anthropometric characteristics and physical anomalies of a select female group of prostitutes, thieves, and violent offenders, arsonists, and rape accomplices.

Lombroso and Ferrero compare the cranial capacity of this select group to that of groups of normal females, female lunatics, and Pacific islanders. They report the differing averages of cranial capacities among the groups and find that the average of an aggregated criminal group to be greater than that of prostitutes and normal females. However, Lombroso, a physician, also notes that cranial capacity varies greatly by type of offense and by the geographic regional affiliation of the subjects. Interestingly, the within-group distributions of cranial
capacities are remarkably similar, with the mode of each
group being roughly 1200 to 1400 cubic centimeters, with a
total range of 1000 to 1750 cubic centimeters. In other
words, the comparison and study groups may be more similar
than they are different. Nonetheless, Lombroso posits that
there are significant differences, and then closely examines
the peculiar physical traits of the study or criminal group.
This further investigation by Lombroso as to the orbital
capacity, skull circumference, and facial angles of the
criminal group may be a specious venture at best.

Part of Lombroso’s work is devoted to the pathological
anomalies or abnormalities of female offenders. Skull
deformities, asymmetry of the face, and lower jaw and
cheekbone anomalies are examined and discussed at length.
In fairness to Lombroso’s effort, he takes great care in
reporting the discernable differences between his study and
his comparison groups. Here, it will suffice to say that
Lombroso finds a generally higher number of anomalies in the
criminal group than in the comparison groups. These
physical anomalies include moles, prehensile feet,
hairiness, and deformed dental structure. As an example,
Lombroso reports that prostitutes generally have more moles
and prehensile feet and are hairier than other female
criminals, idiots, normals, or epileptics. He further
states that prostitutes show fewer anomalies producing
ugliness, but they are marked by more of the signs of
degeneration. How Lombroso arrives at this conclusion is
Lombroso's study of female offenders is noteworthy for its attention to women in crime at a time when criminology was in its infancy. We must still be mindful of the serious drawbacks to the study and exert caution when assessing the value of Lombroso's findings. First, we are not assured that the study and comparison groups are drawn randomly from their respective populations. There is no means by which we can determine if these groups are truly representative of those larger populations. Second, the causal connection drawn by Lombroso between physical anomalies and crime is a tenuous one. Abnormal dental formation, for instance, may be more indicative of the inability to receive adequate dental care than it is of a baser criminal composite. A family of means can afford dental care, while a poorer family may not. Further, some of the physical anomalies mentioned by Lombroso are subject to cultural interpretation. In many cultures and subcultures, body hair and moles on women are considered to be desirable and not pathological. Lombroso does not seem to recognize the role of cultural or subcultural variation in accounting for differences in human appearances.

The fact is that human beings come in various shapes, sizes, colors, and features. Depending largely upon with whom we associate and interact, we may wear our hair a certain way, cover with makeup or clothes the parts of our bodies we wish to disguise and accentuate the parts we want
others to notice. Today we may entirely change the way we look through cosmetic surgery. Physical appearance may be more culturally influenced than it is genetically determined. Consequently, assigning criminal etiological values to our differing physical semblances offers minimal scientific reward.

Lombroso was not alone in his approach toward understanding crime. Criminology at that time was fraught with atavistic theory and phrenoclogical and anthropometric inquiry. As noted earlier, Darwinian conceptions of biological evolution heavily influenced scientists in many disciplines. Criminologists set about detecting atavistic characteristics among criminal offenders that might support the notion that criminals are throwbacks in the evolutionary scale. Harvard scientist Earnest Hooton (1939a) enlarged upon the Lombrosian model of criminality. Hooton, like Lombroso, undertook to examine the physical characteristics of antisocial individuals. His belief, also like Lombroso's, was that behavior arises from organic constitution. Sheldon (1949), a researcher with a similar approach to understanding crime, constructed a typology of body types, consisting basically of fat, medium, and skinny


3. For a short summary of Beccaria's ideas, see "On crimes and punishments" in Jaccoby (1979).
categories. Criminals, he reports, are more likely to be of medium build. His findings are subject to the same critical scrutiny as those of Lombroso. At that time, however, criminal anthropology was the state of the art.

Lombroso, Hooton, and others were also responding to a philosophical issue. Cesare Beccaria, a social philosopher predating Lombroso, set forth an egalitarian suggestion for social control and criminal punishment. To insure equality for all before the law, Beccaria believed that we must focus on the crime rather than the individual. Each criminal offense, therefore, should have a set penalty, applicable to every individual accused and found guilty of the offense. There should be no variation in the meting out of the sentence. Today, we call this idea determinate sentencing and it is an attractive policy to some. Beccaria thought this might minimize injustice.

Lombroso and his peers thought quite the opposite. Such a policy would achieve "justice" at the expense of the individual. The delicate balance between individual concerns and the public good would be tipped in favor of the latter. In the end, there would be no justice at all. Lombroso believed it a far more rational course to consider individual cases and circumstances in the impositions of criminal sanctions. Reform and rehabilitation are better accomplished when the individual and his/her special needs are considered. It was a logical course for Lombroso to concentrate his empirical efforts on discerning the peculiar
traits of the criminal type. In this way, a more productive and successful rehabilitation program, especially designed and suited to the individual, would result. There is no irony lost, however, in the realization that little could be done to correct the assumed cause of crime, atavistic characteristics.

Lombroso and his peers did show signs of a dramatic shift in their thinking. In the introduction to Lombroso's seminal work, Crime: Its Causes and Remedies (1911), Maurice Parmelee, a sociologist, notes that Lombroso increasingly recognized more sociological explanations of crime causation. Education, economic conditions, density of population, and other environmental concerns preoccupied Lombroso in his later years. Late in his life, he would even lay the foundation for what is now referred to as the convergence hypothesis in criminology. Lombroso noted that the more societies industrialize and the more women assume nontraditional roles, the more closely male and female crime rates appear to approximate each other. This rather serendipitous finding should be Lombroso's legacy to our understanding of women in crime.

Fernald's study

An enduring controversy in criminology centers upon a clash of two opposing ideas. One idea promotes crime as a product of the individual's organic composition. Criminal propensity is seen as an inherent quality in some human beings and crime in society is traceable to the behavior of
these people. Lombroso put great stock in this belief. That crime springs from the various pressures of the social environment is the crux of the opposing idea. Proponents of this notion of the etiology of crime have little faith in the criminal type theory formulated by Lombroso. Rather, they examine the qualities of the societies where crime occurs. This approach is usually characterized as the nurture approach. These two ideas continue to compete in criminological research.*4

Mabel Ruth Fernald (1920) and her colleagues present a study that lends great support to the nurture point of view. In 1920, in the wake of the women's suffrage movement, Fernald published A Study of Women Delinquents in New York State. It is a comprehensive and meticulous piece of research. Fernald, a psychologist, applies rigorous empirical methods within a quasi-experimental research design in order to assess the explanatory power of psychological and sociological variables in understanding female criminality. She selects a study group of women from four New York correctional facilities and from probation cases from women's night court of Manhattan and the Bronx. Several comparisons are made within the study group by type of crime as well as between the study group and groups of male offenders and the general population.

4. Currently, there is some very good research on the genetic and biological bases of crime. The rudiments of Lombroso's formulation have not been completely abandoned. See Jeffrey (1979).
Fernald finds two lines of influence bearing upon female criminality: poor economic backgrounds, with limited educational and occupational opportunities, and inferior mental capacity. According to Fernald, economic necessity may underscore the commission of property crimes. Limited educational and occupational opportunities among some women may mitigate against the pursuit of financial rewards through non-criminal channels. Some forty years later, Merton (1957) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960) would expand upon this idea and develop models that portray crime as a function of certain pressures to deviate found within the social structure. The pressures spring from limited opportunity to attain socially-constructed and informally agreed upon goals of wealth and success. Also, criminal opportunity is related to one's position and status in the legitimate world.

Fernald is cautious when addressing the second finding, that female criminal offenders exhibit less mental capacity than their male counterparts and than the general population. She makes clear that the differences between the groups are slight and the overlapping large. Further, she adds that mental capacity is even less useful in differentiating the types of crime in which women are likely to engage. In other words, differences within the study group are smaller than those between the study group and the comparison groups. Given this discussion of mental capacity, Fernald points out that economic factors may be
much stronger predictors of crime. Through such an argument, Fernald departs from Lombroso and contradicts the work of Goring (1913) who, seven years prior to Fernald, attached a preeminent power to the constitutional factor of lesser intelligence in explaining crime. By presenting such an impressive research document, Fernald and her associates encouraged those who began to join the nurture camp of the nature-nurture controversy.

William I. Thomas

There are times in the development of a science when a particular academic setting provides a forum for a creative and important exchange of ideas. Such an exchange, rooted in that setting at a specific time, may influence the thinking of many scientists who follow. The Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago in the early years of this century is a good example of this intellectual phenomenon. Albion Small, a sociologist and President of Colby College in Maine, was invited to develop a sociology department at Chicago at a time when American sociology was in its infancy. Under Small's leadership, a group of extremely creative minds assembled. Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, Robert Park, John Dewey, and Everett Hughes are a few of the great social thinkers associated with Small's department.

In a sense, the Chicago school of sociology was devoted more to a social philosophy than to strict positivistic empiricism. A strong emphasis was placed upon an
understanding of the personal experience and inner consciousness of the social actor. A lesser emphasis was placed upon the statistical analysis of exhibited behavior. This was an exciting direction for American social scientists and it quickly spawned a renaissance of sociological inquiry aimed at understanding behavior from the point of view of the actor. William I. Thomas was another of the great social thinkers associated with this movement at the University of Chicago. Although Thomas was later asked to leave the University, due in part to the rather provocative nature of his research interests, he played a vital role in the creative exchange of ideas that characterized the Department of Sociology at that time.*5

In 1923, Thomas published *The Unadjusted Girl*. The work was an original monograph and a supplement to the *journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*. Like his peers, Thomas was well aware of the nature-nurture debate in criminology. Thomas (1925) conceded there to be certain influences at work throughout life and that some of these influences are inborn and that some are of the social environment. Influenced by behavioral psychologist John Watson, Thomas postulated that there are four human wishes or forces which impel action: the desires for new experience, for security, for response, and for recognition. These wishes are thought to be the

5. Upon his departure from the University, Thomas accepted positions at the New School for Social Research and Harvard. His last years were spent in research in New Haven, Ct. and, later, Berkeley, Cal.
fuel of human action and the satisfactory realization of each one is believed to make for a healthy, normal life. The neglect or unsatisfactory realization of any of the four basic wishes lay behind maladaptive or unadjusted behavior.

While these wishes are believed to be universal, Thomas concentrates considerably upon self-determined acts of behavior. He believed that the four wishes may be satisfied in a variety of different ways and that individual actors may satisfy them in discrete ways. The choice of fulfillment means may be adaptive or maladaptive to society and may exhibit adjustment or unadjustment of the individual to the demands of social life. In this way, Thomas' formulation can be seen as both a push and pull theory of behavior. The individual is initially motivated to act by the demands of the four wishes, but is then pulled through his choice or volition to certain manners of acting.  

Thomas' emphasis is clearly upon the developmental aspects of behavior. Prior to any self-determined act, Thomas thought, is a stage of examination and deliberation called the definition of the situation. He suggests that an individual interprets the social situations that present themselves and then acts based upon those interpretations.

6. Similar formulations in other disciplines were developed about this time. Psychanalyst Karen Horney, writing in the same era as Thomas, departed from strict Freudian "push" notions of behavior. Horney believed an individual could also direct his/her behavior towards a goal. See Horney (1967).
This formulation of human behavior appears to be a decidedly individualistic one, with a profound concern for understanding the inner-consciousness. There is room for the analysis of patterned behavior, since Thomas makes clear that an individual's definition of the situation is inexorably bound with the definitions and actions of others. These definitions can become quite rigid, though they are not set in concrete. Change and redefinition are possibilities. Thomas posits, however, that a life policy and individual personality may gradually follow from these definitions. Definitions of the situation are at once a way of interpreting the world and a basis for action.

Another portion of The Unadjusted Girl is devoted to understanding prostitution and sexual promiscuity in women. A series of cases and corresponding subjective accounts by women of their lives are included in the study. Thomas suggests that the unadjusted woman is one who does not adequately or appropriately realize her desire for response. Loosely translated, the desire for response is the desire for life, sexual or otherwise. This unsuccessful reconciliation of the demands of the response wish with the demands of the social situation is the key to understanding unadjusted female behavior, according to Thomas. To Thomas' discredit, he directs little discussion toward the other three wishes as they relate to women and their potential impact on female behavior. Thomas apparently views these other wishes as more relevant to the male condition than to
the female condition. The implication is that there is an inherent difference in the affective predispositions of the sexes; this may or may not be true. Nevertheless, Thomas does not adequately address the relevance of the desires for new experience, for security, and for recognition to women. This failure may be in part a function of the predominant gender roles of his time, although Thomas was somewhat of a feminist in his day, and of his rather narrowly focused research.

Thomas' contribution to our understanding of behavior and of female criminality is, nevertheless, a significant one. He demonstrated the need for and value in the analysis of the perspectives or social definitions with which people approach everyday life. Thomas also made great gains in understanding deviant and disvalued behavior through the analysis of the subjective interpretations of reality by deviant actors. His work and that of his colleagues at the University of Chicago provide a theoretical and methodological framework for the present study of criminally violent women.

The Gluecks

Harvard researchers Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck published several studies of crime prior to the second world war. One of these studies, *Five Hundred Delinquent Women* (1934) is an impressive, largely quantitative analysis of female criminality and is intended to be a companion volume to their work on male criminality. *Five Hundred Criminal
Careers (1930). The Glueck's work on female criminality provides a detailed survey of the background and traits of female offenders, or existing correctional programs and policies, and of the results of such treatment. The present concern is primarily with the etiology of female criminality, so a review of the Glueck's first concern is in order.

The Gluecks chose five hundred women who had been incarcerated at a Massachusetts correctional facility as their study group. The sample selection process involved picking women whose parole expired between the years 1921 and 1925. The sample was assembled by counting the cases backward from 1925 until five hundred cases had been collected. Random selection is by no means a trait of this sampling process and it offers nothing in the way of a stratified sample by age, race, and type of offense. As is the case with Lombroso's work, we are at a loss in our assessment as to whether or not the Gluecks' sample is representative of the larger population of female offenders. Also, due to a dearth of comparable measures in the population of noncriminal women at that time, few comparisons are offered between criminal and noncriminal women. This drawback to the study, however, is appropriately and explicitly stated by the researchers. Once the five hundred cases were selected, the Gluecks used prison files, parole records, and field investigations as data sources.
The Gluecks pursue a number of variables as to their weight as sources of female criminality. Mental characteristics, early family life, childhood, adolescence, work record, criminal record, and sexual and marital life are explored in each case and then combined for all five hundred cases for an aggregate measure of the group. The Gluecks find their study group to be severely biologically, economically, and socially disadvantaged and characterize the group as a generally sorry lot. Early uprooting of family ties, physical and mental handicaps, broken homes, limited education, and poor work and recreation habits are the commonalities accentuated by the Gluecks. They further suggest that criminal women are the failures of our efforts of adequate and appropriate socialization. By hinting that socialization is at the root of crime, they promote resocialization, where possible, as its solution.

Fifty-four percent of the Gluecks study group were incarcerated for sex offenses. Consequently, the Gluecks expend great empirical energy in the analysis of the sexual lives of their cases. They find that sexual promiscuity and dysfunction are shared traits of criminal women. One striking trait presumed by the Gluecks to be common to most criminal women is the inability to control the sex impulse. However, the women in the study sample may be victims of the sexual mores existing at the time. For example, an adultress who was present in the Gluecks' sample would not likely be present in a comparable sample today. Adultresses
are rarely imprisoned today. Similarly, a sexually promiscuous man would not likely be incarcerated solely for his promiscuity, then or now.

A flaw such as this mars the Gluecks' study. The study is further devalued by the recurrence of a logical flaw. While the Gluecks are to be credited for their sincere effort in initiating their study of criminal women, they often lose the forest for the trees when they interpret their findings. Their findings might offer more insight into the ways in which society is structured than into the hearts and minds of their sample members. Consequently, when the Gluecks prescribe ways to minimize female criminality, they treat the symptom and not the cause. In an exaggerated manner, the characteristics discerned by the Gluecks to be descriptive of criminal women may also be descriptive of the status of women as a group in society.

The Gluecks' study of criminal women is valuable in one sense. Mentioned earlier, though neglected in this discussion, a significant part of the study concerns the criminal processing of the female offender. The Gluecks compared measures of well over one hundred variables at two points in time in the lives of the offenders: prior to the commitment to prison and during the post-parole period. The Gluecks are surprised at the sizable number of women who led reasonably adjusted and legitimate lives during their post-parole period, that is after their commitment to prison and their parole. Stated with a good deal of hindsight, it
would appear that the Massachusetts correctional facility for women and the parole system did a fair job of resocializing criminal women into the acceptable and traditional female gender role of that time period.

**Florence Monahan**

Florence Monahan, the female counterpart to ex-warden and noted author Lewis E. Lawes,*7 was at different times the superintendent of women's correctional facilities in Minnesota, Illinois, and California. Her book, *Women in Crime* (1941), is worthy of mention for several reasons. The book is not an empirical study of female criminality. Although well-educated, Monahan was an administrator and not a research scientist. Monahan had over twenty years experience with criminal women and her work is laced with personal knowledge and specific cases. Monahan wrote at a time when criminological research in the United States held the attention of criminal justice practitioners and her book reflects the dominant paradigm of criminogenic thought of her period.

Monahan was a reform-oriented prison head, in a mold similar to Sing Sing warden Lawes. She believed crime to be a product of forces arising from the social environment. Poor socio-economic and limited cultural backgrounds tended to encourage criminal behavior. It comes as no surprise that Monahan viewed the prison as a workable setting for the

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7. Lawes, author of *20,000 years at Sing Sing*, among other books, wrote the introduction to Monahan's volume.
resocialization or rehabilitation of criminal women. This view is not markedly different than that held by the Gluecks, but Monahan is a bit more enlightened as to the female gender role in society than are the Gluecks. Monahan is not especially preoccupied with the prior sexual behavior patterns of her charges.*8 Rather, her concern lay with upgrading the educational and occupational skills of female offender. Monahan's understanding of the sources of female criminality are clearly rooted in the nurture camp of the nature-nurture debate and her rehabilitative efforts are designed to counteract those social forces that are believed to breed crime.

There is a final irony in Monahan's book. In her summary chapter, she draws a rather chilling course for future rehabilitation efforts. Monahan expresses a great hope in the biochemical treatment, through such things as hormonal injection and glandular alteration, of criminal men and women. The increased use and abuse of psychotropic drugs, such as thorazine and prolixin, in the treatment of offenders and psychotics since her time has demonstrated a diminishing promise for such treatment. Biochemical treatment may also raise profound civil and constitutional issues in our approach to the crime problem. Monahan's allegiance to sociological explanations of crime belies the

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8. As with most prison administrators, Monahan was concerned with prison homosexuality. Rather than viewing prison homosexual behavior as a response to limited heterosexual opportunity, Monahan saw its presence as an abominable aberration and believed that it should not be tolerated.
popular appeal of biological solutions to crime. While the nurture argument was the stronger of the two arguments in the debate of the issue in the 1940's, the nature argument was not without an audience.

**Otto Pollak**

Otto Pollak (1977) presents an intriguing thesis in *The Criminality of Women*, first published in 1950. As stated earlier in these pages, official measures of crime point to a marked difference in the criminal participation rates of men and women. Pollak contends, however, that official measures of crime are not completely accurate and therefore not always indicative of the true incidence and prevalence of crime. For a variety of reasons, not all crime that occurs is reported or detected. If it were, our police would be much busier and our prisons much fuller than they are. Because of the inability of official crime measures to assess the full extent and breadth of criminal behavior in society, the sex differential in crime rates should be redressed and carefully scrutinized. Pollak believes that the gap between male and female criminal participation rates is not nearly as wide as the official measures of crime would suggest. There is a masked character of female crime, Pollak argues, that conceals much of the actual criminal behavior of women.

According to Pollak, one reason this concealment occurs is the sneaky and manipulative character of female criminal behavior. Women, more so than men, apparently engage in
crime as accomplices, murder through less detectable methods, and victimize those within the family where their behavior is relatively hidden. Pollak offers reasons for the manipulative behavior of women and the patterns of criminal victimization which it produces. By virtue of their distinct biology, women can fake orgasm and men cannot. Through social learning, women are taught to conceal their menstrual cycle; men have no similar condition with which to concern themselves. Also, women learn to channel their natural aggression into socially concealed behavior. Men are encouraged not to be so inhibited. Pollak believes that these processes may contribute to the discrete types of criminal behavior undertaken separately by the two sexes.

Another reason offered by Pollak to explain the disparity of crime rates concerns the attitudes within the criminal justice system toward women. A prevailing chauvinistic approach toward women in society has a like presence in and effect on the criminal processing of women. If women are generally treated with chivalry in the larger society, then the criminal transgressions of women may be less likely to result in arrest. If there is an arrest, Pollak continues, women are less likely than men to be convicted. Officially, the criminal justice system, with all of its cultural baggage, may assist in keeping women out of crime statistics. Pollak's presentation of supportive evidence is persuasive on the latter point. He draws upon
cross-national data and compares the conviction and acquittal rates of males and females. On both counts, women fare better than men. It provides at least some evidence that men and women receive differential treatment within the criminal justice system.

Pollak also elaborates on an observation made years before by Lombroso. Again using cross-national data, Pollak reports an apparent convergence of male and female crime rates over time. The social emancipation of women seems to correspond with an attendant increase in female crime rates. Pollak adds that this phenomenon may, in part, be due to to increasing socio-economic pressures and criminal opportunities for women that may coincide with new freedom from the constraints of the traditional female gender role. This observation and suggestion by Pollak would serve as the impetus for future research and would galvanize the criminological community some twenty-five years later.*9

A Renewed Attention

Those whom we have called the classical theorists with regard to their separate works on female criminality built a solid foundation for much of the research on women and crime presented within the last twenty years. The theoretical approaches adopted by some of the classicists are no doubt flawed by their reliance on the cultural interpretations of

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9. A student of Pollak's, Freda Adler, at the University of Pennsylvania, would advance this formulation significantly. Her work will be discussed shortly. The University of Pennsylvania was and continues to be a fertile setting for criminological research. Thorsten Sellin and Marvin Wolfgang are also associated with the University and undoubtedly influence the work of other crime researchers.
the female gender role of their period. Further, methodological designs of a few of the classicists are somewhat weak and their work is therefore somewhat suspect. Each of the theorists, however, imparts some small token of knowledge to our present understanding of women and crime. Lombroso and Ferrero redirected their later attention to sociological explanations of female criminality, perhaps because they anticipated the great promise it held. Fernald and her colleagues promoted socio-economic factors as strong predictors of female criminal behavior. Thomas demonstrated the value of exploring subjective interpretations of social situations by criminal women. Although their argument lacked robustness, the Gluecks focused attention on criminogenic socialization processes. Monahan shared her personal experience with the resocialization or rehabilitation of criminal women. Finally, Pollak offered reasons for the disparity in the male and female crime rate and turned a critical eye to the differential treatment of the sexes in the processing of criminal offenders. These ideas still deserve the attention of criminologists. In truth, there has been a burgeoning interest among crime researchers in female criminality.*10 A few of the more important recent studies of women and crime are noted. The reader would do well to remember the contributions of the classical theorists when addressing present knowledge.

10. This increased interest is illustrated by the large number of edited collected works devoted exclusively to women and crime. See Brodsky (1975), Crites (1976), Datesman and Scarpitti (1980), and Bowker (1981).
Sixteen years after the publication of Pollak's work on female criminality, University of Minnesota researcher Gisela Konopka published *The Adolescent Girl in Conflict* (1966). Professionally trained in social work, Konopka makes good use of the theoretical formulations and empirical suggestions of William I. Thomas. She presents the subjective interpretations of the social situations encountered by the delinquent girls she studies. Konopka talked to and, to the extent that field conditions would allow, "lived" with 181 adolescent girls between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. Each girl had been the subject of a juvenile court adjudication. All were from Minnesota and most were in an institution, a reformatory, on probation or on parole. Others were in juvenile institutions solely because they were unwed and pregnant. Most were white, a few were black or Native American, though Konopka does not numerically specify the sample breakdown by race or type of offense.

The subjective accounts of their lives and the feelings offered by the adolescent girls are hard-edged and often poignant. Konopka draws out the attitudes and socially-patterned perspectives of her subjects on such issues as racial prejudice, love, work, education, adolescence in an adult world, and the generation gap that grew wide in the United States in the 1960's. Through these accounts, Konopka develops an image of the adolescent girl.
in conflict as one who is essentially lonely and who rarely participates in close interpersonal exchange. She is drawn into herself as she often feels abandoned by others. The adolescent girl in conflict is a loner, according to Konopka, and she is given to inadequately solving the problems of her everyday life by herself. Konopka believes therein lie the roots of unadjusted and socially unacceptable female adolescent behavior.

Konopka demonstrates how the changing role of women in society may exacerbate the feelings of loneliness of the delinquent girl. The success of a few women in traditionally male-dominated endeavors encourages many more women to pursue a similar course. This is not lost on the adolescent girl in conflict. However, with the limited education and even more limited occupational opportunities that usually attend a lower-socio-economic status, the delinquent girl is prone to repeated disappointment and frustration. Consequently, Konopka posits, the delinquent girl is driven further into her isolation and toward unacceptable behavior.

As a means of reform, Konopka suggests revamping existing youth services to better fit the special needs of the adolescent girl in conflict. She adds that better educational programs and revised approaches to teenage pregnancy offer a more humane alternative to institutionalization for the unwed adolescent mother. Konopka also believes that gradual sex role parity will
benefit the lot of all women in the long term and, in particular, might eventually ease some of the strain on adolescent girls. Perhaps most importantly, Konopka reaffirms the need for human understanding. We could be far more adept at taking the role of the other than we are at present. Konopka's research and her suggestions for a better society figure heavily in the present study.

**Freda Adler and the new female criminal offender**

Several of the classical theorists report an apparent convergence over time of reported male and female crime rates in modern industrial societies. Ostensibly, this is not due to decreasing male crime rates. Rather, it is thought to occur because female crime rates increase faster than do male crime rates. Lombroso and Ferrero make reference to this phenomenon and Pollak articulates several reasons for its occurrence. Not until 1975, with the publication of Freda Adler's book *Sisters in Crime* (1975), did this notion attract widespread attention in the criminological community. Adler's book has since become a source of concern and of controversy among criminologists.

Adler begins her treatise with an effort to dispel the cultural myth of female passivity. Levels of female aggression, she argues, are more dependent upon social role expectations than they are upon innate biological drives. If not equal, Adler assumes the naked aggressive capabilities of men and women to be similar. The cultural demands of the traditional female gender role, however,
encourage the suppression of outward aggression or the sublimation of the drive through channels appropriate to the traditional female gender role. Adler believes that the persistent gender disparity in crime rates is more an indicator of a culturally affected prescription of appropriate male and female behavior than it is a measure of the innate possibilities of the separate sexes.

Adler presents a rather persuasive argument that the increasing participation of women in crime may, in part, be linked to the zeitgeist of women's liberation. What results is an elaboration of the opportunity theory to which Fernald alludes. An expanded awareness of female potential and a concurrent reality of women's entrance into traditionally male-dominated occupations may open the doors to criminal opportunity. Using the Uniform Crime Reports of the United States Department of Justice as official measures of crime for the years 1960 through 1972 and relying heavily upon intensive interviews with female criminal offenders and criminal justice practitioners, Adler sets forth her argument. Official measures of criminal participation by men and women indicate a marked acceleration of female rates relative to male rates. Subsequently, women appear to be increasing their representation in the criminal ranks.

Noting that the changing content of female gender role socialization is likely to affect the young more than the entrenched older women, Adler reports that crimes among girls are increasing faster than among adult women. As to
race, Adler reports higher crime rates among black females than among white. Historically, she states, the two groups of women have played different social roles. Black women traditionally have had more exposure to male cultural and socioeconomic pressures as working mothers and heads of households than have white women. This exposure may explain their higher rate of crime participation. Adler notes that white women are likely to criminally deviate with more frequency as they too are increasingly exposed to these pressures. As to class, Adler reports that the economically disadvantaged women, mostly black, are increasingly participating in blue collar crime, such as theft and robbery. The economically advantaged women, mostly white, increasingly participate in white collar crime, such as fraud and embezzlement.

The convergence hypothesis, simply put, suggests that as men and women experience increasingly similar social, economic, and cultural pressures, the criminal rates and patterns of the two sexes grow concurrently similar. In time, the disparity between male and female crime rates may considerably diminish. Adler's book advanced this formulation through a well-written and convincing style. Perhaps because of this, the book made a sensational entrance into criminological circles. Sides were quickly

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11. Note that Merton (1957) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960) separately presented intricate theoretical formulations of the link between opportunity and crime and the possible corresponding presence of opportunity structures in the legitimate and illegitimate social worlds. Note also that Adler had the benefit of these formulations and Fernald did not.
chosen as to the veracity of Adler's formulation and the reliability of her findings. Some interpreted the formulation literally and incorrectly assumed Adler was blaming the women's movement for an epidemic of female crime. Others were too quick in their assumption that men and women are now equals in crime. Both readings of Adler were unfortunate.

Addressing the complaints of the former group, Adler does not blame the women's movement for anything. On the contrary, she asserts that the women's movement is to be credited for raising our social consciousness about the potentials of women and for creating increasing legitimate opportunity for women. But as women are increasingly exposed to the pressures that were once placed only upon men, it makes strong theoretical sense to assume that women may engage in deviant and conformist behavior that is similar to that of men. As human beings, women are no better or no worse than men. This is true if any biological disparity between the sexes is held constant.

Addressing the position of the latter group, Adler does not strongly emphasize that the gap between male and female crime rates is still very wide. Women still account for only approximately twenty percent of all arrests in the United States and women are arrested for property offenses with far more frequency than they are for violent offenses (Kirkpatrick, 1979). Adler reports rather astounding but accurate higher percentage increases in women's than in
men's arrest rates. What she does not adequately report is that the actual number of female arrests is still quite small relative to the actual number of men arrested. Also, Uniform Crime Report estimates are subject to measurement error and Pellow's argument should not be taken too lightly with regard to this issue. The reported increase in female criminality may be more indicative of a change in the attitude of criminal justice personnel toward women than it is a reflection of the increasing criminal behavior of women. Recent research on this issue will be discussed shortly.

There can be little doubt that Adler's work represents an important landmark in criminology. Perhaps more than any book preceding it, Sisters in Crime focused a great deal of research and lay attention on women and crime. At the very least, it ignited some very good research on the important issues surrounding female criminality, issues that had lain largely dormant since Pollak's The Criminality of Women.

Rita Simon

Adler reports rather startling increases in the rates of female participation in criminal behavior. She attributes these increases to the broad changes in the gender role of women in American society. Socioculturalist Rita Simon presents a muted translation of the ideas discussed by Adler. In a penetrating study, Women and Crime (1975).12 Simon is more cautious than Adler in assessing recent trends of female criminality.
Simon draws upon similar crime data sources used by Adler in her work. Simon is more explicit, however, in marking the changes in the demographic and status characteristics of American women. Using data collected by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Simon marks the changes in the marital, educational, financial, and employment statuses of American women over approximately twenty years, roughly from 1950 through 1970. She is also careful to compare those changes with men, since men provide a ready and significant comparison group when speaking to the analysis of gender role change. Simon reports that there are proportionately more women in the labor force in 1970 than were in the labor force in previous years. This is apparently true for single as well as for married women with children. Simon also reports a higher proportion of American women attending college in 1970.

Despite these significant trends, Simon is careful to point out that there has been no large increase in the proportion of women employed in higher-status occupations. While over half of American women work, the majority do so in service occupations. Indeed, more women are employed outside the home, but they remain largely relegated to traditionally-held female jobs, such as clerical positions or waitressing. Simon believes that in order for women to

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12. In the same year, the work originally appeared as a monograph entitled *The Contemporary Woman and Crime*. This National Institute of Mental Health monograph was one of the Crime and Delinquency Issues published by the then U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
commit criminal offenses, they must be given opportunities to commit them. This is a reiteration of the opportunity theory that has surfaced before in the criminological assessment of women. Simon suggests that service occupations do not provide ample criminal opportunities. Thus, women still lag behind men in their separate participations in crime. Unless legitimate opportunities expand, Simon believes that the participation of women in crime is not likely to see large increases.

Simon does report a limited expansion of legitimate opportunities and, subsequently, she reports limited increases in female crime rates. In a review of official measures of crime trends through an analysis of arrest data of the Uniform Crime Reports of the US Department of Justice, Simon notes that there are more women involved in crime in 1972 than there have been since the end of the Second World War. The increases are largely confined to crimes of property, such as theft and fraud, and are not generally found in crimes of violence. Simon also reports that an analysis of judicial statistics manifests an increase in the proportion of women convicted in the courts for white collar offenses. This trend is in agreement with the trend revealed in the arrest data. When considering the changes reported in the demographic and status characteristics of women, these crime trends would seem to provide limited support for the opportunity theory of female criminal participation. As American women are
afforded increasing legitimate opportunities, it appears as though there are concurrent increases in the participation of women in crime.

Simon departs from the approach taken by Adler in that she recites a pressing need to explore the relationship between female criminality and gender roles in greater depth before we take for granted the correlation between the two. Simon insists that the gap between the criminal participation rates of men and women is still pronounced. Further, the link between increasing legitimate opportunities for women and their increasing criminal participation is an ill-defined link. Specifically, how do changes in the former precipitate changes in the latter? Opportunity theory assumes that the psyches and motivations of men and women are not substantially different. Is this truly the case? Simon appropriately calls for further research on this matter before we take for granted the intricate link between legitimate and illegitimate opportunities implicated by opportunity theory or the convergence hypothesis.

One other aspect of Simon's research deserves mention. Simon examines the conviction and incarceration rates of men and women in the United States from 1950 through 1970. While there have been notable changes in the demographic and status characteristics of American women over those two decades, the proportionate incarceration and conviction rates of women have not substantially changed. Men still
stand a far greater risk of conviction and incarceration than do women. This finding would suggest the operation of a selection bias in the criminal processing of men and women in the United States. Comparatively speaking, the presence of a selection bias in the criminal justice system can be seen as a bane for the female offender and a blight for the male offender. Intrigued by this finding, Simon interviewed thirty trial judges and prosecuting attorneys in an attempt to discern their general attitudes toward criminal women. This select group of criminal justice practitioners conveyed to Simon that they do treat women more leniently and more gently than they do men. The judges report that they are more likely to convict a man than a woman. This finding gives fuel to the argument of those who suggest that the criminal justice system displays chivalrous treatment toward women. The system is criticized for a blatantly sexist manner of criminal processing. Like Pollak, some researchers believe that the widespread and sexist attitudes of criminal justice personnel help keep men in crime and women out of it.

A feminist perspective or female criminality

British sociologist Carol Smart offers a feminist critique of our criminological understanding of female criminality in Women, crime, and Criminology (1976). The lack of empirical and theoretical attention to women in criminology troubles Smart. As to the small amount of existing literature on women and crime, Smart suggests that
it is largely informed by the dominant ideologies and cultural biases concerning the role of women in society. Criminology is thought to be tainted with sexist attitudes toward women. Smart chastises Lombroso and Ferrer, Thomas, Pollak, and Konopka for perpetuating the myth that women are dependent upon, genetically, biologically, and intellectually inferior to, and thus subservient to men. As a consequence of their work, Smart believes, cultural myths carry the day in our criminological understanding of women.

Smart argues that our reliance upon official statistics as a means to gauge and understand female criminality is jaundiced. Citing studies that provide a comparison of official measures of crime with self-reports of illicit behavior, Smart suggests that the true patterns of male and female criminal participation may not be as different as official reports would have us believe. Cultural definitions of the female role, a male-dominated social system, and the sexist attitudes toward women in the criminal justice system contribute to the distortion of the true scope of female deviance. Much of female criminal behavior may be hidden. It is not that it does not occur as frequently as does male criminal behavior; rather, Smart posits, social and cultural forces mitigate against its detection. It may also be that female criminality is managed or controlled in ways that differ from the ways in which we manage and control male criminal behavior.
Smart suggests one way in which this might occur. It appears that female deviant behavior is repeatedly tied to the life-world of women. This life-world is a reflection of cultural conceptions of the traditional female gender role. According to Smart, women are thought to live through their men and for their families. There are few cultural and economic rewards for women who would do otherwise. The only avenues of deviance appropriate to this constraining notion of the adult female gender role are shoplifting or sexual deviance. Likewise, juvenile girls are processed for running away or promiscuity. Official and informal means of social control are apt to sexualize any deviant display on the part of women. Further, Smart believes that a good many women are channelled through the mental health system for various behaviors that might well lead men through the criminal justice system. In short, Smart believes that the reality of female criminality may differ markedly from the official portrait of women and crime. Social and cultural forces are the oils on the canvas.

Smart also critiques the causal relationship set forth between the women's movement and increasing female crime rates. According to Smart, it is fallacious to assert that the emancipation of women has caused women to commit crimes with increasing frequency. Instead, she sees both phenomena as arising simultaneously in response to social and economic pressures. Smart has a point. It is extremely difficult to establish a cause and effect relationship when both
phenomena appear to occur concurrently. There appears not to be any time lag between the two that would intimate that one occurred in response to the other. A lag in time sequencing is a prerequisite to scientific causal analysis. Most informed contemporary criminologists are aware of this and are cautious when addressing this relationship. The problem of faulty conjecture may lie outside the discipline of criminology. Perhaps among the lay public or in the world of the practitioner is this relationship between the women's movement and rising female crime more commonly drawn.

In her work, Smart characterizes women as the invisible actors and victims in crime. To summarize her position, a tendency among criminologists to support prevailing male-oriented ideologies distorts an accurate assessment of women and crime. This is the essence of Smart's critique of the discipline. She advises that we redress the balance of criminological attention in studies of crime and include the sex variable more often in our theoretical formulations and research endeavors. Smart encourages social scientists to study female criminality not from an individual approach but from a structural approach. She believes there to be a need to emphasize social structural components that contribute to the oppression of women. To do otherwise is thought to stifle positive change. Social control mechanisms may prove to be more valuable tools in understanding female criminality than sex-specific biological and psychological
typologies. If we accept her prescription, Smart believes that the lot of the female offenders and women in general will be substantially improved.

More recently, another work devoted to the reassessment of extant theories of deviance with regard to female criminality has appeared. Leonard (1982), like Smart, faults theoretical criminology for a neglect of gender, specifically women, in theory construction. She believes that the discipline suffers from an absence of consistent attention to women. Leonard's most significant contribution is her review and critique of deviance theory with regard to its application to women. For example, Leonard cites Merton and anomie theory for ignoring various subgroups in society, among them women. The theory, believes Leonard, applies only to men and the quality of financial success. We are not assured that women subscribe to the same cultural goals as do men. How do women and men respond to social pressures when they pursue other cultural goals not mentioned by Merton or anomie theory? Leonard recognizes that the theory is helpful and useful in one sense. It may help identify the socially-structured strains that apply to women and those that do not.

Leonard suggests that labeling theory may be useful in understanding selection bias in the criminal justice system. In a curious way, women tend to be positively labeled as non-criminal in that they do not often fit the cultural imagery and conceptions of criminals. Because of this,
women may be more likely than men to escape criminal processing. While Leonard credits this particular theory as a helpful model in some ways, she points out that labeling theory tends not to focus on important structural determinants of crime, such as power, and how they may specifically impact upon female criminality. As for other theories, Leonard identifies their strengths and weaknesses as well in addressing female criminality. Differential association and subcultural theories, for instance, might explain the sex differential in crime rates through a suggestion that women may not have the same frequency and quality of contact with criminal definition and elements as do men. Women, therefore, may be less inclined than men to adopt criminal life patterns. Leonard faults these formulations for their devaluation of individual will in explanations of human behavior. Learning models of behavior do not well afford the possibility of choice in human acting and, at times, tend to be overly deterministic.

After her critique, Leonard, also like Smart, emphasizes the need for the development of a feminist theory of crime causation. Leonard does not explicitly set forth a theory herself, but she does suggest that such a theory might underscore macrostructural and cultural determinants of crime. The rudiments of an adequate theory of crime that addresses female criminality is believed by Leonard to be found in existing theories of deviance. In their present form existing theories of deviance are not adequate and are
anomalous in their lack of attention to gender and, specifically, to women. Using extant theories as building blocks, Leonard suggests constructing new theories and methods that might better address the sex variable.

Leonard's suggestion is an echo of a similar idea presented by Harris (1977) calling for a retrenchment in deviance theorizing. While Harris believes the sex variable to be the single most differentiating factor in deviant and acceptable behavior, he also criticizes the discipline for a puzzling disregard of its significance. In truth, the discipline and our general understanding of human behavior and social life would be stronger for an increased attention to gender.

**Current themes of female criminality**

This chapter is devoted to a selected history of the attention to women in studies of crime. It is not intended to be a comprehensive history.*13 Rather, the intent is to illustrate a developing criminological posture toward the study of women. It is also to emphasize the major thematic approaches to women and crime. Currently, several themes predominate.

One of these themes concerns the apparently increasing female crime rates. It is not a new idea. Lombroso made note of a seeming convergence of male and female crime rates

13. The reader may want to consult other histories of women in criminology. See for example Klein (1973) and Smith and Visher (1980).
over time as nations industrialize. Criminocologists and social scientists who succeeded Lombroso have explored this phenomenon further as we have seen. Certainly Adler and Simon devote considerable attention to it and suggest possible explanations for its presence. The convergence hypothesis and opportunity theory hold promise for understanding increasing female criminality. Gresham Sykes (1967) offers an appropriate metaphor that succinctly summarizes the gist of these explanations. The differences in the behavior of the sexes, Sykes states, transcends mere biological contrasts. The incidence of being struck by lightning is greater for men than for women. This is not due to their separate biologies but because men are more often in situations where the chances of being struck are high. It makes some sense to believe that if women are in those same situations, they too will be struck with a similar frequency. So it may be with crime. As women step outside the home with an increasing frequency, they may experience the social and economic pressures and the opportunities to commit crime with an increasing frequency. In any case, this idea has gained a substantial audience in criminological circles as there has been a shift away from biological explanations of female criminality and towards more sociologically-oriented ones.

There is some controversy about the extent of the increases in female crime rates. Some believe that the increases have been greatly exaggerated. Still others
suggest that the level of female participation in crime has been fairly constant and apparent increases are a function of changing attitudes toward women in society and in the criminal justice system. Social life is complex, but we must develop models that are much simpler than the reality we hope to understand. In this way, we may at least partially comprehend the complicated. Since there is some controversy about the extent of female criminality, it might be helpful to refer to a few studies aimed at resolving this controversy.

In a review of the literature in the comparison of official rates of crime and self-report rates by sex, Bowker (1978) provides some direction. Bowker appropriately points out there are usually problems with most measurement techniques. The superiority of one measure over another is rarely a black and white case, but is more often a matter of degree. Official measures of crime are subject to cultural bias and prevailing attitudes of criminal justice personnel. Self-report measures of crime are subject to selective recall and the distortion of memory as time passes. In comparisons of the two measures of crime by sex, Bowker reports that self-report measures clearly show smaller gender differentials than official arrest statistics. Further, it is mostly the frequencies for each offender that differ, rather than the overall pattern of the relative frequency of female offenders or the relative differences between the sexes.
Bowker also reports that this comparison of the two measures of crime suggests that the criminal justice personnel tend to under-report female property offenders more than serious violent offenders. One interpretation of this finding is that the more serious the female offense is perceived to be, the more likely it is to meet with some action by the criminal justice system. We might assume, then, that murder would be more likely to elicit an official response than would shoplifting. Since murder is a severe transgression, official rates of murder are more accurate of actual murder than official rates of shoplifting are of actual shoplifting.

The nature and extent of the chivalrous treatment of women in criminal processing is not clearly delineated and is also controversial at present. In a discussion of the meaning of chivalry in criminal processing, Anderson (1976) suggests the word chivalry is used with imprecision. It is often used with little concern for its exact dimensions. Who, in the criminal justice system is chivalrous? Who benefits from such paternal protection? Does chivalrous treatment vary by race, age, or socio-economic status? And who is protecting the female offender from her protectors? These are all important but difficult questions which are topics of continued research in the social sciences.

One other theme that has been previously expressed and that currently commands some attention in criminology concerns the causal link between the women's movement and
female criminality. As Smart suggests, this link may be a fallacious one. Weis (1976) and Giordano and Cernkovich (1979) arrive at a similar conclusion. In explaining any increases in female crime, these researchers believe economic pressures and increasing opportunity may prove to be better explanations of female crime than will a so-called liberated mentality or consciousness. It is not so much the spirit of liberation that causes women to commit a crime, but mounting economic pressures and expanding opportunities that contribute to the likelihood of its occasion. Weis and Giordano and Cernkovich examine self-reports of delinquent activity and the attitudes of delinquent actors. Weis reports that there are sex differences in delinquent behavior but the patterns of delinquent involvement are similar for the sexes. This is in general agreement with the findings of Bowker. Weis further states that the benefactors of the women's movement are typically white, middle class, and conformists and these are traits not especially descriptive of the female offender population. Giordano and Cernkovich add that the so-called liberated consciousness may be a far cry from the life-worlds of young delinquent women. They are careful to mention, however, that there is some tentative evidence that young females may be assuming more active roles in crime and delinquency than they had in the past. Nonetheless, the appropriate theoretical question to address at present, and the one question Weis sets forth, is whether liberated women are
more criminal than non-liberated women. It has yet to be satisfactorily answered.

Klein and Kress (1976) suggest that this causal myth serves as an official and informal means of social control. Those who would oppose changes in the female gender role may point to increasing female crime and liberation as a strong and sufficient reason to return to more traditional conceptions of the gender role of women. At the very least, they may use the myth as a political weapon against feminists who argue for constructive change. Klein and Kress suggest that the violent female offender seems to surface in the popular media when women assert themselves. This is not only unfortunate for positive change toward gender role parity in the larger society, but it interferes with the rational understanding of female criminality as well. The fact is that the largest share of present criminological research suggests that women, like men, may commit crime in response to various social, cultural, and economic pressures. Myths die hard, however.

In the midst of these arguments, Henscn offers a valuable point. Henscn (1980) believes that the relationship between liberation and increasing female crime rates is often perceived to be a taboo subject in criminology. Researchers are generally loathe to empirically address the relationship and this reluctance, believes Henscn, amounts to an irrational fear which places narrow limits on our knowledge. Henscn believes that there
may be some relationship between the attitudinal changes, raised consciousness, and increasing labor force participation and the reported increases in female criminality, although this relationship is not yet well delineated due to the reluctance of researchers to examine it. Further, Henson posits that feminist writers and social scientists will have a difficult journey ahead if they continue to maintain that, as women increasingly enter the labor force outside the home, they will be somehow immune from the frustrations and pressures existing in that sphere.

There are few reasons to believe that men and women are constitutionally different in this regard. If men and women lead increasingly similar lives, they are apt to be exposed to and respond in kind to increasingly similar social pressures to conform and deviate. One other point is germane to this discussion. Since men and women are inexorably bound up with each other in various interactive relationships, it is likely that, as the gender roles of women change, and adjustment in the gender roles of men will occur. Exactly how this may affect male criminal patterns and trends is less clear but certainly a question that merits consideration. Perhaps the social scientific community might make a concerted effort to understand the political sensitivity of researching the relationship between liberation and crime and, at the same time, lessen its intrusion into scientific endeavors to investigate these phenomena.
This treatise is not directly concerned with the resolution of these specific issues. It may be important nonetheless to approach this study in light of these issues and with a mind to the past and current research on women and crime. Past research and current controversy inevitably find their way into this study in one form or another. For example, this research concerns the lives of women who have murdered and who are incarcerated in the state of North Carolina. Bowker intimates that murder by a female is more likely to meet with criminal processing than is shoplifting by a female. It might be, then, that the sample of female criminal homicide offenders is more representative of the population of all female criminal homicide offenders than a sample of incarcerated female larceny offenders would be of all female larceny offenders. A selection bias is more likely to operate in the criminal processing of shoplifters than it is in the processing of murderers. This is not certain but it is likely.

As a study of women and murder, this work may be considered as a study of female aggression. In this chapter, a review of the treatment of women in general criminology is presented. Before discussing this study in detail, it will be useful to review the existing research on women and aggression and sex differences in aggressive behavior. The following chapter addresses this matter and others.
Chapter Three

Women and Criminal Violence

A good starting point for understanding women and murder is to discriminate between general aggression and criminal violence. One way of approaching this would be to explicate a syllogism: all criminal violence is aggression but not all aggression is criminal violence. Dollard et al. (1939) and Berkowitz (1962) define aggression as any sequence of behavior aimed at the injury of some object. Aggression may be directly or indirectly disposed. Direct aggression is that which is aimed at the provoking object. Indirect aggression is that aggression which is aimed at an object other than the provoking object.

For example, a girl trips over her dog on her way to the icebox for a snack. She stubs her toe in the process and it begins to throb. This is not only painful but it make the girl angry. If she, in turn, kicks her dog, she has directly aggressed against the provoking object - her dog. If she strikes out at her unsuspecting younger brother who happens to be in the kitchen at the time of the incident, then the girl has aggressed against an object other than the provoking one. This would be indirect
Aggression. Aggression may also be either verbal or physical. Verbal aggression may be defined as that which produces psychological harm to the victim. The young girl would have verbally aggressed against her dog or her brother had she yelled at either. Physical aggression is that which produces some physical harm to the victim. As it turned out, the girl kicked her dog so her actions would be classified as direct physical aggression. Returning to our initial statement, we may say that criminal violence is usually physical aggression that is directly or indirectly disposed to another human being or to other people. Aggravated assault is one example; murder is another. We shall amend this definition in a subsequent section of this chapter.

There is some question as to how men and women compare in the capacity for and display of aggression. Some believe men to be more aggressive than women. Others see generally little difference between the sexes. Are our impressions of sex differences and sex similarities in aggression truly accurate? In what ways is social scientific research instructive on these issues?

**Sex differences and similarities in aggression**

Much of the research on sex differences and similarities in aggression eminates from the experimental psychological community. This is the case for two reasons. First, an experimental research design allows the scientist to control for various extraneous influences that might
otherwise contaminate and obfuscate the relationship between two or more variables. The scientist may also manipulate several variables to his/her liking through the use of an experimental design. Certainly these tasks are better accomplished in a controlled laboratory setting than in a natural setting. The scientist has only marginal control over a natural setting. Second, experimental psychology has a long history of interest in the various behavior patterns of living things. Aggression is thought to be one behavioral pattern. Sexual activity might be another. Given this concern, experimental psychologists are very much interested in how different groups of human beings compare in behavioral patterns. Just as ethologists may wonder how and why red ants are different from black ants in aggression, experimental psychologists wonder how various groups of humans differ in aggression. Perhaps the most clear differentiation factor of humankind is sex. For these reasons, experimental psychologists generate much of what we know about the role of sex in aggression.

Frodi et al. (1977) offer an exhaustive summary and critique of the experimental psychological research on sex differences and similarities in aggression. Obviously, all researchers do not approach the study of sex differences and similarities in exactly the same way and Frodi and her colleagues provide a good synopsis of the various approaches to this issue and summaries of the major findings of each approach. Frodi et al. are quick to recognize that women
are quite capable of aggression. Generally speaking, they relate that there is evidence in the experimental psychology literature that women are often as openly hostile and as directly aggressive as men. In some cases, women may even be more aggressive than men. In truth, of the 72 studies investigated by Frodi and her colleagues that contained some measure of aggressive behavior, 61% did not show an expected higher male than female aggressiveness. The point here is not that men and women are equals in aggression but that the perceived and often reported differences between the sexes may be exaggerated. It might be helpful to review the summaries of the experimental psychological research offered by Frodi and her colleagues.

Studies of sex comparisons in aggression do not uniformly find men to be more aggressive than women. Nonetheless, there do seem to be some discernable differences. In studies that do not involve angered subjects, Frodi et al. report that men tend to display more overt aggression than do women. This is to say that men may tend to display a higher level of general hostility than do women. However, sex differences do not always appear in the willingness to admit hostile feelings. Women, like men, may admit feeling hostile but they may not act on that feeling as often or in the same way as do men. Frodi et al. point out that while these patterns seem to reflect the general findings of several studies, they are not etched in stone. Men are often found to be generally more aggressive or
hostile than women, but not invariably so. In studies where the subjects are purposively angered, no reliable sex differences are found in the display of direct physical or direct verbal aggression. In a few words, then, it would seem that when not provoked, men and women behave differently. When provoked or angered, men and women seem to behave in similarly aggressive fashions.

Frodi and her colleagues suggest that a review of the studies in the experimental psychology literature yields a number of factors other than mode of response that seem to have predictive power for some results. A majority of the studies indicate that both men and women behave less aggressively toward women than men. Sex of the target is apparently an important consideration, although there are several studies that do not offer support. Other studies also indicate that women are more prone to guilt, fear, or anxiety over aggression than are men. If this is true, women more so than men may experience greater inhibition to express hostility in the form of aggression. Several studies suggest that while men and women are both influenced by aggressive cues in the environment, they may be differentially influenced by the type of aggressive cue. For example, a show of weapons tends to lead to greater aggression among men but lesser aggression among women. This might suggest that women may surrender more often than men to a display of naked power. Such a display may serve only to aggravate male aggressiveness.
These sex differences in aggression might be explained by a model of differential gender role socialization. Men and women may learn to express and respond to aggression in discrete ways. Prodi et al. suggest that there is consistent evidence that aggression and various assertive traits are less appropriate to the female gender role than they are to the male gender role. Many studies indicate that behavior labeled as assertive for men is apt to be characterized as excessively aggressive for women. In western cultures, and perhaps elsewhere, aggression is not an especially appropriate behavioral response among women. If the convergence theorists discussed in the previous chapter are correct in their assertion that women are increasingly committing violent offenses, however, then it may be that women are aggressing with increasing frequency regardless of gender role expectations.

Prodi et al. also elaborate on sex similarities in aggression evidenced in the experimental psychological literature. For example, several studies indicate that the sexes are similarly affected by deindividuation and anonymity in aggression. For both sexes, studies suggest that deindividuation or anonymity lead to more aggression when the subjects are with others and to less aggression when they are alone. In studies that examine physiological processes implicated by aggression, the results seem to indicate that the sexes react similarly. For example, blood pressure increases for both men and women in hostile
situations, although men register higher increases. Another study indicates no sex differences in galvanic skin response in aggression-inducing condition.

The review by Frodi and her colleagues of the experimental psychological literature on sex comparisons in aggression suggests that women and men may be more similar than dissimilar with regard to aggression.*1 Earlier it was stated that some people firmly believe that men are naturally more aggressive than women. It may be that this is a popular cultural belief subscribed to by many. It may even be that this belief has somehow influenced the research on sex comparisons in aggression. Minturn and Guthrie (1978) suggest that ethnographers tend to emphasize sex differences in studies of aggression training and under-report sex similarities. Using ethnographic reports from the Human Relations Area Files as a basis for measuring sex differences in reward for aggressive behavior in children, punishment for aggressive behavior in children, and frequency of aggressive behavior in children, Minturn and Guthrie report that ethnographers indicate sex differences in reward, punishment, and frequency of aggression when the amount of those behaviors is high, but

1. Several additional studies have been published since the Frodi et al. article. Research on sex comparisons in aggression continues to generate conflicting findings. For example, Barrett (1979) and DiPietro (1981) report sex differences, finding males more aggressive than females. Brodzinsky, et al. (1979) report mixed findings, and Franzini et al. (1978) generally record no gender differences, though in one instance they report that females showed more aggression than males.
fail to report sex differences when the amount is low. In 28 of 44 societies studied, there were no sex differences. And in only 11 societies were there clear sex differences, although ethnographers were apt to include many more societies. The larger effects of such bias in science is an exaggeration of the ways the sexes differ in the quality and quantity of aggression and a cloaking of the many ways in which the sexes are similar.

In truth, there are some sex differences in aggression and the literature review by Frodi et al. clearly delineates these differences. There are also many similarities between the sexes. From all of this, we might garner some broad impressions as to how the sexes actually compare with regard to aggression. When provoked or angered, it appears as though men and women are equally likely to directly aggress, either in a physical or verbal fashion. Recall the example about the girl stumbling over her dog. If the girl were instead a young boy, and if he were to encounter the same accident of tripping over his pet then, all things being equal, the boy and the girl may be equally likely to directly aggress toward the harmless dogs. It is less clear, given present empirical knowledge, how the boy and girl compare in their likelihood to indirectly aggress - to strike or yell at their separate siblings. One other point should be kept firmly in mind. It appears as though men are generally more hostile or aggressive than women. This means that men may be more aggressive than
women when both groups are not provoked or angered. Perhaps the boy in our example would be more likely than his female counterpart to kick or holler at his dog for any old reason. This is not to say that the girl could not learn to be as ornery as the boy, and it is also not to say that the boy could not learn to be a bit more inhibited with his aggression - like the girl.

Theoretical approaches to human aggression and murder

Murder is the most severe form of outwardly-directed aggression. Certainly, along with suicide, and as a form of human aggression, murder has the most dire of all possible consequences. Both suicide and homicide result in loss of human life. Perhaps only war is more tragic, magnifying the individual loss a thousandfold. Because of widespread concern for violence in general, there is a clear need to systematically address human aggression and murder through several theoretical approaches.

An overview of research on human aggression and murder yields four explanatory models. Although there may be other models of aggressive behavior, these four provide for the widest range of extant explanations. The first of these four may be termed the biological model. Proponents of this model posit that aggressive behavior is a function of instinct (Lorenz, 1963), heredity (Jeffery, 1979), or a body chemistry (Mednick and Christiansen, 1977). At its core, the model suggests that nonbehavioral deviance - biological or genetic anomalies - may effect behavioral deviance. For
example, much research has been devoted to the study of the connection between the XYY chromosomal abnormality and criminality. Other research is concerned with the interplay of socio-environmental and individual factors in the etiology of crime. While this model has devoted considerable attention to male criminality, female criminality is not well addressed through it. For instance, XYY research necessarily excludes women. The present study does not make use of the biological model, although this should not be taken as a devaluation of the model. The thematic emphasis of this study is drawn from the remaining three models which are more social psychologically focused.

The social learning model of human aggression views violence as a learned behavioral expression. Bandura (1973) suggests that because of the pervasive violence in our social world, violence may be perceived as effective rule-enforcing behavior. In war, terrorism, violent crime, fist fights, and even in contact sports, one often gets his/her own way through means of some aggressive and often violent behavioral display. Sutherland (1974) suggests that violent behavior can be learned through close and frequent interaction with others who regularly exhibit such behavior. This model clearly points to contrasting sets of behavioral expressions learned through socialization in the course of everyday interaction. This is a potentially powerful explanatory tool for examining female aggression and perhaps for understanding the disparity between male and female
rates of criminal violence. It may be that men are more often than women learn to aggress outwardly. Note that the model also allows for women to learn to be as violent as men. The possibility implicitly presents itself.

The third model of human aggression and murder, the social psychological model, has roots in the frustration-aggression hypothesis as set forth by Dollard et al. (1939). Aggression is regarded as originating ultimately in response to some frustration. Frustration usually refers to an interference with ongoing goal-directed activity (Berckowitz, 1962). For example, in his study of 51 male homicide offenders, Palmer (1960) reports that homicide offenders suffered higher levels of frustration generated by early-age physical and psychological traumas than did their nearest-aged brothers. More recent studies (Ketner and Humphrey, 1975; Humphrey and Palmer, 1980) examine the relationship between stressful life events, such as divorce, job promotion, and death of a loved one, and criminal homicide. There appears to be a positive correlation between the two. The present study draws heavily upon this model of human aggression.

The subculture of violence model is based primarily upon the works of Wolfgang (1958) and Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967). Subcultures of violence are bodies of custom which promote and condone the commission of violent acts. An individual who is well-integrated with such custom increases the impact of that custom on his/her daily life.
subculture of violence may obtain, for example, in an environment where youth gangs predominate. It may also be that subcultures of violence have largely excluded women and help explain, in part, why more men than women tend to be criminally violent. As is the case with the social learning model of aggression, however, the subculture of violence model does not exclude the possibility of sex parity in criminal violence. Again, the possibility is present.

These last three models of human aggression are not mutually exclusive. There are linkages among them. Social learning is an important process in the subcultural transmission of violence, for example. Similarly, a subculture of violence can be a source of frustration for an individual or it may expedite the expression of frustration. The present study draws upon some of the themes woven through these models. For example, female criminal homicide may be understood through the interplay of three themes:

1. There are general cultural norms and values supportive of violence in American society,

2. There are subcultural values and norms supportive of violence, and

3. In everyday social life, there are usually situational and chronic frustrations and stressors that may give rise to violent acts.

As stated earlier, there are other ways to approach the study of human aggression. In a general way, the present study makes use of the above themes, and particularly the third theme concerning the frustration and stress of
everyday social life, in understanding women and murder. Harris (1977) makes a good case for redressing extant theories of deviance via a renewed attention to women. This study will provide a partial measure of the above theoretical models' applicability to the study of female aggression.

**Women, criminal violence, and criminal homicide**

We began this chapter by untangling the meaning of aggression and its relevance to criminal violence. Now it may be helpful to attend to the meaning of criminal homicide and its relevance to criminal violence and aggression. Human violence can be seen as physical attack that is directed toward a human target by another human being and is usually intended to inflict some form of physical harm. Thus it is similar to our understanding of direct or indirect physical aggression. Criminal violence is violent behavior that is prohibited by law and that is subject to penal sanction. In short, criminal violence is one form of violence which is, in turn, one form of aggression.

One type of criminal violence is criminal homicide, although there are many other types of criminal violence. Aggravated assault and rape are two examples. Robbery is another type of criminal violence as well as a crime against property since it entails the taking of a good through the use of force or threat of force. In any case, criminal homicide, a type of criminal violence, is a form of direct or indirect physical aggression with lethal consequences:
the target loses his/her life. These meanings and definitions become more complicated. Homicide is a broad category that includes justifiable as well as nonjustifiable killings. Put simply, not all homicide is criminal or subject of penal sanctions. Palmer (1980) is instructive on this point. Palmer writes that, contrary to popular belief, murder and homicide are not necessarily synonymous. Homicide is the broader category, of which murder is a type. A police officer who shoots and kills an escaping convict commits justifiable homicide. Law usually declines to define such action as criminal. In most instances, the law accepts the killing of another human being when the victim clearly threatens and jeopardizes the life of another.

Palmer writes further that, with regard to nonjustifiable or criminal homicide, state laws vary widely. In many states, the law defines four different types of criminal homicide, distinguished from one another by their separate degrees of premeditation, maliciousness, and intent. These four types of criminal homicide are first degree murder, second degree murder, voluntary manslaughter, and involuntary manslaughter. First degree murder, the most serious form of criminal homicide, is also the form characterized by the greatest degree of premeditation, maliciousness, and intent. A cold-blooded killing of a human being for personal, monetary or other gain would ordinarily be viewed as first degree murder. Involuntary
manslaughter, the form of criminal homicide characterized by the least degree of premeditation, maliciousness, and intent, might be exemplified by the person who accidentally hits and kills another person while driving his/her car under the influence of alcohol. The lines between these four types of criminal homicide are often not well-drawn in real life and, ultimately, it is the court who officially defines a killing as one type or another and assesses the guilt or innocence of the offender. For the purpose of this study, it is best to remember that all four types of criminal homicide are forms of criminal violence and, as such, are also forms of direct or indirect physical aggression.

We do know something about women and aggression and about sex similarities and sex differences in aggression. But what do we know about women and criminal homicide? And how are women who kill the same as and how are they different from men who kill? For those who are familiar with the popular board game of "Clue", in which players are asked to solve a murder case, we sense that suspects Mrs. Peacock, Miss Scarlet, and Mrs. White are somehow distinguishable from the lot of male suspects, Colonel Mustard, Professor Plum, and Mr. Green. We may not be so certain of the nature of the differences between these two groups of suspects, yet we may still subconsciously assign these suspects different weapons, motives, even crime scenes, based upon their sex.
In the mystery novels of Agatha Christie, some difference is sensed, but not so easily identified, between the author's female suspects and her male suspects. Krouse and Peters (1975) systematically examined 68 Christie novels. They specifically focused on the sex variable and its role in the intricate murder plots spun by Christie. Of 70 murderers, Krouse and Peters found 35 to be women. More women than men were found to be victims. There are 50 male victims and 87 female victims. There does not appear to be any significant sex difference in murder method, as Krouse and Peters find Christie to be especially fond of murder by poison, regardless of sex. As for motive, the researchers compare equal sex groups of 14 apiece who murdered for money. For men, apparently money in itself was worth killing for; for women, murder for money was usually a means to keep a house or man. As for other motives in Christie's world, women sometimes killed for love while men rarely did. Both sexes killed at times to preserve or consolidate their careers, though Krouse and Peters found men to have higher aspirations. They also found that Christie is usually more convincing when insanity is used as a plot resolution for women than when it is used for men.

When the murder is solved in Christie's novels, Krouse and Peters found men and women to behave very differently. Male murderers seemed to be snarling, vengeful types when cornered; women tended to collapse.
In a general sense, Krouse and Peters find that Christie often comfortably reinforces cliches. Men seek money and women seek men; murder is a means to these separate goals. It is possible, however, that Christie plots are reflections of what we, as a culture, perceive to be the differences between men and women who kill. Christie does not create myths, she retells them.

Norland and Shover (1977) suggest that we actually know very little about how gender roles and criminal violence are related. This is not to say that we, as a culture, are beyond speculation about this relationship. Many of us believe Christie to be a more accurate reporter of actual human drama than she may be. But Christie was a fiction writer and, though she may have drawn her tales from the stuff of real life, her tales are still fictitious. It may be helpful to review social scientific studies of women and criminal homicide. Perhaps social science is no more accurate than Christie in deciphering female criminal homicide, but at least we are assured that the cases from which conclusions are drawn are real.

Women and criminal homicide: two studies

Two studies are notable for their rather extreme analyses of female criminal homicide. Neither study contributes much to the rational and empathic understanding of criminal violence and its relevance to women. Neither study employs a systematic research design. Instead, both selectively use real cases of women who kill to further
ideology. While they are alike in their use of this methodology, they are far apart in their explanations of female criminal homicide.

The first of these two studies is Sparrow's *Women Who Murder* (1970). Sparrow's work is largely an anecdotal analysis of women and criminal homicide. Sparrow is an English barrister with criminal trial experience in Manchester and Bangkok. As a legal advisor, he has had immediate contact with at least 15 murder cases. His book is a collection of almost as many cases involving women.

Without empirical justification, Sparrow assumes women to be different from men in mental thought processes, intuition, emotional reactions, and their approach to life and death. In Sparrow's world, women are imprinted with a greater quile and cunning than are men and it is this natural distinction that Sparrow believes makes female criminal homicide a particularly despicable and threatening act. It is worth noting that Sparrow is not cataloguing generally-held beliefs. That is not his intent. He is sincere in his subscription to those ideas presented. Sparrow wholeheartedly embraces the adage that the female of the species is far deadlier than the male. Female criminal homicide is stamped with a characteristic cruelty and subtlety that Sparrow associates with the evil peculiar to
women. This is the essence of his treatise.*2

Sparrow believes female criminal homicide to have its origins in love and hate. To a greater degree than men, women are subject to the extremes of love and hate. Women are capable of great loyalty and devotion, but are also capable of ruthless and vicious aggression. Women may not aggress as often as do men, but when they do, Sparrow believes their aggression is marked by an unmatched fury.

As to the special shape and pattern of female criminal homicide, Sparrow suggests women murder through stealth and cunning—a manifestation of their natural inclination. Poison is thus a preferred choice of human disposal among women according to Sparrow. Given women's emotional attributes, women are more likely than men to kill someone they love. Presumably, a woman's love is less stable and predictable than a man's. The female murderer also is thought to desire to rid herself of a rival or unwanted love. Sparrow believes that an overpowering sense of a right to sexual satisfaction and excitement contributes to

2. Addressing the topic of women who kill, Blum and Fisher (1978) suggest that there is a culturally widespread polarization of attitudes about women: they are either mothers or whores; they are either the gentler sex or the deadlier of the species. Murderesses, continue Blum and Fisher, are believed to be deviant and bad since they have overstepped the boundaries of femininity associated with the traditional female role. Put another way, murderesses, by virtue of the definition of their status, cannot be good mothers. Blum and Fisher indicate that many believe this to be true. It would appear that Sparrow would have no argument with this maxim.
female criminal homicide. Presumably, this plays a lesser role in male criminal homicide, although Sparrow does not directly address the issue.

Perhaps the most elementary of all criticisms of Sparrow's work is that it fails to recognize that murder may sometimes be an expressive act. Sparrow conceives of murder only as an instrumental behavior - as a means to a desired goal. He does not entertain the idea that murder can be an irrational response to frustrating life conditions or a by-product of situational demands. This short-sightedness may be a function of Sparrow's selective experience and unfamiliarity with existing explanations of violent behavior. In the end, *Women Who Murder* cannot be counted as a valuable building block of understanding women and criminal violence.

If Sparrow's work promotes a sexist interpretation of the social phenomenon of female criminal homicide, Ann Jones' *Women Who Kill* (1980) promotes a decidedly feminist one. This is not by itself a bad attribute. Its value depreciates, however when real life is bent to fit the theoretical model, instead of using real life as an unyielding touchstone against which to test the model. Both Sparrow's sexist analysis and Jones' feminist treatise suffer from this methodological malady.

Jones, an historian, begins her analysis with a critique of the existing criminological literature on women and crime. She faults many of the works devoted to female
criminality for an explicitly sexist orientation. She then ties this orientation to her perception that American criminology seeks out crime in the criminal and not in society. American criminologists, believes Jones, have concentrated on the individual and not on the social structure. As a consequence, female criminality is thought by Jones to be explained by criminologists through individualistic models. This may have been an accurate description of an earlier state of the discipline, but it is wholly inaccurate at present. Further, Jones' characterization of the discipline serves to dismiss the grand theoretical accomplishments of social scientists such as Merton, Cloward and Ohlin, Quinney, and Sutherland, among others and the ecological focus of Guerry and Quetelet a century ago. These theorists depart from individualistic models of crime causation. Together, their theoretical accomplishments contributed to a much broader public grasp of the structural antecedents of crime. Their work also laid the foundation for the work of Adler, Smart, Simon, and others.

Basically, Jones presents two ideas relevant to the discussion of women who kill. First, Jones states that we may learn a great deal about the changing position and status of women in American society by exploring cases of female criminal homicide and the public reactions to these homicides. Premised on the notion that we may learn about normalcy through studying deviance, this idea is attractive.
Through studies of deviance, we may more clearly recognize the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and better understand the processes whereby deviant and legitimate statuses are confirmed. Also, it may lead to a more complete knowledge of how these boundaries and statuses change over time. Jones' second idea characterizes female criminal homicide as a political act. This is more difficult to digest. Through the use of specific cases of women who have killed at various times in American history, Jones proffers the thesis that female criminal homicide is a function of the subordinated status of women in society and is an effect of a male dominated social structure. The various cases upon which Jones draws are shaped and shaved, sometimes drastically, to fit this thesis. Certainly some violence is politically inspired. Assassination of a public figure is one example of criminal homicide that may be directed toward some political goal or statement. It is more difficult to view the murder of a child, husband or lover, parent, or stranger in this light.

Jones' thesis, that women murder because they are oppressed, met with some controversy. In a review of Jones' book in Psychology Today, Dixler (1980) found the work to "offend (her) as a historian, a feminist, and a person committed to rational discourse." Dixler had two general criticisms of the book in her review. First, Dixler believes that Jones does not use the record of female criminal violence in an effort to see what might be learned.
Instead, Jones uses the record to indict men, Dixler writes. The implication of the book is that all manner of men somehow cause women to murder, a proposition that Dixler does not find particularly attractive. Dixler also believes that Jones makes no effort to understand the past on its own terms. Jones tends to reconstruct the past in a shape more suitable to her political beliefs. As such, Women Who Kill may better be regarded as propaganda than a serious effort to understand why women kill.*3

Both Sparrow and Jones make one very crucial error in their separate theoretical formulations of female criminal homicide. Harris (1977) suggests that all viable theories of deviance must incorporate the sex variable in their formulations of social life. The social sciences have been justly criticized for a general lapse in including women in their studies of human behavior. For many years, theories of human behavior were largely theories of male human behavior. In recent years, a concerted effort has been made in the social sciences to review existing theory with regard to women. Theory that cannot adequately accommodate and explain female behavior depreciates. In Chapter Two, an account of how this relates to the discipline of criminology

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3. Jones was not pleased with Dixler's review of her work. In a subsequent issue of Psychology Today, Jones writes that Dixler misunderstood the general thesis of her book. Jones suggests that her thesis is that the historical patterns of, and society's response to, female criminal homicide reflect biases about women's nature and role in society. Jones feels that Dixler has simplistically reduced this thesis. Dixler, in a rebuttal, maintains that the structure of Jones' book implicitly undermines what Jones has suggested is her explicit argument.
is offered. Yet in our eagerness to incorporate women in our theories of human behavior, we must not discard the male element. Both Sparrow and Jones have done just that. In their commitment to explain female criminal homicide, they have ignored the responsibility to explain male criminal homicide in their theoretical formulations.

For if women kill as a function of their overpowering sense of sexual need and excitement, as Sparrow suggests, or if women kill as a function of sexist oppression, according to Jones' theory, why do men, representing approximately 85 percent of all criminal homicide offenders, kill? We need a theoretical balance that neither Sparrow nor Jones can provide.

Victorian women and Mrs. Harris

The separate conclusions of Sparrow and Jones are not necessarily outcomes of their methodology. Case study, if presented accurately and if used carefully, can be enlightening. Hartman's *Victorian Murderesses* (1977) makes good use of cases of female criminal homicide in the Victorian age to explore the possible reasons for its occurrence, as well as to offer a commentary on the role of women in society at that time. Hartman presents the specifics of 12 cases of murder involving Victorian women. She also explores the public response to the 12 murders. Hartman explicitly states that she is exploring the lives of these exceptional women in an effort to better examine the hidden features of the typical. As mentioned earlier, much
can be learned of normalcy by studying deviance.

The women with whom Hartman concerns herself are predominantly white and middle class. Unlike the portrayal of a similar group of women in Jones’ historical analysis, Hartman does not characterize these women as victims of male oppression in their homicidal roles. To do so would be to rob them of volition. Clearly, Hartman approaches the topic quite differently than does Jones. At the same time, Hartman does not deny that these women met with the pressures of a male-dominated social structure in the Victorian age. Her point is that these 12 women who killed experienced the same constraints and burdens of behavior imposed on their sex as did the majority of white, middle class Victorian women who did not kill. The fact that many of the homicides discussed by Hartman occurred within the family may offer some clue to and commentary upon the special role boundaries and domestic pressures of Victorian times.

Hartman suggests that women may murder not just to escape what they perceive to be desperate circumstances but to achieve or retrieve some imagined happier state. This is perhaps Hartman’s most significant contribution to our understanding of women who kill. Hartman recognizes the possibility of both expressive and instrumental traits in an act of murder. Homicide can be both a release and a goal. There is likely to be a mixture of release and goal-direction in many homicides. This formulation offered
by Hartman also avoids sex-specificity; the model may explain why women murder as well as men.

One other theme that surfaces repeatedly in Hartman's book is the lurid fascination of the general population in the Victorian age with murder. Apparently, many law-abiding citizens reveled in the morbid details of notorious murder cases. Victorian women were especially enamored of such sensationalism. Hartman suggests that this may have some significance beyond a general thirst for the sensational. It may have been that, through the popular attention to murder cases involving women, Victorian women relished the show of women in self-assertive roles and, at the same time, enjoyed the twist on male conventions.

Recently one murder case gained significant national attention. Public interest in the case suggests that this last observation by Hartman, the notion of a gender commentary in female criminal homicide, may have some contemporary relevance. In March of 1980, Mrs. Jean Harris, a middle-aged mistress of the exclusive Madeira girl's school in Virginia, shot and killed Dr. Harman Tarnower, author of a well-read diet book and Mrs. Harris' lover. Perhaps because of the position and status of these two people, the case garnered immediate media coverage that persisted throughout the trial and conviction of Mrs. Harris a little more than a year later. The coverage of the case generally depicted a rather one-sided love relationship between the victim and Mrs. Harris. In the eyes of many,
Mrs. Harris became the woman scorned, herself the victim of the ebbing passion of a callous man. Syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman describes Mrs. Harris as "Everywoman who ever hung onto a relationship by her fingernails while her self-esteem eroded like a crumbly windowsill on the eighteenth floor. Eventually, like all of them, she fell into an abyss." (1981:95).

Perhaps the most penetrating analysis of the Harris case is offered in Trilling's Mrs. Harris (1981). In theme, the book elaborates on Goodman's view of the tragic scene. Loss of self-esteem is an emotional force that may have driven Harris to strike out at Tarnower. Her perception of an unrequited love and Tarnower's frequent and open philandering with another woman was a constant source of strain for Harris. But the loss of self-esteem had other sources as well. Trilling appropriately paints the world of Tarnower and Harris as tenuously upper-class. Clearly, Tarnower is an achieved member of the well-to-do. Harris is a member, but it is a membership largely ascribed through her relationship with Tarnower, even though she achieved a great deal in her lifetime. Harris, uncertain of her status and retaining marginal membership to the upper stratum of society, was understandably concerned with outward appearance. This too was a chronic source of strain for her. She was a mistress, but not a wife. Her career was not progressing as she may have hoped. And she believed Tarnower had betrayed his social standing by writing a
plebeian diet book quoted by the masses. A source of further agitation, Harris had helped author the book - a conspirator in her own pain. Trilling probes deeply into this pain and exposes the stress experienced by Harris in her professional and personal lives. An inner turmoil and constant frustration dog Harris and, ultimately, may have contributed to her act. Tarnower represented a direct target for her aggression. After all, he caused her great pain. But he also represented an indirect target of her aggression spawned by frustration with other life conditions.

Other studies of female criminal homicide

There have been several other studies of female criminal homicide that have contributed in some way to our larger understanding of women and criminal violence. Ward et al. (1969), for example, present findings from a study of women and criminal violence. Data for their research were gathered at the California Institute for Women during the 1960's. The researchers found that the larger share of female criminal homicide was committed by a lone offender - a woman acting without an accomplice. Thirty-five percent of the women's victims were husbands or lovers, 19 percent were children, and in only 10 percent of the cases did the victim and offender not know each other. Most of the female criminal assaults and homicides occur suddenly and in the context of interpersonal conflict, usually domestic conflict. Most of the homicides were also associated with
alcohol consumption. The women who kill deliberately and with premeditation were found by Ward and his colleagues to be rare. Similarly, the number of female criminal homicides that were economically motivated was small.

In these findings, Ward et al. are impressed with the salience of gender roles in understanding women's participation in criminal violence. The object of the women's lethal aggression most often had affective relationships with their aggressors. Interestingly, the victims of women's violence were often drunk, asleep, or otherwise incapacitated at the time of their demise. This finding would suggest that physical strength and size differential between victim and offender may not play a significant role in criminal homicide by women.

Wolfgang (1967) conducted an exhaustive study of criminal homicide in Philadelphia. He analyzed all criminal homicides in that city recorded by the police between the years 1948 and 1952, inclusive, some 588 cases. Like Ward and his colleagues, Wolfgang discerns several patterns of female criminal homicide and how it differs from that of males. By race and sex, Wolfgang found black women to have a higher homicide rate, about 9.3 per 100,000 people, than either white males (3.4) or white females (.4). Black males have the highest rate at 41.7. Wolfgang believes race may be a better predictor of criminal homicide than sex, based upon these race-sex comparisons. This is not to say that Wolfgang does not find sex to be an important
differentiating variable in criminal homicide. Men kill most frequently in the street while women kill most often in the kitchen. Women generally stab their victims; men stab as well, but are also more likely to beat their victims to death. Prior criminal citations were found to be generally associated with criminal homicide. It is interesting that Wolfgang found that proportionately more male victims of homicide had records than did female offenders. Wolfgang reports that when a woman commits murder, she is more likely than a man to kill her mate. This corresponds to the findings of Ward and his colleagues.

Rosenblatt and Greenland (1974) offer another study of female crimes of violence. These Canadian researchers collected information on two groups of violent offenders, one group from a mental institution and one group from a prison, during 1970 and 1971. Taking the two groups together, the sample consisted of 165 males and 26 females. Twenty of the women had committed or attempted murder. As to the setting of the crimes, Rosenblatt and Greenland report that most women committed their violence in a domestic setting while less than half of the men did. Guns were the favored weapon for both sexes. Most female crimes of violence occurred within the family and in only three cases of female criminal violence were the victim and offender unrelated. Less than half of the victims of male violence were family members. Rosenblatt and Greenland indicate that the setting and the victims of most female
criminal violence suggest that where women spend most of their time, in the home and with family members, is also where most of their criminal violence occurs. The salience of gender role in explanations of female criminal homicide appears to be a central theme in much of the existing literature on women and murder.

In an analysis of recent Uniform Crime Report data and Vital Statistics of the United States, Wilbanks (1981) addresses the importance of the sex variable in our understanding of criminal homicide. With regard to group patterns, Wilbanks reports that the age group with the highest homicide rate among all female criminal homicide offenders is that between the ages of 20 and 24, inclusive (7.6). The age group with the lowest rate is that between the ages of 65 and 69, inclusive (.9). Wilbanks also found that nonwhite women have a higher homicide rate than do white women and white men (13.8, 3.7, and 9.1, respectively). Nonwhite males have a much higher rate than any of these groups, 22.6. This rank-order is the same as that delineated by Wolfgang. Wilbanks also reports that white women tend to kill white men and black women tend to kill black men, when women do kill. Like other researchers in this area, Wilbanks finds that there is a predominance of the intrafamilial setting and familial victim-offender relationship in female criminal homicides.
Cole et al. (1968) offer a typology of personality style and behavior pattern among women who kill. The researchers base their analysis on an examination of 111 women incarcerated for criminal homicide at the California Institution for Women. All 111 women in the sample were scheduled for the 1965 Board of Trustees review and were required to undergo psychiatric evaluation by the principal investigator. The data for the study derive from those evaluations, interviews, criminal records, court prison records, and information provided by the friends and families of the sample subjects. Forty-two percent of the sample were white, 43 percent were black and 10 percent were Hispanic. Most of the female subjects had little education and approximately 81 percent of them were employed in unskilled occupations. Most of the women (47%) killed their husbands or paramours, 33 percent killed acquaintances or strangers, and 20 percent victimized children. The most frequent weapon was a gun, followed closely by a knife. The mean age of the women in the sample was about 37 years.

The researchers tout the study as a sociopsychological one in that the typology presented is based upon an interface of personality style and operational behavior pattern. Six discrete categories are set forth. The first category of women who kill is the masochistic. Masochistic women led fairly stable lives and were usually well-controlled and reliable. Paradoxically, they tended to choose rather abusive mates. In a rare and violent rage,
often after years of physical abuse by their mates, these women attacked the provoking mates. As one might expect, masochistic female criminal homicide offenders tended to feel enormous remorse after the killing.

The second category, the overtly hostile violent women, provided a direct contrast to the masochistic women. These women led unstable lives and were often aggressive and impulsive. They had histories of violent episodes and most expressed a dislike of authority. Frequently, they attacked their victims with a clear intent to do them harm. The third type, the covertly hostile violent women, did not generally have histories of violence. They often had superficial interpersonal relationships. According to the researchers, women of this type tended to express hostility only when it was safe to do so, such as when the chance of retaliation was small. These women often killed their children.

The inadequate type of female criminal homicide offender is the fourth category set forth by the researchers. Women of this type were often confused in their approach to daily living and were frequently ineffectual. General coping behavior was subaverage. They usually were eager to please their partner and their only truly active behavior seemed to be to avoid stress. These women tended not to be the primary participants in the homicide. The psychotic women in the sample, the fifth category of female criminal homicide offender, were
chronically and severely disturbed. Often they were not well-adjusted to daily life and exhibited symptoms of psychoses. They had extremely poor interpersonal relationships and apparently had little direct control over their lives. The last category offered by Cole and his colleagues is the amoral type. According to the researchers, amoral women who kill exhibited a manifest intent to kill their victim and engaged in a fair amount of planning to do so. They tended to be more intelligent than their peers and to exhibit a high degree of self-interest. The homicide was usually economically motivated or designed to eliminate a person who interfered with a sexual relationship.

The typology presented by Cole and his colleagues is an intriguing one for its demonstration that women of diverse personality types commit murder. Put simply, women who kill are not of one psychological composition. This finding might point to social determinants of criminal violence as potentially valuable targets of study. It could be that the typology offered by the researchers is equally descriptive of the range of personalities and behavior patterns of women who do not kill. The researchers appropriately acknowledge this possibility. In fact, Cole and his colleagues pay careful attention to sociological variables in their analysis. Race, age, and victim-offender relationship were found to be differentially associated with the six discrete categories. For example, 71 percent of all women
categorized as overtly hostile types were black. Among all black women in the sample, about 60 percent were classified as overtly hostile violent types. In contrast, only about 15 percent of all white women who killed and 36 percent of all hispanic women in the sample were classified as overtly hostile.

It is findings such as these that might lead one to explore three possibilities. Black women who kill are naturally more overtly hostile and violent than either white or hispanic women who kill. Second, psychiatric evaluators and others may be more likely to classify black women as overtly hostile and violent than to classify white or hispanic women as such. Or, third, there may operate social pressures to exhibit overtly hostile and violent behavior that affect black more than white or hispanic women. Drawing upon other research that relates to this matter, it is more likely that the latter two processes, rather than the first, are operative.*4

Another study concerned with the general patterns of female criminal homicide is provided by Palmer (1980). Palmer offers a cross-national comparison of sex differences in criminal homicide and in suicide. Using recent official reports of murder and suicide in England and Wales and in

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4. Homicide studies in Africa indicate that African black women are homicide offenders far less frequently than white women in the U.S. (MacDonald, 1961). This would suggest social and cultural forces, rather than race, as explanatory independent variables.
the United States, Palmer operationalizes a high-violence nation as the United States, with a homicide rate of approximately 9.6, and a low-violence nation as England and Wales, with its homicide rate of about 0.9 for the same year, 1975. Palmer reports that in England and Wales women are much more likely to kill themselves than others, as compared to the United States. Palmer also reports that criminal homicide offenders are more likely to victimize members of their own families in England and Wales than in the United States. Palmer finds this to be especially true of women in England and Wales. Finally, homicide offenders in England and Wales are more prone to kill themselves after the act than they are in the United States.

Palmer, in interpreting these findings, proposes a heuristic model worthy of consideration in future research on women and violence. Palmer suggests that one thing that may operate in England and Wales and among women in both countries is a subculture of inner-directed violence. Wolfgang and Ferracutti used this notion to explore the learning of outer-directed violence. Individuals may learn to express frustration or solve problems through outwardly-directed violence. Palmer suggests that individuals may also learn to express frustration and problem-solve through inwardly-directed aggression. Suicide is a severe type of inner-directed violence. Smoking, alcoholism, and overeating may be others. Certainly this is a proposition to explore in relation to both sexes. How do
the two sexes compare with regard to smoking behavior? With regard to alcoholism and obesity? Or with regard to bulimia and anorexia? It may be that women are socialized to express aggression inwardly and men to express aggression outwardly. A proposition such as this might assume that men and women share similar capacities for aggression but their mode of expression and the target of that aggression differ. This is merely speculation; further research on this matter is required.

Suval and Brisson (1974) conducted a study of female criminal homicide offenders in North Carolina. The female subjects for their study were residents at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women. The subjects for the present study are residents at the same prison. In 1972, Suval and Brisson drew up a sample of 87 female criminal homicide offenders. The researchers also used separate samples of female property offenders and female drug offenders from the same prison as comparison groups. Some sex comparisons were also made, using the findings from an earlier study of male criminal homicide offenders in North Carolina by the same researchers.

The study examined the social histories of the individual members of the sample and comparison groups. The social histories came largely from the prison files. The residents' demographic, social and offense characteristics were found in those files. The researchers also had prison staff members complete questionnaires dealing with their
observations and evaluations of the inmates' behavior while imprisoned. The researchers properly note the various observational biases that may make their way into the information collected through this method.

Suval and Brisson report that the female homicide offender was typically black, poorly educated, and over thirty years old. They also report that female homicide offenders were older and were more often black than female property or drug offender. It is interesting to note that the researchers indicate that on these variables male and female criminal homicide offenders are more alike than are female criminal homicide offenders and female property and drug offenders. The same held true when they examined educational levels of the offenders. Male and female homicide offenders generally had less schooling than the comparison groups of either sex.

Examining relational ties of the criminal homicide offenders, Suval and Brisson report that their research suggests that both sexes, and especially females who kill, tend to come from a rural, family-oriented background and that this background may implicate close identification with kinship and other primary relations. Both male and female criminal homicide offenders were more likely than their comparison groups to be regularly employed but the researchers report that, for both sexes, employment is overwhelmingly confined to low status jobs. It may not be surprising to learn that both male and female homicide
offenders were more often frequent drinkers than their other
brothers and sisters in crime. According to Suval and
Brisson, rarely are criminal homicide offenders heavy drug
users.

Suval and Brisson summarize their findings as to the
staff observations and evaluations. They relate that
approximately three-quarters of the female criminal homicide
offenders were described as getting along well with staff
and inmates. However, the staff generally believed that
female criminal homicide offenders were more likely than
female property or drug offenders to experience adjustment
problems in prison. As to prestige rankings in the prison
subculture, female homicide offenders were found to be less
likely than female property or drug offenders to have high
prestige. This differs somewhat from the researchers
findings in a male prison where male criminal homicide
offenders were found to have higher relative prestige.
Interestingly, Suval and Brisson found that female criminal
homicide offenders were not as likely as female property or
drug offenders to exhibit masculine behavior or engage in
homosexuality while incarcerated.

By way of conclusion, Suval and Brisson suggest that
women who kill may have learned to retain high expectations
of interpersonal relations; they seem to meet with chronic
disappointment in their actual relations. Also, because of
her low educational achievement and socio-economic status,
the woman who kills may lack the resources to manage the
conflict which precipitated murder. In this framework, murder is seen as a last resort to very frustrating life conditions. This is similar to the theoretical model set forth by Palmer (1960) to explain possible sources of male criminal homicide.

Biggers (1979) examines female criminal homicide in the south and formulates a learning theory of violence to explain the phenomenon. Biggers is a counselor for the Division of Corrections in the State of Florida. She interviewed 32 women incarcerated for murder. Of the 32, 23 killed a male mate and only 4 of the victims were strangers. None had murdered a child. Most had used a gun in the homicide. Biggers found her sample subjects to be generally poorly educated, with few job skills, and to be basically nonassertive. Unfortunately, we are not told how representative the sample is of women murderers nor how she arrived at her conclusions. We are told only that she interviewed a larger group of 135 female felons, of which 32 were murderers. Her findings, therefore, are to be considered in this light.

Biggers' general impression of female criminal homicide offenders is that they are women who witnessed a good deal of violence in their homes or neighborhoods prior to the murder. It might be that these women interpreted violence as a way to successfully resolve conflict. Thus, when conflict arose in the familial context, the setting for most of their murders, the women may have used murder to resolve
that conflict. Biggers comments that the group of women with whom she spoke tended to view their victims as objects to be disposed of rather than human beings. They also tended to deny the reality of the murder and the death. In addition to the possible operation of learning processes contributing to female criminal homicide, it may be that a process of desensitization on the part of the offender is at play. Stripping the victim of his/her humanity before and after the murder may make the act of murder more palatable to the potential and actual offender. Of course, this is speculation as well and will remain so until further investigation.

Recently, Coles (1981) administered a questionnaire to approximately 50 women convicted of and serving time for criminal homicide in the state of California. Thirty-six questionnaires were returned, and this group serves as Coles' sample of female criminal homicide offenders. Coles had initially hoped to conduct face-to-face interviews with these women, but the institutional authorities would not permit it. Coles describes her sample as predominantly white and in their thirties. Few had police records prior to their crime. Most had been victims of physical and sexual abuse. The majority of their victims were male mates and most were killed with a gun of some type. The murder was frequently the result of a domestic altercation.
An overwhelming majority of the women thought that the situation that precipitated the murder was life-threatening or that it was the result of a sudden outburst on their part following a long build-up of tension. It would appear that most of these women perceived themselves to be in immediately or chronically stressful states prior to the murder. For example, Coles reports that of the women who had killed a mate, all had been beaten by the victim. Interestingly, in light of Palmer's proposition, 50 percent of Coles sample said they had contemplated suicide as a means of escape from this chronically or immediately stressful life condition.

Finally, in an effort to discern how these women felt about their gender role, Coles asked a series of questions along this line. The women were asked, for example, what they thought to be a woman's main job. Other questions were asked as to how they felt about working wives among other things. Coles interprets the findings as characterizing a group of women that are not especially liberated from the constraints of the traditional female gender role. Homicide, declares Coles, does not appear to have been liberated. Put simply, women apparently kill as a last resort to resolve unbearable, usually marital-related, life conditions. It might also be, given why these 36 women thought the murder occurred, that their murder might be merely an expression or an otherwise irrational aggressive product of these conditions.
The road from here.

What can we make of all of this? Where does the sum of this research on women, aggression, and criminal violence leave us? From the studies on sex differences and similarities in aggression, we learn that women, when provoked, may be capable of the same intensity and frequency of aggression as are men. We might add that the very presence or reality of aggression by some women suggests a possibility or potential for aggression in most women. Rather than being the physical, psychological, or cultural anomaly so many make her out to be, the aggressive female is, as Sobel (1978) suggests, both a possibility and an increasing reality of everyday life.

From the studies on women and criminal violence, we know that women tend to kill those people whom they know, usually a family member, and most often a spouse or lover. We also know they tend to kill with knives or guns. We know women are likely to kill in the home setting rather than elsewhere. And we have reason to believe that women who kill apparently lead rather desperate lives and may murder as an expression of or a means to resolve that desperation. This is what the studies tell us: What are we lacking in our understanding of women and criminal violence?

While we may know something about the patterns of female criminal homicide, we know less about why it occurs. Sparrow and Jones venture explanations, but those are too simplistic and overweight with ideological freight. They
offer little promise to enrich our understanding. We may need to listen more to the participants in the behavior, to the women who murder. Konopka listened to teenage girls in trouble and Biggers tries to listen to women murderers, though with less consistency. Their work helps us better understand the special problems and life conditions of girls and women found guilty of social and legal transgression. To further our knowledge of women and murder, we need a study that tells us more about the specific points of desperation in the lives of women who murder and, since it is they who are ultimately responsible for the loss of other lives, we need to hear from them. This study was designed as an attempt to do just that. The two chapters that follow spell out the theoretical and methodological framework of the research.
Chapter Four

A Theoretic Stance:
The Stress of Everyday Life

If there is one overriding concern of this study, it is to develop an understanding of the structure and dynamics of the lives of criminally violent women. This understanding is advanced through the application of two related approaches to the study of human behavior. The first approach may be called the social stress approach and it is illustrated by the works of Straus (1978) and Humphrey and Palmer (1980, 1982). They propose that situational and chronic stress can have behavioral consequences. The second approach, the sociology of everyday life, is fashioned after the work of Douglas (1970). Douglas believes that any scientific understanding of human action must begin with and be solidly built upon a common sense understanding of the everyday lives of the individuals performing that action. Taken together as a theoretical introduction to this study of criminally violent women, these two approaches to the study of human behavior can help us to appreciate how the shape and texture of social life contribute to the origin and persistence of criminal violence.*1
Understanding stress

Much of the current research on the sources and consequences of stress has at its roots the work of Walter Cannon. Cannon (1925) investigated what he termed the "fight or flight" syndrome and its relationship to certain physical disorders. "Fight" or "flight" refers to the state of alarm descriptive of an organism faced with a threat to

1. Studies of human behavior usually have some theoretical starting point. This study is no different than others in that regard and Chapter Four articulates the theoretical disposition of the study. In social science and in other sciences, theory and method are interwoven. Not all studies of human behavior need follow a strict code of positivistic empiricism. Much good research on individuals and groups makes use of methodological means other than formal hypothesis testing. Some social scientists advocate a behavioral science where theory is more discovered or generated than it is verified (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This means that theory may develop from direct observation of and even participation in the human drama. Positivists, on the other hand, are frequently proponents of a scientific method where theory is constructed apriori and later subject to empirical verification (Zetterburg, 1965). Those who believe theory is better discovered than verified construct theory while they do research. These so-called grounded theorists of human behavior claim that any model of behavior should be firmly rooted in the social reality it supposedly accommodates and explains.

There is room and a need for both scientific postures to the study of individual and group behavior. Discovery and verification are processes vital to the advancement of psychological and sociological theory. Theory should spring from systematic inventories of social life and it must mature through repeated checks of its validity, utility, and, importantly, its vitality. Theory that does not endure continuing examination of its approximation of social reality is eventually discarded. The worth of a theory depreciates as distortion inflates.

Put simply, then, the more adaptable a theory is to varying situations and to differing behaviors and the more dynamic and broad-based is a theory, the greater the likelihood that a theory will withstand repeated verification tests. It could be that a theory that is molded from firsthand systematic experience with social phenomena is a theory that is likely to possess robust qualities. For these reasons and others, the present study has healthy but generic doses of discovery and verification.
its bodily integrity. A young girl challenged by a classmate, for example, must decide whether to answer the challenge through argument, physical attack, or by running away. Those who have been in situations similar to the one facing the young girl know that it requires a decision not often calmly made. The "fight or flight" syndrome is one characterized by agitation and anxiety. In his studies of physical disorders, Cannon discovered that various gastrointestinal illnesses appeared to be related to an overexposure to the syndrome.

Leading stress researcher Hans Selye, a medical scientist, later articulated the precise physiological process by which stress is manifested. Selye (1956) directed his initial attention to the physiological components implicated by the "fight or flight" syndrome. Later in his life, Selye described a chemical alarm system, the General Adaptation Syndrome (referred to as the acronym GAS), that enables an organism to respond to external stimuli. The GAS is the mechanism that gears the body for a fight or for flight when it is confronted with a threat.

The GAS involves the nervous system, the pituitary, and the adrenal glands. When faced with a threatening stimuli, the body's nervous system sends a message to the pituitary gland. The pituitary gland next releases a hormone and directs it to the adrenal gland. In turn, the adrenal secretes a different hormone through the body's circulatory system. This activates the body's metabolism and allows for
an immediate response to the outside threat. Blood pressure usually increases, breathing becomes more pronounced, and the heart rate quickens. Many people are apt to characterize this state of alarm with the remark: "I can really feel the adrenaline flow!" Remarkably, the body is also capable of calming itself when the threat disappears.*2 The pituitary releases yet another hormone called an endorphine. This hormone effectively lowers blood pressure, slows respiration, and relaxes other motor activity.

Selye was entranced by the relative efficiency of the GAS. He likened the body to a homeostatic system - self-regulating and capable of both immediate response and self-relaxation. But Selye also warned of the fundamental shortcoming of the GAS. It is subject to wear and tear. If the GAS is engaged too frequently, in excess, or if it otherwise derails, it may have deleterious effects upon the body. According to Selye, the human organism is born with a store of adaptive energy that is metered by the GAS. The living out of one's life is the gradual depletion of that store.*3 After all, Selye suggests, humans are mortal

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2. There is some good current research on the body's ability to calm itself through biochemical processes. Some scientists cast endorphines as the natural opiates of the body. See Pert (1981).

3. Some researchers call this assumption into question. There may be equal reason to believe that the human body is able to continually replenish the store of adaptive energy. These researchers suggest that human activity produces as well as consumes energy. In doing so, they offer an expansion approach to human energy that contrasts with Selye's scarcity approach. See Marks (1977).
creatures and, as such, they age and eventually die - some faster than others. A body chronically asked to adapt or adjust to external stressors is analogous to an automobile abused by an erratic or overzealous driver. As an automobile responds to abuse with mechanical trouble, the human body responds to overload with what Selye identified as diseases of adaptation. Ulcers, hypertension, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disorder, and neuralgia are a few of the illnesses thought to be stress related. They all derive in part from an overtaxation of the General Adaptation Syndrome.

**Psychological and social sources of stress**

Selye left open the door for successive scientists to explore the psychological and social sources and consequences of stress. By emphasizing the external stimuli that give rise to the engagement of the GAS, Selye highlights the importance of the interaction between the external sociocultural environment and the internal physical and psychic states of being. It is possible and perhaps even highly probable that certain physical illnesses and maladies have psychological and social origins. Selye suggests that the psychological and social origins involve life changes that require some adjustment or reorientation on the part of the individual or group.

Holmes and Rahe (1967) advanced Selye's proposition. They developed a scale whereby researchers can measure and gauge the quantity and quality of potentially stressful life
change. They call this tool the Social Readjustment Rating Scale. In it, Holmes and Rahe delineated 43 life events that seem to cluster about the time of disease onset. These events include, among others, a change in residence, a death of a loved one, the birth of a child, marriage, and divorce. Both desirable and undesirable events listed on the scale precipitate some sort of life adjustment. A new job requires some form of adjustment. One must accommodate unfamiliar surroundings, meet new personnel, and perhaps look to more challenging duties. The death of a loved one also mandates an adjustment. This type of adjustment extends beyond a period of grieving. When a loved one dies, the constellation of relationships is altered for the survivor. The death of a spouse, for example, might change the relationship between the surviving partner and his/her children.

Holmes and Rahe rank the 43 life events by degree of stressfulness. The death of a spouse ranks first, trouble with in-laws ranks roughly in the middle, and a minor violation of the law ranks forty-third. Holmes and Rahe suggest that the greater the degree of life change as measured by the cumulation and weight of life events, the greater it will be associated with the onset of disease. In this case, illness can be viewed as psychogenic. It originates in psychic or mental functions rather than in purely physiological ones.
Dohrenwend et al. (1978) expand upon the Social Readjustment Rating Scale. They do this in two important ways. First, Dohrenwend et al. add more stressful life events to Holmes and Rahe's original list of 43. The tally of life events expands to 102. Further, the new scale is divided into eleven separate "life phase" sections. A few of these sections are Work, Finances, Social Activities, School, and Having Children. Second, Dohrenwend et al. provide a desirability rating for each event that indicates whether the life event is encountered in a negative, positive, or ambiguous fashion. A work demotion, rarely a favorable experience, is catalogued as a loss. This signifies that it is negatively encountered. In contrast, a promotion is frequently eagerly awaited and it is assigned as a gain because of its positive attributes. Retirement may be either a negative or positive event, according to the individual affected. It is therefore classified as an ambiguous event.

The life events measurement tool designed by Dohrenwend et al. is called the Psychiatric Epidemiology Research Interview (the acronym is PERI). In developing the PERI life events scale, the researchers provide a comprehensive list of stressful life events - life events requiring adaptation or adjustment - and a procedure for scaling the events. The PERI scale serves as the basis for the life events interview schedule used in the present study.
Both the Social Readjustment Rating and PEEI scales focus attention upon individual life change. Individual life change, if pronounced and clustered, may precipitate ill-health. Using the scale, individuals can gauge their present propensity for disease by assessing the quantity and quality of stressful life events. The two scales are useful in another way. Group, state, and national level aggregate measures may also be gained using the scales to predict populations at risk. Group level measures are merely an aggregated measure of individual life events. A divorce, for example, is an individual level phenomenon. A divorce rate is a measure of a group level phenomenon - the "amount" of divorce occurring in a particular group. In this sense, stress can apply to social group adjustment as well as to individual adjustment.

Dodge and Martin (1970), applying this group level notion of stress, point to the structure of the sociocultural environment as a potential source of stress. By operationalizing status integration, the extent to which individuals are or are not in close interactional association with one another (a sort of closeness of fit), through various state level measures of social phenomena, such as divorce or employment, Dodge and Martin identify high and low stress areas of the country and suggest an association of these phenomena with certain illnesses. Presumably, a state with a relatively high divorce rate and high unemployment rate would be a high stress state and
might tend to manifest relatively high rates of chronic illnesses, such as hypertension.

Dodge and Martin offer some useful concepts regarding social stress. Stress developing from mental or psychic functions is said to be psychogenic. Dodge and Martin identify stress that flows from the structure of the sociocultural environment as sociogenic stress. An individual physical illness that springs from the psychological adjustment to life change is generally referred to as a psychosomatic illness. This term appropriately highlights the potentially close relationship and interaction between mind and body. Similarly, Dodge and Martin identify physical illness endemic to populations in various sociocultural environments as sociosomatic illness. This term highlights the potentially close relationship between the structure of social interaction and the health of its social actors.

Although they are related concepts, psychogenic stress and sociogenic stress differ somewhat. An individual who develops migraine headaches as a result of recent divorce may be a victim of psychogenic stress. Young black males, a group that exhibits a relatively high rate of hypertension, may be victims of sociogenic stress in American society. Schnall and Kern (1981) suggest that this high rate of hypertensive disease may, in part, be a function of institutionalized racism. There are various social conflicts and prejudices in American society that are
peculiarly experienced by young black males. As socioecenic stress relates to American women, Carmen et al. (1981) suggest that the relatively high rate of mental disorders among women may be a function of the politically, socially, and economically disadvantaged statuses they occupy.*4 The present study of criminally violent women explores psychogenic and socioecenic stress and their relevance to the lives of the women in the sample. The study's emphasis, however, is on psychogenic stress.

Behavioral consequences of stress

The medical and social sciences have illustrated the link between life stress and certain physical illnesses. Heart disease, migraine headaches, neuralgia, and hypertension among other ailments appear, in part, to be stress related. Recent empirical developments suggest the possibility that life stress may have behavioral as well as physiologcal consequences.

The work of Carmen et al. (1981) suggests behavioral effects of socially patterned stress. Mental disorders, such as depression and neuroses among women, may partially stem from the structured inequality in which women live out their daily lives. Gove and Geerkin (1977) report that employed married males have the lowest reported rates of

4. Kessler and McPae (1981) report limited empirical support for the notion that, as gender roles become more comparable, rates of reported mental disorders among women decline. Assuredly, social structure as stressor is an idea that merits attention.
mental disorders, while unemployed married women have the highest. Findings such as these suggest that mental illness among women may be sociogenic. The research itself indicates an increasing interest in the behavioral consequences of stress.

Admittedly, less is known about the connection between stress and behavior than is generally known about stress and physical illness. Perhaps even less still is known about the link between stress and aggression or criminal violence, though there is some strong evidence that there is indeed a connection between the two. Straus (1980) investigates the relationship between stress and physical child abuse. He reports that the rate of physical child abuse increases as the number of stressful life events experienced by both parents during the previous year increases. This correlation is strong, adds Straus, only when certain conditions, such as isolation from social networks, the role-modeling of violence, and male dominance in the marriage are present. Linsky and Straus (1982) report findings that implicate sociogenic stress and crime. Using the fifty states as units of analysis, Linsky and Straus find that state level aggregate measures of negative and ambiguous events, such as rates of business failures and infant deaths, are correlated with violent and non-violent criminal behavior. Since there are several possible unexplored mediators of this relationship, the researchers express a need to empirically examine the impact of
potential mediators, such as social learning and social cohesion on the stress-crime link.

In an extensive series of empirical studies in North Carolina, Humphrey and Palmer investigate the link between psychogenic stress and crime. These researchers use a revised version of the PERI life events scale to catalogue the quantity and quality of life stress among criminal offenders. The bulk of their data derives from offender prison files and files from the state medical examiner's office. Humphrey and Palmer are primarily interested in the link between psychogenic stress and criminal homicide. Their work provides a springboard for the present study.

In their North Carolina sample, Humphrey and Palmer (1980) report that criminal homicide offenders experience more stressful life events and with greater consistency than do non-violent felonious property offenders. The lives of criminal homicide offenders are apparently more severely and more chronically stressful than are the lives of non-violent felonious property offenders. Humphrey and Palmer (1980, 1982) also report that homicide offenders who kill members of their families tend to suffer stressful life events characterized by loss (e.g. death of a loved one), while their criminal counterparts tend to experience more non-loss events.

Race and sex are considered as important variables by the researchers. Humphrey and Palmer (1980) report that white males seem to be more likely than non-white males to
kill within the family when both groups exhibit lives marked by rather high levels of stress. In general, high stress is more descriptive of the lives of offenders who kill within the family or close friends than it is of those who kill strangers. Further, in a strict comparison by sex, male criminal homicide offenders seem to live lives marked by higher stress levels than the lives of female criminal homicide offenders. Exploring the relationship between sex, psychogenic stress, and criminal homicide in more detail, Ketner and Humphrey (1980) report that women who kill are likely to experience high stress in familial roles while men who kill are likely to meet with high stress in occupational roles.

Drawing upon the formulations of Dollard et al. (1939) on the relationship between frustration and aggression, Humphrey and Palmer (1980) set forth the rudiments of a model of psychogenic stress and criminal violence. Stressful life events, according to the researchers, place demands upon individuals to adjust to new life situations and conditions. Chronic life stress, the life stress that seems to be characteristic of criminal homicide offenders, may sometimes outstrip an individual's ability to adapt and adjust. Severe frustration or some critical blockage in

5. In part, this finding might be a function of the sex-specificity of the measurement tool used in the study. Stressful events that peculiarly affect the lives of women, such as rape and childcare difficulties, are not included. This issue is addressed further in Chapter Five.
role performance can result. It is the compounding of taxing events over the years that is the characteristic pattern of criminal homicide offenders. The effects of stressful life events may eventually combine, according to Humphrey and Palmer, to spark a homicidal attack. It is in this social psychological fashion that the researchers draw the relationship between psychogenic stress and criminal violence.

The subjective interpretation of life stress

Why is it that some individuals seem to thrive on high stress life situations and others are buried by them? One component of the stress process not yet discussed may offer a partial answer. This component might best be termed "the subjective interpretation of life stress." People are apt to approach and interpret life events, situations, and conditions in different ways for a variety of reasons: varying life histories, varying sociocultural conditions, varying social positions and statuses, or perhaps personality differences. The subjective interpretation of life events may figure heavily in the relationship between stress and criminal violence.

In his definition of stress, Straus (1978) furthers an understanding of the way in which subjective interpretation relates to the stress process. Straus defines stress as a function of the interaction of the subjectively defined demands of a situation and the capabilities of an individual or group to respond to those demands.
definitional element contributed by Straus is his emphasis upon subjectively defined demands. Two individuals can approach the same situation with two different views as to its particular demand. One individual may view the situation as extremely stressful and personally taxing; the other may view it as only moderately so.

Straus emphasizes the subjectively defined situational demands. He is also careful to implicate individual response capabilities in his definition of stress. An individual with a wealth of coping resources at his/her disposal presumably might view a particular situation as less stressful than an individual who possesses few coping resources. This may or may not be true, but it could be helpful to entertain an addendum to Straus' formulation. It may be that individual response capabilities are also subjectively perceived. Most of us are acquainted with individuals who would seem to possess more than adequate coping resources but who seem to have adjustment problems nonetheless. Similarly, there are those who appear to have virtually little in the way of resources but who seem to manage taxing situations with a wonderful flair. On the whole, however, it would appear that those with healthy stores of coping resources are better off than those without such stores.
The phenomenology of role stress

Much of social life is a broad series of encounters with other people. These encounters usually do not occur in a random fashion. Molecular particles under heat will collide with and bounce off of each other both randomly and rapidly. This is not very much like human interaction. It may sometimes seem as though this is the case if we consider only the social scene at a busy airport or on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. But even these scenes have an order to them. Thousands board and depart airplanes daily with a fair degree of continuity. Millions of dollars in stocks are traded on the floors of stock exchanges all over the world everyday and this is done with a high degree of regularity. Unlike molecules under heat, there is a relative order to human encounters. We might say that our daily lives are somewhat predictable, though there is room for the unexpected. Our lives are ordered but not always rigidly so.

One helpful tool in understanding the order in human interaction is the concept of role. Palmer (1970) states that role can be approached in three ways. First, role can be viewed as the expected behavior of individuals who occupy a given status or position in human interaction. The role of brother, for example, may be seen as a position with an entire set of attendent behavioral expectations. As a brother, one is expected to interact with a mother and father in certain ways and with a sibling in other ways.
Second, Palmer believes that role can be seen as some form of an average of the norm of all behavior of people occupying a certain position. An outside observer of the ways in which brothers generally interact with others might adopt this understanding of role. Last, role can be viewed as the actual behavior of individuals occupying certain positions. Palmer well understands the natural tension between expected behavior and actual behavior that exists in everyday life. A pronounced incongruence between expected and actual behavior, Palmer asserts, could eventually give rise to deviant behavior.  

There is a variety of applications of the concept of role. Merton (1957) uses the term role set to refer to the interactions of individuals occupying complementary statuses. A wife, as an illustration, cannot be a wife without the actual or symbolic presence of a husband. The role set of wife-husband would be a summary pattern of the interaction between the two. Ccoley (1964) views the social self as a function of the web of social roles played out by an individual. One's sense of self is dependent upon the feedback of others who witness or take part in his/her role-playing.

conceptualization of some aspects of human interaction. A sociological concept is only as useful as its ability to accurately incorporate real social phenomena. The concept of role helps us conceptualize ordered human behavior in a detached academic manner. But is role firmly rooted in real social phenomena? This is to ask if the concept of role can be verified by the actors themselves. Is role "possible" in the common sense world of human drama? In an essay on this issue, Natanson (1972) suggests that it is. Role is a feature of everyday life, writes Natanson, and it is frequently referred to by actors as an image of the ways developed by them to respond to their perception of how they are supposed to behave.

Natanson suggests a limited phenomenological proof. In fulfilling what an individual understands to be the requirements of a role, he/she must occasionally behave in ways he/she finds personally repugnant. Consider the following illustration. A section chief in a large factory is asked by top level management to lay off five of her workers. She would rather not lay off the five workers. She believes, however, that she is bound by the duties and responsibilities as section chief and she therefore informs the five workers that they are temporarily dismissed. Still bound by the expectations attending her role as section chief, she continues to believe that she acted against her basic nature. Her role as section chief remains an
important feature of her everyday life and, at times, forces her hand.

Of course not all human behavior is role behavior, but a large portion of it is. We fit our behavior to the behavior of others through roles. Roles allow for the expression of self and they may, at times, inhibit that expression. And some roles are more important than others. In the world of everyday life, this is often a matter of individual concern. There are times when we may feel that our roles demand a good deal of concerted energy to play out. Role playing can be demanding. Again, this is subject to individual variation. The subjective interpretation of everyday life may be an important consideration in the stress process. Strauss (1978) was instructive on this point in the previous section.

Palmer (1981) offers an understanding of how role-playing can cause stress. In a few words, Palmer suggests that stress obtains through some inadequacy in role-playing. Role-playing is stressful when an individual perceives that he/she cannot possibly meet the expectations of others. The role may be too demanding. The actor can also see too little challenge in role. The role is not demanding enough, and that too may be stressful. Palmer delineates other forms of potentially stressful role playing. An actor may experience stress when he/she perceives a conflict within or between roles. A woman who must work outside the home fulltime and must also raise
several children often experiences a conflict between her roles of mother and worker. An employee who must answer to two separate supervisors may occasionally meet with conflict in a role. Role rejection is yet another potential source of stress. An individual repeatedly told that his/her performance in a given role is far from adequate is likely to experience stress. The loss of a role through the death of a loved one can be taxing, as can the assumption of a new role when expectations are not yet so clearly defined. Finally, Palmer suggests that the encroachment of others upon an actor's social territory—his/her roles—may generate stress.

Palmer's formulation of the various types of role stress is basically a psychoogenic model of stress. Importantly, his formulation implicitly underscores the subjective interpretation or framing of everyday life from the actor's standpoint. For example, there can be no role encroachment without an individual perception that he/she is being encroached upon. Similarly, what one actor might interpret as role encroachment another might view as a simple and generous gesture of cooperation. Role stress, like roles themselves, is phenocenologically rooted.

The quality of the perception of stress or tension in everyday life may figure in the relationship between stress and criminal violence. The interpretive component of the stress process is a preeminent theme of the present study of women who kill. How human beings interpret their separate
and communal lives and what consequences such interpretations may bring are questions whose answers would appear to illuminate the stress-criminal violence link. Before stating the specific aims of the present study and describing the study's research design, the intellectual thrust of the study is underlined in the following section. The theoretic stance of this research is a sociological perspective tagged "the sociology of everyday life."

**Stress and the sociology of everyday life**

The sociology of everyday life is a sociological orientation concerned with the experiencing, observing, understanding, describing, analysing, and communicating about people interacting in concrete situations (Douglas, 1980:1).

Douglas' portrayal of the sociology of everyday life might be an overly broad one, but it does connote the implicit emphasis of the perspective. The sociology of everyday life is concerned with the totality of the human experience in the social world, the rich tone of human communication, the detail of human action, and the subtle aroma of its residue. The sociology of everyday life is directed toward understanding the social world from the points of view of the actors who give it form. The subjective construction, maintenance, and interpretation of social reality are units of analysis. This approach to the study of human behavior has a long history in the social sciences. From the verstehen described by Max Weber, to the meaning of the act explored by George Herbert Mead, to the frame analysis of Erving Goffman, a concern for the
inner-states of interacting individuals is apparent.

Douglas' concern is with a reexamination of human life in its natural context. His approach is a decidedly phenomenological one. Much of his writing borrows from Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz. Husserl (1962) discusses the complex of human interaction from a philosophical station. The common sense knowledge of the world is his focus. The use of the term common sense here does not signify what is often referred to as "horse sense". Rather, it refers to the shared orientations toward the world of groups of individuals. It is what Husserl calls the natural stance. The natural stance is that stance taken by men and women acting out their everyday lives. In one way, it is all that we frequently take for granted in interaction. It is the intersubjective understanding that is the mortar of social life. An example of the natural stance comes from the case of the section chief in the large factory, previously mentioned. Remember she was coerced by her understanding of the role and her constructed role behavior organized a large share of her experience. Imagine a thousand similar organizations of experience by as many actors. This conception may come close to Husserl's notion of the natural stance.

s a general theory of intersubjective understanding. Schutz assumes that the core stream of consciousness of each individual is inaccessible to other individuals. No person can precisely know another. Yet this does not necessarily spell a solipsistic fate for the social world. In fact, there is a great deal of order to human interaction. We are not like heated molecules bouncing off one another. Simply put, Schutz believes that there are linkages of experience among individuals that allow for shared meaning. These linkages are insured by the occasional criss-crossing of streams of consciousness among individuals.

Consider this example: two individuals watch the same road race at the finish line, but from opposite sides of the street. They spot the very same action in the race, but from unlike vantage points. If they were to later converse following the exciting finish, they might relate to each other various details of the action. They may agree on some of the action, but see other aspects of the finish differently - perhaps largely because of the discrete views of the race that their separate positions afforded. Both were cast in the same role, that of race observer, but had somewhat different experiences playing the role. There are linkages and gaps in the intersubjectivity of understanding.

In any case, the work of Husserl and Schutz provides for a sociology of everyday life by exploring the thoughts and actions of the actors responsible for its construction.
and maintenance. The exploration of human thought and action may be best guided by a theoretic stance. Douglas (1970) develops the theoretic stance as a contrast to the natural stance. A theoretic stance toward the social world calls for a suspension of or temporary detachment from everyday life. It is a standing back from the world to reflect upon it and, in Douglas' words, re-view it. Essentially, it is a recapitulation, of sorts, of the natural stance. From the panorama of a theoretic stance, Douglas suggests the social scientist is able to grasp that which is taken for granted in everyday life. A sociology of everyday life, as Douglas describes it, is more a career than it is any one theory or method. To take a theoretic stance is to be both an integral part of and somewhat detached from everyday life.

Importantly, Douglas emphasizes that any theoretical formulation of social life must be solidly rooted in social life. It must spring from and capture the understandings human beings bring to their daily affairs. Douglas does not kindly entertain sociological theories that are functions of the peculiar understandings of abstracted empiricists. Put another way, Douglas advocated grounded theories of human behavior. Sociologies of everyday life are grounded in the understandings with which individuals approach human interaction.
Everyday life stress and criminal violence

The theoretic stance of the present study of the lives of criminally violent women may be appropriately termed "the stress of everyday life." In response to Douglas' vocation, the purpose of the study is to trace an act, criminal homicide, to the unique and not so unique understandings of everyday life of the actors, in this case female criminal homicide offenders. It does this through the application of a phenomenological notion of stress. Both Straus (1978) and Palmer (1981) relate the importance of the subjective interpretation of life change in the stress process. A life event may elicit a reorganization of experience. An actor must get his/her bearings in a new reality. If an event or a chronic condition is perceived by the actor to be severe or otherwise traumatic, if an actor believes him/herself to have some persistent difficulty in the playing out of his/her social roles, then stress may obtain.

The relationship between stress and criminal violence is, as yet, a sketchy one. For present purposes, perhaps an elemental, if inelegant, relationship can be stated. Life stress, both situational and chronic, may place burdensome demands on an actor to accommodate new life situations and conditions. At times, an individual may understand her life situation to be one that outdistances her ability to perform adequately. This is to say that an actor can perceive her life as enormously stressful. A general but profound frustration with everyday life may develop. And, as
Humphrey and Palmer (1980) posit, acute or chronic stress can spark lethal aggression. Stressful life events involving a perceived victimization at the hands of aggressive others could be the flint that gives friction to the spark. Succinctly stated, that is the theoretic stance of the research. With these ideas in mind, the present study pursues subjective life stress of women who kill. 8

The aims of the study

The present study is an exploration into the sociology of everyday life. Its primary concern is with the structure and dynamics of the lives of women who have killed; its point of view comes from the women themselves. The study is about how criminally violent women make sense of their lives and how their experiences with and understanding of everyday life may have contributed to their criminal violence. A connection is drawn between repeated stressful life experiences and later lethally violent aggression. The specific questions addressed in the study are:

1. What kinds of experiences occur in the lives of criminally violent women.

2. What are the predominant patterns of stressful life events in the experiential world of these women.

3. What is the general pace and tempo of daily life among women who kill.

8. As such, the present study can be viewed as a distant cousin of Palmer's (1960) earlier study concerning the link between physical and psychological trauma and male criminal homicide.
4. What types of understandings of and approaches to everyday life do these women develop as a result, and

5. How does all of this contribute to criminal violence?

This study does not pretend to represent objectively accurate accounts of what went on in the lives of women who killed. In a sense, this study is rather like "a trial in which only one witness testifies, the defendant" - as Trilling (1981:325) characterizes a person in psychotherapy. But this likeness well-suits the aims of this study. Since the study investigates how criminally violent women make sense of their everyday lives, most of the information presented in the study comes from the women themselves. It is the essence of their general understanding of everyday life that this study seeks to capture. This chapter develops the theoretic stance of the study. The following chapter explains how the research was carried out.
Chapter Five

The Study: Design and Method

Research strategies in the sociology of everyday life are as varied as human interaction. There are but two general requirements of such strategies. First, the research strategy must manifest a systematic analysis of everyday life through some form of communication with the members of the group under study. The sociology of everyday life encourages more and more researchers to get close to people-in-the-world so that they may better understand how those people construct their lives. Second, since there are so many different ways to go about the study of social phenomena, the sociologist of everyday life must give a meticulously detailed account of his/her method of study. A full accounting allows the social scientific community to assess and perhaps intellectually profit from the technologies developed and used by investigators. Other social scientists might then add to the broth of knowledge regarding everyday life. The sociology of everyday life is one broth not easily spoiled by too many cooks.
Under what subjectively filtered life conditions does female criminal homicide occur? This is the present concern. For the purpose of fulfilling the two methodological prerequisites of a general sociology of everyday life, several aspects of the design design of the study are described in this chapter. The logical structure of the analysis of the relationship between internal realities and the social action of criminal homicide is exposed in the process.

**Framing the study**

The present research grew out of a general interest in female criminal offenders. An increasing familiarity with the existing literature on the subject brought with it a concern for the relative scarcity of research on female criminal violence. As the review of the literature in Chapter Two would suggest, much current research centers upon the relationship between women's changing roles and the rise and fall of female property crime rates. Further, excepting the works of Konopka and Adler, the current research is largely in a quantitative vein. There is a recognizable dearth of knowledge about women and crime that derives from sources other than officially recorded rates. Thus, the initial development of the present study began as a partial response to an existing empirical emphasis on the quantitative analysis of female property crime. This emphasis was the impetus of the qualitative aspect of this study of female criminal violence.
Fortunately, the researcher had some contact with other scientists engaged in an ongoing study of criminal homicide in North Carolina. After some preliminary discussions, Drs. Stuart Palmer and John Humphrey agreed to receive the present study under the much larger umbrella of their research. They generously offered to help get the study started. They would act as guides, critics, and sponsors.

The sponsorship of Palmer and Humphrey was a boon to the study, especially in its early stages of development. This was so for several reasons. Importantly, North Carolina offered a rather fertile research setting for a study of female criminal homicide. It has a relatively high homicide rate when compared to the other forty-nine states. It also has a comparatively large number of women incarcerated for criminal homicide. And they are usually housed in one spot, the state prison for women in Raleigh. By way of contrast, a study of this magnitude carried out in the New England region would require a researcher to travel to roughly four states to compile a sample of female criminal homicide offenders as large as the sample available in Raleigh. The logistics of North Carolina as a research setting for the study were attractive. Finally, the reputations of Palmer and Humphrey as criminal homicide researchers and their willingness to act as sponsors lent legitimacy to the study. This would later prove to be valuable in gaining access to the field.
What would be the focal point of the research? Understandably, this was a preoccupying question in the early stages of the study. The study was originally designed to be one where data would come from the actors themselves. The intent was to learn about the occurrence of female criminal homicide from the point of view of the women involved. The study was to be a decidedly social psychological one geared to the grasp of life conditions in which criminal homicide is present. As such, it would be a sociology of everyday life of women who kill.

Palmer and Humphrey contributed significantly toward the definition of the study's focal point. Their own research on criminal homicide began to focus more and more on the stressful life conditions of criminal homicide offenders. Their findings indicate that there is some relationship between the quantity and quality of stress in daily living and criminal homicide (19 a, 19 b). As noted in Chapter Four, male criminal homicide offenders apparently live more stressful lives than do their counterparts in property crime.*1 Stress seemed to be a promising explanatory concept. Also, it seemed that there were many parallels between the two approaches: the sociology of everyday life and the stress model. Both are concerned with the interaction between the actor and the social environment. And both pay considerable attention to the internal state of the actor. For the expressed purposes of the study, the wedding of the two approaches appeared to be
Developing the interview schedule

Given the theoretical inclination of the study, how might the research be carried out? The most practical way seemed to be by interviewing a substantial number of women who killed other individuals. Over time, other ways were ruled out. Athens (1980), for example, conducted a study of the meanings of violence among violent people by interviewing them and by observing their violent behavior. For obvious reasons, the observation of criminally homicidal acts is not possible. Even if it were, detached observation of murder is not an especially pure ethical enterprise.

Another method of collecting information on the phenomenon would be to survey a representative sample of women who kill. This method was eliminated for a variety of reasons. As Coles' (1981) study demonstrates,*2 the return is likely to be far less than the actual number sent to the target group. Further, an attrition rate mitigates against a representative sample. There is likely to be a significant portion of female criminal homicide offenders who are semi-literate or illiterate. Problems of communication might arise using a written medium with these women. Also, survey techniques are not truly amenable to

1. This appears to be true for females as well. See Appendix One for a discussion of this point using data collected by Palmer and Humphrey.

2. Coles' study is discussed in some detail in Chapter Three.
the sociology of everyday life. The lilt of a voice, the richness of colloquial expression, and non-verbal cues are not recorded. Finally, surveys tend to force respondents to conform to the researcher's notions of the social reality. The rigid structure of the measurement tool can sometimes be stifling to a respondent. He/she is not afforded a forum for open dialogue and the facilitation of meaning. For these reasons and others, the face-to-face interview was selected as the principal way of collecting information on how women who kill interpret life events and currents.

Lofland (1971) once referred to the interview as an act of perceiving as conducted between two individuals. In the present study, the researcher wanted to "get at" the ways in which the subjects make sense of their lives. This was eventually accomplished through carrying on semi-directed conversations with the subjects concerning their separate lives. An interview is a give and take dialogue that is more or less controlled by the researcher. Ultimately, there is a third party to the conversation and that is the reader. But the reader is a party to the conversation in an indirect way only — after the fact. The reader cannot ask additional questions or seek clarification from the respondent. The reader plays a relatively passive role in the research.

An adept researcher, however, recognizes the ultimate presence of a third party. He/she strives for clarity, continuity, and accuracy in the encapsulation of what
transpires between researcher and subject. This is especially true among sociologists of everyday life who try to capture the essence of the internal and intersubjective realities of those whom they study. Clarity, continuity, and accuracy are goals to which the present researcher aspired. What the reader encounters in the following pages can never be everything that actually occurred during the interviews. The pages to follow offer a mere translation of all that transpired. As such, the interview is a somewhat imperfect research tool as well.*3

Despite its imprecision, the interview was deemed the tool best suited to the needs of the study. It was decided to design an interview schedule of questions since the investigator wanted to talk to each subject about the various events and feelings experienced in childhood, in love, at work, and in other areas of everyday life. The best strategy seemed to be to design a semi-structured interview schedule that could be used as a general guide during the actual interview. Ideally, it would allow for a systematic accounting of life experiences, it would provide a comprehensive list of possible life events, and it would still leave ample room for a subject to "freewheel" or talk about areas of her life not specifically delineated in the

3. One example of a problem in translation would be the difficulty in recording facial expression or tone of voice. How a person looks when she says something or how she says it can be very meaningful. There are places in this study where some of this is presented and places where it is not. At all times, primary importance is given to the capture and relay of the essence of a subject's inner state. The contours of the lives of these women are preserved.
schedule. This was a tall order.

The life events scales developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967) and Dohrenwend et al. (1978) made good references for the interview schedule. They represent a fairly extensive list of possible life events. Humphrey and Palmer (19 A, 19 B) use a modified version of the PERI scale in their research on stress in the lives of criminal homicide offenders. The implementation of an extensively amended version of the PERI scale seemed a good idea for the present study. It would be a version specifically tailored to the goals of the study.

The PERI scale was transformed into an appended interview schedule. Several critical modifications of and numerous items added to the PERI list helped tailor the list to present needs. Adequate room was reserved in the schedule to record age at event or experience when it was possible to do so. Of course this was dependent upon subject recall. If an event happened more than once, two ages were recorded: the age it first occurred and the age it last happened. Through this method, a chronology of events and a life history from the subject's viewpoint could be crudely assembled. Another modification involved leaving space on the schedule to record the frequency of events or experiences that are likely to occur daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, or otherwise. Arguing with a spouse or lover would be an example of this. The frequency with which the subject was beaten by her parents would be another example.
Presumably, the frequency of an event or experience can be an important consideration in the life of an individual. When frequency was recorded, it is important to note and understand that the subject was not asked to pigeonhole herself into one category: everyday, twice a week, etc. The subject would tell the researcher how frequently the event would occur and the researcher would "code" the response on the schedule as he saw fit. This was done to preserve the integrity of the response and, at the same time, to allow for the picking out of general patterns descriptive of the larger group.

The PERI scale was amended in other ways. As mentioned earlier, Palmer's (1960) study of male criminal homicide offenders identified trauma suffered at an early age as a pattern descriptive of male offenders. The events of childhood were thought to be important factors in understanding the ways in which individuals approach daily living. A section of the schedule was therefore devoted to childhood events and experiences. Questions within this section concerned relationships with parents and siblings, deaths of close ones, illnesses suffered in childhood, and other possible sources of childhood trauma, both physical and psychological. Again, the subject was queried as to how she felt about such life happenings - at the time and later in life. Potentially stressful experiences in adulthood were also covered in the schedule. Makosky (1980) faults some life events lists with sex-specificity. Life
experiences such as childcare difficulties and rape, peculiar to women for the most part, are not included in these lists. Every effort was made in the present study to avoid sex-specificity. Questions about childcare, rape, hysterectomy, menopause, and forced sex in marriage among other events were eventually included in the interview schedule.

The interview schedule was designed as a tool to use while actually interviewing the subjects of the study. Prefacing the schedule was a one-page sheet that allowed for the recording of background information taken from the prison record file of each subject. All residents of state and federal correctional facilities have separate files. The information contained within each file includes race, age, religion, place of birth, a police description of the crime, court processing of the case, social worker and mental health worker evaluative test results, and an abbreviated social history.

For each woman of the present study, much of this information was recorded in the preface sheet of the interview schedule prior to the interview. In other words, the investigator knew something about the subject before the interview. This technique was adopted for two reasons. First, the researcher could gather important information as to the specifics of the offense without broaching the topic with the subject. Since many of the cases were under appeal at the time, it was anticipated that some women would be
reluctant to talk freely of their crimes. As it turned out, all but a few spoke openly of their offense and usually without prompting. Second, by examining the file of the subject before the interview, the researcher was able to sensitize himself to the case beforehand. Such sensitivity proved to be valuable in the interviews. For example, a woman who recently suffered the loss of a parent would require a different approach to the interview than a woman who did not. When interviewing the grieving woman, talking about her relationship with her parents might be done more delicately. The perusal of each recorded file not only produced information for each case but it also afforded some background preparation for the interviews.

All in all, the interview schedule contained over 325 items covering nine different life areas: childhood, school, crime and legal matters, work, finances, residence, love and marriage, having children, and social activities. The interview schedule also included a background information sheet to be used to gather information from the record files. Ample space was reserved in the layout of the schedule to record the subject's thoughts and feelings on related and unrelated matters. The schedule was designed as a tool to be used and modified as the occasion would call. It was not an instrument to be preserved at the expense of the subject's point of view.
Early in the developmental stages of the study, it was decided to record information via pencil and paper rather than tape record each interview. Tape recording in a prison setting can be obtrusive and at times unsettling for the subject. There is enough distrust circulating throughout prison life without having an outsider add to it with his/her recording machine whirring away, seemingly without end. Pencil and paper might still seem obtrusive to some—the researcher forever clinically jotting down the personal minutiae of another's life—but it is probably less so than a tape recorder. Practice facilitated the taking of notes during the interview. It is not really as difficult as some would have us believe and, through attentive practice, one can become quite proficient in the skill. Another reason mitigating against the use of taping was the foreseen volume of tape that might threaten to become unmanageable. With such a relatively large sample and without an equally large support staff, the costs appeared prohibitive. The recording of information by hand during the interview seemed not to incur such costs.

There are still great benefits to be had through the taping of conversation. Dialect, vocabulary, and detail are preserved to some degree. Therefore, at the same time that taping was ruled out as the principal means of information gathering, it was decided that it would be helpful to use it in a limited way. A select few of the original sample would be asked if they would agree to take part in separate
recorded follow-up interviews. They would be told that the areas covered in the follow-up interview would be similar to those covered in the initial interview. In this way, suspicion and distrust were minimized. As it happened, nine follow-up interviews were undertaken and proved to be extremely profitable in building an understanding of the internal and intersubjective realities of the sample women. The investigator was able to replay the tapes several times in order to confirm expressed meaning or intention as well as to uncover meaning below the surface of conversation. The reader will find many segments of these taped interviews in the text of this study. These segments represent the life stories of many of the sample women as told in their own words from where they stand in the social milieu.

Taken together, the two ways of information gathering seemed to be promising ways to address the goals of the study. The interviews conducted with the schedule would help identify broad patterns of stress experienced by female criminal homicide offenders in the daily lives. The pace of life could also be addressed. The specific sources of stress could be discovered through a systematic analysis of the subjectively filtered life-worlds of the women. The interview schedule would advance these aims by providing apriori a comprehensive list of possible stressors while still allowing for a good deal of flexibility during the interview that might indicate other possible stressors. The taped follow-up interviews would offer a living record of
the thoughts and feelings of these women as they recount their lives. This method seemed also to offer the investigator an opportunity to replay a conversation to uncover meaning perhaps hidden or missed at the time. Finally, the taped segments promised to be a source for illustration in the text.

Once the interview schedule was drafted, it was necessary to check for possible bugs or glitches in the tempo of the questions. What may look fine on paper can sometimes meet with some resistance set against the real world. A pre-test or trial run was planned. Fortunately, the researcher had some prior lessons in the techniques of interviewing under the tuition of Dr. Howard Shapiro, a clinical social psychologist at the university. Problems such as the gender difference between interviewer and subjects and the subcultural differences were anticipated.4 One cannot always plan for these problems but it is probably best to understand their potential for interference.

4. There were several possible intercessors between interviewer and subject. The obvious subcultural intervenor would be the prison subculture. Another involves the cultural variation associated with different regions of the United States. The investigator is a male from the northeast and the subjects are women in large part hailing from the south. These problems were not insurmountable in practice, however. The researcher would probe further when meaning was not clear, though not in a condescending way. It was done with a genuine appreciation for the differences among people. The sample women did not seem to mind when asked to explain a given response and many would eventually offer clarification without being asked. This goes on in everyday life often. Witness a conversation between a Bostonian and a mid-westerner.
Five undergraduate women in an introductory criminology class were selected for the trial run with the interview schedule. Each was given a specific role to play for their separate interviews. For example, one would play the part of a young white woman imprisoned for killing a male bank clerk during a robbery. Another would play the role of a middle-aged black woman accused of the fatal stabbing of her husband. Each "play actress" was given two days to prepare for her interview and all five interviews were then completed over a week's time. During and after each interview, notice was taken at the various points in the schedule that seemed awkward and of questions that did not work very well in the light of actual conversation.

The pre-test notes were next reviewed with Dr. Ann Diller, an education specialist also in residence at the university. Diller quickly saw the need to develop the natural tempo or rhythm of the interview schedule. When using the schedule in the test setting, many negatively-directed or sensitive questions were sometimes clustered in spots and the interview grew overly depressing and morose at time. Too much of this at one time tended to wear upon both interviewer and subject. To combat this problem, several more positively-directed questions were included at key places in the schedule. For example, before asking about the relationship the subject had with her most recent husband or lover, often the victims of her lethal aggression, the subject was asked which relationships with
men she found most rewarding. At other places in the schedule, a similar pacing of mood was engineered. In the practice of actual interviewing, this pacing went a long way in fending off mental fatigue.

The parts of the schedule that were redesigned were tried out in an informal way with friends and acquaintances. After making some minor adjustments, the interview schedule was drawn up in its finished form and reproduced. Each interview would require a fresh copy. Once this had all been completed, the interviews with the sample women were set to begin.

Gaining entry into the field

Doing research among prison inmates is a somewhat controversial avocation. Some see such research as inherently problematic. Prisons are violent places for one thing and inmates may be coerced into participation for another. When inmates are involved in social scientific research, some cast them as human guinea pigs conscripted against their will. Another view of research in prison settings is that prisons need more outside contact, not less. Researchers gain more knowledge about prisons and about crime. In turn, inmates have more contact with universities, colleges, teachers, and students. Research in prisons afford inmates a greater variety of interaction with influences outside the prison environment. Equally important, inmates are given the chance to contribute, to give of themselves in the hope of helping others. Inmates
feel better about themselves because of this. Perhaps it is simply a matter of how one feels, out-level, about prison research. Either one views research such as this as overly dangerous and somewhat exploitive or as a mutually beneficial interchange between a disadvantaged group and an inquisitive one. Most people think one way or the other.

The present study owes to a belief in the latter view—that research conducted among prison inmates is highly valuable to both participants: the inmate and the researcher. Perhaps because of a continuing subscription to this view, gaining access to the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women was seen as a worthwhile pursuit. Many individuals played critical roles in gaining that access and, for better or for worse, can take some credit for the successful completion of this study.

The first step in winning entry to the Center required the cooperation of the North Carolina Department of Corrections. The research team of Humphrey and Palmer enjoyed a mutually satisfying relationship with the Department for several years prior to the present study. A meeting between the Director of Research for the Department of Corrections, Kenneth Parker, and Humphrey and the present researcher was arranged. There, it was decided to meet with

5. This belief has roots in previous exposure to inmates and the prison environment. The year before the present study was undertaken, the investigator had been a guard at a maximum security state prison for men. It was for a three-month period and was done to gain a clearer understanding of prison life.
some of the staff at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women (hereafter referred to as NCCCW) to discuss the goals and feasibility of the study. There is little doubt that Humphrey's relationship with Parker helped in setting up the meeting with the NCCCW staff. While some believe otherwise, corrections departments at the state level often encourage research of this nature. They too benefit from more rather than less knowledge about crime.

The NCCCW staff appeared to be equally enthusiastic about the research project. Humphrey and the investigator met the next day with the assistant superintendent of the center, Jenny Lancaster, and the Director of Psychological Services, Steve Kiefer. The aims and design of the study were explained and Lancaster and Kiefer were careful to relay their special concerns and the exigencies at the Center as they related to the study. The researcher assured both Lancaster and Kiefer that participating women would be granted absolute anonymity and confidentiality. They were also told that participation in the study was voluntary. The content of the interview schedule was discussed and, when asked, Lancaster and Kiefer were each given a copy to look over more thoroughly. As one might expect, the concerns of the NCCCW staff mirrored those of the researcher and a fairly strong understanding of each other's needs and worries developed. The meeting of Lancaster, Kiefer, Humphrey, and the researcher lasted for about two hours.
At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that Lancaster would ask one of the criminal homicide offenders at the Center if she would like to participate in the study. Lancaster expressed a desire to sit in on the first interview to see firsthand exactly how an interview would proceed. Lancaster had a shrewd eye for picking a woman for the first interview who was rather highly regarded among other residents at the institution. She correctly reasoned that the first woman might play a pivotal role in the successful enlistment of other subjects in the research. Other residents would ask the first woman about the study. In their world at NCCCW, potential subjects would want to know if the research was "legitimate". Presumably, a "legitimate" study is one where the interests of the residents are furthered by the study and not violated or betrayed in any way. In any case, it would greatly help if the first subject were one whose opinion many segments of the prison community valued and trusted. Lancaster chose such a woman and sat in on her interview.

The first interview took place three days after the initial meeting with Lancaster and Kiefer. The subject was a young white woman who was serving time for the first degree murder of an elderly woman during an admittedly badly bungled robbery. From most accounts, the subject was a resident whom the administration, custodial staff, and, importantly, other residents respected. Lancaster

6. An inmate at NCCCW is called a resident.
maintained a good relationship with her despite their seemingly adverserial roles. Theirs was a relationship best characterized by an intuitive understanding of each other and of their separate role expectations as superintendent and resident. In a sense, this had to be the case since the subject would be called upon by the researcher to recount the very sensitive and private events of her life in the company of the prison superintendent. It might appear to be a peculiar arrangement to the outsider but it was a prerequisite step toward the completion of the study.

It worked out very well, perhaps better than one would expect. On occasion, Lancaster would make comments. They were instructive for the most part and did not intrude upon the interview. The subject talked openly about all aspects of her life, from birth through her crime. Her approach to the interview was somewhat guarded initially but this was expected. As the interview progressed, the subject grew more comfortable and more accustomed to the types of questions asked about herself and about her life experiences. The subject eventually spoke to the details of her crime, no small sign that some measure of trust between all three individuals existed. The interview lasted for much of four hours, interspersed with breaks for lighter conversation and stretching. Her full pack of cigarettes well over half-gone by the end of the interview, the subject left allowing that she felt a bit better after talking about aspects of her life that haunted her for many years.
It came to pass that both Lancaster and the first subject privately and publicly endorsed the study. Each time they were asked of the study's "legitimacy", their support did not falter. In the months that followed, the researcher became a somewhat familiar face at NCCCW and perhaps a less threatening one due to the support and venturesome effort of Lancaster and this first of many subjects.

Later that same afternoon, the researcher met with Lancaster and two mental health case workers at NCCCW. It was agreed then that these three individuals would review the list of female criminal homicide offenders supplied them by the researcher. They would determine the whereabouts of each individual on the list. Each potential subject would be approached and informed of the general aim and design of the study. Over the succeeding two weeks, the two mental health workers organized the potential subjects into groups and separately met with the groups to explain the research and to solicit volunteers. The mental health workers were instrumental at this point in developing a sample. Informing the women at NCCCW of the study called for a personal effort on their part and ill-afforded time. Both performed above the researcher's expectations. In just two weeks time, the interviews commenced.
The research setting

NCCCW is a large sprawling compound in Raleigh, North Carolina. Originally built as a men's prison in 1933, it was converted to a female unit five years later. Prior to 1955, white and black women were housed separately within the prison. The Center was integrated in 1955 without serious incident. Currently, NCCCW has a resident population of just under 600 women, one of the largest women's prisons in the country. It has a correctional staff of slightly over 200 members. NCCCW boasts a number of work-training programs, among them cosmetology, secretarial science, welding, and upholstery. The Center has received some national notoriety as the one-time residence of convicted felon and rape victim Joan Little and as the subject of a CBS News television short. While NCCCCW is located in the southeastern part of Raleigh at the edge of a low-income black neighborhood, the men's state facility, Central Prison, is about three miles away in the southwestern corner of the city.

NCCCW is the only maximum security prison for women in the state. Its ten acre tract is surrounded by a chained link fence twice the height of the average woman. The fence is crowned with a two foot high V-shaped section of barbed wire, about six strands of it running the length of each side of the V. At strategic spots in the prison, near gates and such, this barbed wire V is entwined with ribbon wire. Ribbon wire is coiled stainless steel ribbon, shiny and
thin. Around each coil there protrude about a dozen double-edged razor blades. When touched or otherwise nudged, the numerous coils are designed to wrap about the intruding object, usually the appendage of a discouraged escapee. The fence itself is a menacing sight but its one consolation is that one can see through it, an advantage absent in prisons with brick or concrete walls.

As you enter the prison, you must pass through two electronically controlled gates that slide back and forth. Only one gate can be opened at one time. A resident is never permitted an unimpeded sprint to the outside. It also makes for a convenient sallyport where one is checked by a guard before entering and leaving the prison. The investigator was given a state identification card by the Department of Corrections so that he would not have to be checked every time he came to and left the Center.

Once cleared and through the second entrance gate, you come upon a courtyard with cement benches and tables impressed with checkerboards. Clusters of trees provide the courtyard with much needed shade during the hot, sticky weather of summer in the south. Green grass is everywhere. Paved sidewalks wind this way and that. An occasional dirt path exaggerates the shortest distance between two points. The place is not quite like a park or a college campus but it is a good deal more inviting than many other prisons.
To the left of the main courtyard as you enter is the health clinic and infirmary. To the right are the administration building, recreational areas, basketball courts, and gymnasium. Brick dormitories with barred windows and sparsely framed with shrubbery are clustered in the center of the yard. There is an apple tree over by the administration building. Squirrels and birds pay little attention to any of this. They romp freely inside and around the compound.

Guards and inmates patrol about the prison yard, much the way they do at other prisons. Guards are unarmed and clad in blue-grey uniforms. The residents are variously clothed. Each resident must wear a shirt or dress issued them. Its color is indicative of an assigned custody grade: blue for maximum security and green for medium security. Despite this requirement, the women have rather ingenious ways of maintaining individuality in their dress. Colorful scarves and bandanas are worn around the neck or used to wrap up hair in a certain style. Designer jeans give flair where there is little. Most of the women wear some form of garment over their prison issue shirt or dress. Some wear sweaters, others wear shawls, and still others use attractive belts and shoes. On a few of the women residents, only a hint of the prison issue peeks through. The various styles of dress in prison pay tribute to the diversity of tastes carried in from the outside and to the strength of the human spirit to retain a sense of self
against all odds. *7

Contrary to what many believe to occur in prison, guards and residents converse with each other quite a bit. Guards and inmates can get to know each other intimately. At NCCCW, these two groups talk of their families, of current events, and sometimes about the resident's court case. Coffee and cigarettes, everpresent in prison, are enjoyed together on many occasions. Undoubtedly, there is much sadness in prison but there is laughter as well. On sunny warm days, the prison yard is alive with people. Residents set the volume high on their large portable stereos, or "Boom boxes". They dance joyously with one another or alone and uninhibited should there be no available willing partner. As is the case with style of dress, this may be an expression of self in the closed world of prison life where the self is often threatened.

On occasion, a couple will stroll arm in arm or may be seen hugging and kissing. There are a few racially mixed couples but not many. Some of this behavior is simply close outward affection while some of it is a manifestation of prison homosexuality. Much the way it is on the outside, some of the prison community is accepting of these displays and other parts of the prison community greet it with

7. In the past, some criminologists thought that prisons had a very successful record of stripping an individual of his/her sense of self through the deprivation of personal clothing and such. This may have been the case with prisons years ago. See Sykes (19). This does not seem to be the case with prisons today. Inmates frequently bring to prison artifacts from the subcultures to which they belonged on the outside. Many prisons today are culturally heterogeneous. See Irwin (1980).
Visiting day is usually on Sunday and the prison is busy accommodating the volume of people coming and going. Friends and relatives may visit a resident in the gymnasium or in the designated picnic area when the weather is pleasant. A stream of visitors fills the administration building, waiting to be checked by guards. Any gifts the visitor might bring must be carefully examined by a guard for possible prison contraband. Jars of jam are emptied into plastic bags. A resident cannot have any glass that could be fashioned into a weapon. Similarly, baked goods are sliced in such a way as to check for concealed objects, and, at the same time, to pre-slice the baked good for a female resident not having the benefit of a knife or cutting utensil. Guards fulfill their duties to do these things, sometimes overzealously and sometimes reluctantly. Although they are visibly annoyed and impatient with all of this, the residents understand the role expectations and attendant duties of the guards.

Most of the interaction between guard and resident proceeds smoothly and informally. Nonetheless, there are clear boundaries to the relationship. Guards frequently call residents by their first names but residents must address a guard or staff member as Mr., Mrs., or Miss. There are occasional flare-ups as well. A guard must not allow a resident to enter a building without a pass. Residents who must face this rigidity day in and day out
sometimes verbally or physically lash out at a demanding guard. The guard handles such behavior with discretion, deciding to write up the resident for disciplinary action in one case and not in another. The relationship between resident and guard may be summarily described as one marked by a built-in tension between two roles. On the whole, however, and considering the circumstances, their daily interaction with one another goes smoothly. During the course of the present study, there were few serious incidents between guard and resident.

The actual interviews took place in four different rooms at two separate locations in the prison: the administration building and the diagnostic center. One room at the administration building where some of the interviews took place was a large, airy one with windows on two sides. A long oak table occupied the center of the room and several oak chairs were planted around it. Administrators often held conferences or planning sessions there. Next to this room was another, much smaller room used for attorney-client consultations or for private visiting. This was the least desirable interview setting because of its size, approximately five feet square. It could accommodate only two chairs and a small round coffee table. With the door closed, the smoke from a single lighted cigarette would quickly accumulate and bring tears to one's eyes. Only a few interviews were held here and only when the other rooms were unavailable.
Most of the interviews were held in the diagnostic center at the far end of the prison yard. There were two rooms available to interview there. One was a large conference room similar to the one in the administration building although it had modern and not oak furnishings. The other room at the diagnostic center was an office of a mental health caseworker. When the caseworker did not need her office, it was offered to the researcher. Both rooms at the diagnostic center were well suited to the needs of the interview, affording enough space and privacy.

About three or four interviews were undertaken each day. Three was an ideal number. Any amount over that tended to fatigue the researcher. In the early stages of interviewing and without knowledge of the potential for fatigue, the prison administration had scheduled five interviews per day. This was an impossible pace and was quickly remedied. Interviews generally ran approximately one and one-half hours with the shortest running fifty-five minutes and the longest spanning twelve hours in four separate sittings. Some people talk quite a bit and others hardly at all. Prison inmates are no different. The large share of interviews ran between one hour and fifteen minutes and two hours.

The interviews began at 9:00 am each morning and the work day would generally end around 5:00 pm. On occasion, interviews had to be conducted on the weekend if a subject worked outside the prison during the week. Some interviews
would run past five. If this was the case, they had to be conducted in the administration building as the rest of the prison would be locked up for meals and a count of residents. A researcher must accommodate the rigid schedule of prison life if he/she hopes to advance the study.

Between each interview was adequate time to write summary notes, rest, and prepare for the next interview. Much of the preparation was done the night before. Usually, a two week schedule of interviews had been drawn up with the administration. Copies were sent to the subjects who volunteered so that they would know when they were scheduled. Copies were also sent to the various work locations in the prison so that supervisors would be aware of the schedule. This system also let the researcher know which women were scheduled to be interviewed for the next day. He could therefore plan well beforehand.

The resident scheduled to be interviewed would be called on the telephone by the researcher and be reminded of the appointment and told where to report. With very few exceptions, the subjects promptly arrived for the interview. Only five or six had to be called more than once. The subject would enter the room and be offered a seat. The researcher usually sat kitty-corner to the edge of the table with his right arm rested squarely on the table and the interview schedule open in front of him. This seemed to be a fairly comfortable way of taking notes. The subject sat opposite him, also at an angle to the table. This allowed a
close proximity between researcher and subject but not an annoyingly close one. The subject was sure to get adequate personal space. An ashtray lay between the two and both could smoke when they chose to do so.

The subject was thanked for participating. She was told once again of the general aims of the study and that sensitive questions would have to be asked. She was assured that she could end the interview at any time and that she could decline to answer any questions she would rather not answer. The two most important assurances came immediately before the start of the interview. The subject was guaranteed confidentiality. No one else was present in the room when the woman was interviewed. The door was closed with no guard or other resident within earshot. The researcher pledged his willingness not to discuss with anyone anything that was said during the course of the interview. The second assurance guaranteed the subject anonymity in any future work with the information she would share with the researcher. All efforts would be made to change the names and places involved with her case. The same was true for the women who agreed to the follow-up interviews. They were given the same assurances once more.

The material the reader will encounter in this text incorporates the two pledges of confidentiality and anonymity. Names are changed as are most places and other details. The essence of each case, however, maintains its original integrity. The women who were taped, some of whose
stories are presented in these pages, chose their own pseudonyms. The researcher altered other details.

The interviews proceeded with few impediments. The researcher tried to provide an atmosphere for each interview that was relaxed and comfortable. The subjects could smoke, take breaks, and have coffee as they saw fit. Broadly speaking, the subjects talked openly about the many facets of their lives. While some people tend to think others guard the details of their life histories, when given an appropriate situation and climate, most of us will call forth the rich impressions of ourselves and others and of the events and experiences of our lives. The women of this study did this and with a generally remarkable recall of detail.

It is important to remember that this study is not overly concerned with the definition of an absolute reality. It is concerned instead with an intersubjective reality and with the ways in which criminally violent women make sense of their lives. The openness and willingness with which the sample women approached the study advanced that concern considerably.

8. This pledge was broken only once when the researcher interviewed an extremely depressed and anxious woman. The general depression observed by the researcher was relayed to a mental health worker familiar with the case. No details were discussed and, as it turned out, the despondent woman later personally discussed her concerns with a counselor.
The sample

The Director of Research for the Department of Corrections provided a list of offenders in North Carolina correctional facilities at the time. It represented a crude census of approximately 10,000 offenders. The list was reviewed for female criminal homicide offenders. A tally of 223 women serving time for criminal homicide in the state was taken from the list of 10,000 offenders. The list of 223 was given to Lancaster and her staff at NCCCW so that they could determine how many of those were actually in custody at the Center. Prison census lists are usually reasonably accurate but not absolutely so. Eventually, Lancaster reported that of the 223 names given her, 115 or around 52% were actually serving time at the Center at the time. The others had been released or were serving time elsewhere. In addition, nine women on the initial list were eliminated by the staff for mental or physical health reasons or because of some pending disciplinary action. Lastly, one woman had escaped since the census was taken.

The pared list of 115 women seemed to represent a fairly accurate estimate of the available criminal homicide offenders at NCCCW. Throughout the project, there was continuing attrition. Of the 115 women on the second list, 21 declined to participate, nine were paroled during the research but before they could be interviewed, three developed physical or mental health problems that mitigated against their participation, another three had scheduling
problems that could not be resolved, one was sent to a halfway house before she could be contacted, one was placed in disciplinary custody, and one was a safe keeper pending her trial for murder. The final sample count came to 76 women or 66% of the 115 women on the second list and approximately 34% on the initial census list of 223.

Seventy-six female criminal homicide offenders were separately interviewed over a three month period. Two months after these interviews were completed, nine of the 76 women were chosen for taped follow-up interviews. The nine selected seemed to be somewhat representative of the range of personalities and life experiences among the sample of 76.

The final sample offers a rather broad cross-section of women who kill. Twenty-nine (38%) women are white, 43 (57%) are black and four (5%) are Native Americans. Ten (13%) of the sample women were convicted of first degree murder, 33 (43%) had been convicted of second degree murder, 26 (34%) were serving time for voluntary manslaughter, and six (8%) were there for involuntary manslaughter. One other woman in the sample was serving time on a charge of conspiracy to commit murder. About half the women were between the ages of 23 and 37 at the time of the homicide. Half of the rest were younger than 23 and half of them older than 37. The youngest offender was 17 years old at the time of the homicide and six among the 76 were teenagers when they killed. The oldest offender was 56 at her offense while 17
(22%) women in the sample were forty or older. The information in the prison record files on religion of the offender was inconsistently recorded and hence not very reliable. Fifty-six women or about 75% of the sample were reported to be Protestant and the researcher's sense of the matter is that the overwhelming majority of these women are Baptists.

For each of the 76 individual acts of homicide among the 76 women in the sample, there was only one fatally wounded victim - that is, one death. According to some of the accounts of the offenses contained in the files and relying upon some of the reports of the women themselves, at times there were other victims involved but, if wounded at all, they were not fatally so. Thus, the 76 cases produced 76 homicide victims. Sixty-six (87%) victims were males and the remainder females. Twenty-three (30%) victims were white, 39 (51%) victims were black, 2 (3%) were Native Americans, and in the remaining 12 cases, file information as to the victim's race was missing. File information on the victim's age was also sketchy. Age of the victim was recorded in only 32 cases. Of those cases where victim's age was recorded, about half were between the ages of 31 and 46, inclusive. Two of the victims were over seventy years old, the oldest was 76, and five of the victims were children. All five children were between one month and two years old, inclusive.
Twenty-five (33%) of the homicides were committed with a handgun. The vast majority of sample women killed with a firearm of some type. In all, 52 (68%) women shot their victims to death. Thirteen (17%) women used knives on their victims, four (5%) used a poison of some type, one woman beat her victim to death with her fists, another with a blunt object. One woman used suffocation to kill and one woman caused another person's death by setting fire to a building. The remaining two women used other means, some combination of the means already listed.

Fifty-seven (75%) of the homicides took place in and around the home of the subject and victim, the subject, or the victim. Of these cases, fifteen (26% of the 57) took place in the bedroom, ten (18%) occurred in the yard, seven (12%) occurred in the kitchen, eight (14%) occurred in the bath, hall, or living room of the home. In the remaining 17 homicides occurred in various locations. Of 57 of the homicides occurred in the home or around it, four (5%) occurred in an automobile, in motion or at rest. Three (4%) happened in the street and ten (13%) occurred in some other public place. One of the victims was killed at the place where he and the subject worked and, for the remainign case, information on the offense location was not available.

The pattern of victim-offender relationships in the sample seems to mirror the patterns discovered in other studies of homicide. In the present study, 28 (37%) women killed their husbands although four of these women were
estranged from their husbands at the time of the offense. Another 20 (27%) killed their lovers and two of these women were estranged from their lovers at the time of the killings. In total, 48 (63%) women killed their partner of the opposite sex with whom they had had long-term or stable love relationships. Twelve (16%) of the sample women killed an acquaintance, seven (9%) killed strangers, five (7%) killed friends, and three (4%) of the women were responsible for the death of their own children. There was no information available on the victim-offender relationship for the remaining case. Generally speaking, it would appear that the large majority of the sample women victimize people they know and love.

Means of analysis

Once all 76 interviews were completed, some of the information in the schedules was coded and fed into the computer. This was done for two central reasons. One, the quantification of interview information was used to discover which life events and life currents as recounted by the sample women emerged as patterns. Through such analysis, one could gain a clearer picture of which phenomena were shared in the experiential worlds of the sample women and which phenomena tended to be of an idiosyncratic nature. The patterns discerned through this exercise could then be used as sensitizing tools for the qualitative reconstruction of the dominant approaches to everyday life among the sample women. Two, the quantification of some of the information
is directed beyond the goals of the present study. Wolfgang (1958) believes that the delineation of patterns and repetitions in studies of homicide advances the scientific and theoretical understanding of the action. By delineating patterns, writes Wolfgang, comparisons can be made between studies approaching the topic from differing angles and using varying means of study. Knowledge about homicide is enhanced through a loose triangulation of theoretical and empirical approaches.

The remaining chapters in this work are devoted to the presentation of the information about stress and female criminal homicide gained through the research that was just described. The chapters are devoted to various stages and areas in the daily lives of the women interviewed. Several tables of information are presented in each chapter. These tables exemplify the patterns and shared experiences of the sample women. Many times this is done in a purely descriptive vein. Occasionally, some tables are presented that attend to the within-group differences found to be significant among the sample women. Recalling from Chapter Two, many studies of criminal homicide overplay differences between criminal homicide offenders and the general population and underreport the differences found within the study group. The purpose of these types of comparison is to pinpoint differences within the group and determine if they are at all applicable to the general population and to the larger forces operating in the social context.
The nine follow-up interviews that were taped were transcribed and examined. Some of this information appears in the text in the form of case studies. While the delineation of patterns of life experiences among the sample women was instructive at many stages of the study, the qualitative analysis remains somewhat of an intuitive endeavor. The researcher, during the actual interview and in subsequent analysis of the interview, must search beyond what was merely said. A search for linkages of experience within a single case and among several cases takes place. To understand the frames of reference of individuals, one must become absorbed in the experiential world of the study group without being completely co-opted by it. It would serve little purpose to merely report what was said between the researcher and the women. That is the task of journalists. The job of the researcher is the demonstration of the ways in which these women meet the challenge of daily living and the illustration of how they relate to their homicidal behavior.

Four case studies are presented in the coming chapters. Comments from the women are generously spread throughout as well. The cases and comments spring from the written notes of the interviews conducted with the schedule and from the interviews that were taped. They are not to be taken as literal translations of what transpired during the interviews. Rather, they are meant to be impressionistic images of the life worlds of the women interviewed. Some
information that would tend to identify the subject, such as names and places, have been altered. The essence of meaning and experience in the lives of the samples has, hopefully, been untouched. Each woman is given a new surname. The women chose their own first names. They determined their personal nominal reference in these pages. In some cases, their chosen names are implicitly telling.

Some limitations of the study

As previously stated, the general aim of the study is directed toward the investigation of the structure and dynamics of the lives of women who kill and the understanding of how all of this is related to their criminal violence. The aim is fulfilled through the analysis of the events and experiences of female criminal homicide offenders as they themselves recall them.

If that is what the study is and does, there are several things the study is not and does not do. It is not a study of sex differences in criminal homicide per se. There is little comparison with males that is offered. It is also not a comparative study among women by type of crime. The research focuses upon women found guilty of and sentenced for criminal homicide in the state of North Carolina. The findings of the present research may bear upon these other topics, but they do not directly address them.
The research carried out in this project is not in the vein of strict hypothesis testing. Some general empirical questions are laid down beforehand but not in such a way where they can be accepted or rejected through an empirical process of verification. There is no control group in the design and the design manifests no quasi-experimental intricacy or rigor. The units of analysis in the study are the lives of criminally violent women. As such, its design might best be termed a multi-case analysis. There are 76 cases.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study does not presume there to be a verifiable absolute reality. Rather, social life is viewed as an intersubjective phenomenon much the way Schutz and like-minded phenomenologists view it. A good way of understanding how and why criminal homicide presents itself might be to explore the subjective worlds of the individuals implicated by the action. This would make for a grounded understanding of criminal homicide.

This study relies heavily if not almost exclusively upon the accounts of the actors involved, female criminal homicide offenders. Whenever one relies upon such accounts, there are two processes that may distort the intersubjective portrait of what occurred in the past. In some way, distortion is an important process for consideration since an actor may not consider his/her perception a distorted one at all. In any case, the two processes are selective recall and retrospective interpretation. Selective recall refers
to the human tendency to remember some things and forget others. Sometimes there are good reasons for this. For example, a person might want to forget an unpleasant experience and embellish a pleasant one. Of course selective recall played some part in the present study. On the other hand, when asked to recount their lives in some detail, many women in the study found they remembered things they had long since forgotten. What a person remembers and what a person forgets may figure in the reasons for a person acting in a given way.

One other aspect of the research is germane. Recall may indeed be selective but it would appear from this study that it is also consistent. The women who retold their life stories twice, once with the interview schedule and once on tape, told remarkably similar tales both times. Impressions of past experience can sometimes run deep.

The other distorting process, retrospective interpretation, refers to the reinterpretation of past experience from a new position or status. In this case, the women of the study are each entrenched in the role of murderer. This is a potentially powerful role as one can imagine. In the light of this role, the women may run the risk of over-psychologizing the past or playing the role of murderer too closely to the generally-held expectations of what murderers are like. This process is certainly something to keep in mind when digesting the accounts of the sample women. Another view of this, however, is that the
researcher or reader can be overly distrustful of the subject and overly suspicious of what she says. As one reads over the following pages, it is equally important to keep in mind that the women of this study are now relatively powerless people with little to gain by misrepresenting their pasts and their feelings.
THE LIVES OF CRIMINALLY VIOLENT WOMEN

Volume II
Chapters 6 through 10

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Chapter Six

Life as a Child

The childhoods of the study women are addressed in this chapter. Broad impressions of common early age experience emerge from their autobiographical accounts. The relationship between the events and conditions of childhood and adult behavior may reside in the subjective order and meanings assigned to childhood experience by social actors.

Our early years are times when each of us learns about the workings of everyday life. In our youth, we are the novices of the social and cultural worlds. We learn how to participate in these worlds. The dramaturgical metaphor can be carried to excess when looking at real life, but it is helpful in framing an understanding of human action. Imagine an actress who is awarded a part in a new play. She must learn her own role in the drama and she must have some sense of the roles of other actors in the play. This requires practice, concentration, and timing. In real life, the learning of social roles calls for observation, reflection, and experience. We become aware of what is expected of us by others and, in turn, we form expectations of others' behavior. We observe that behavior can change.
with the social scenery, the social setting. We tap prior experience to process new bits of social information and we behave according to the sense we make of it. Childhood demands a lot of like processing, and much of it we carry to adulthood. Roles emerge, take form, but change as new situations arise. Adaptibility is singular in its value to everyday living, even in childhood.

As we know, the learning of social roles does not always proceed smoothly. The social setting can change abruptly. The pace of life can have a rhythm that one has not been led to expect. The logic of everyday happenings may not be clear, may seem alien. The social world becomes a confusing or unsettling place to be. This can greatly interfere with the acquisition and development of social roles. Children can be acutely affected by such chaos in their everyday lives, given that they are the novices of the social world. They are not yet equipped with sufficient experience or reasoning ability to handle severe disruption of roles that are not long born. The life world may not make sense. Many of the women interviewed in this study described their childhoods in precisely those terms. The events and conditions of their early years "just didn't make any sense." Even as adults, many of the women have failed to successfully manage the trauma of their childhoods. They will readily tell you that.
The resurgence of childhood

The idea that trauma experienced in childhood may resurface in adulthood is a common one. Many theorists have advanced the notion, Freud being perhaps the most notable among them. Using Freud's general framework, Erik Erikson addresses childhood fear and anxiety in his work, *Childhood and Society* (1963). Erikson casts fear and anxiety as separate phenomena. Fear is thought to be a state of apprehension in response to a real and recognizable threat. Anxiety is a diffused state of being. It refers to tension that enlarges the illusion of an outside danger. The threat is less recognizable and difficult to track to a specific event. In a way, it can be seen as a chronic stress condition that may emanate from a variety and plurality of sources. Anxiety might even arise from real fears, real threats. An individual may translate fears into an anxiety about the larger world not directly connected to the original fears.

For example, a child is rightfully fearful of a physically abusive parent. The parent poses an identifiable threat. That same fear may dissolve into anxiety when the same child anticipates attacks from others who have not attacked her in the past. The fear of one person becomes a fear of people in general. Exactly why this happens is not always clear, but the anxiety is certainly understandable from the viewpoint of the child. In any case, Erikson believes that childhood fears and anxieties can inform adult
behavior. Childhood experiences often accompany men and women throughout their lives.

Janov (1970), the developer of primal therapy, provides a dramatic assessment of the impact of early age trauma on later behavior. His work follows a thematic line similar to that of Erikson. Anxiety, Janov believes, is an unfocused state of tension and one that arises in childhood. Janov further believes that anxiety is truly a generalized fear of not being loved. One's personality may develop to protect one from this generalized fear. Personality, then, springs partly from early age trauma and resulting anxiety. As time passes, individuals try, at times desperately, to bury deep in their consciousness the childhood threats they faced. Personality may be the protection needed against possibly overwhelming anxiety.

Much of psychological life may be devoted toward the management of the anxiety that has roots in childhood. Janov develops a primal pain scenario. Primal pains, as Janov sees them, relate to shattering childhood experiences. An individual can be psychologically scarred through experience with other people. Shattering experiences may range from a physical victimization to a perceived emotional deprivation. Regardless of the exact type of shattering event or condition, individuals can interpret them as signals that indeed one is not loved, wanted, or accepted. While there may be many such experiences in a child's life, Janov suggests that one particular experience may stand
above the others. A major primal scene, writes Janov, is the single most powerfully painful event in childhood. He describes a major primal scene as "that moment of icy, cosmic loneliness, the bitterest of all epiphanies" (1970:29). Much of all other life experience may be referenced by that primal scene. The primal scene may endure as an orienting attitude through which one approaches and evaluates the contours of remaining life experience. Through this process, Janov believes that adult life experience may fuel rather than extinguish the pain one felt in childhood.

That an experience can have a life beyond the immediate is an idea that surfaces in cinema and in literature as well. Kane had his Rosebud. Truman Capote learned of sharing, separation, and death through his relationship as a boy with his elderly cousin. He commits his lesson to words in A Christmas Memory. Sybil's multiple personality is seen by many as an attempt to escape the tragic pain of her youth. Her disturbed mother may have disturbed Sybil's persona with each physical and psychological blow she rendered. Even some great comic geniuses are said to have turned to their comedy to manage the small but heartfelt tragedies of their childhood. Humor may lessen the pain but it does not erase its source.

Perhaps Janov's work overstates the power of childhood trauma. After all, most of us live fairly healthy lives in spite of some troubling childhood events. It is plausible,
however, that childhood trauma does play some part in our behavior. Presumably, one is better off with fewer rather than more emotionally shattering memories of youth. An accretion of trauma at an early age may contribute to chronic psychic pain and to an increasing awareness that all that one experiences in the future will have a similar outcome, frustration.

The essence of Erikson's and Janov's ideas is preserved in the present study. Life stress may certainly obtain in childhood and negatively perceived childhood events may have lives in adult memory and action. Many of the women in the study vividly recalled the pain of their youth. As they did, some were teary-eyed, some still terribly hurt, and a great many were somewhat angry at what they felt were uncalled for violations of their childhood innocence. A few of the events described by the women in general were extremely trying: sexual molestation, beatings, and deaths for example. Many more were seemingly trivial events that were enlarged by the chronically stressful living situations in which they found themselves as children.

One woman in the study, a middle-aged black woman found guilty of killing her husband, recalled what Janov might call a major primal scene. This woman came from a rather large family, she was one of five children. She sensed early in life that her mother did not like her. One day, her mother returned home from an outing of afternoon shopping. Her mother had purchased slacks for her brother
and red dresses for each of her three sisters. There was no
dress, red or otherwise, for her. Almost two decades hence,
she recalls the moments sadly. She said she knew then that
she was not loved and that it did not appear as though she
ever would be. An examination of her later close personal
relationships reveals that traces of this childhood event
are still with her. She expected relationships to fail.
No one could love her. True to form, most of her adult
relationships ended abruptly, her last explosively. The red
dress not given was her Rosebud. To her, it was and remains
a potent image.

This chapter details the various trauma experience by
the women of the study. There is a special emphasis upon
events characterized by aggression and loss since these were
recurrent themes. Comparisons are made by race and by the
severity of the homicidal acts to see if the life
experiences of the sample women differ along these two
dimensions.

The setting of childhood

The vast majority, 47 women (67%), of the sample women
reported that they were raised in a rural area. In
contrast, U.S. Census data indicates that, in the South
Atlantic states in 1980, 12.3 percent of the population were
from farm areas. This represents a drop from 1950 when
about 20 percent of the South Atlantic population was from
farm areas (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).
Forty-two of these women said that they were raised in farming communities. Agriculture is an integral part of the North Carolina economy. The climate and geography are ideal for tobacco, for example. Many of the women's parents were themselves farmers or sharecroppers, and many of the women remember helping their families with the chores. Proportionately similar proportions of white and nonwhite women in the sample grew up in these small farming communities that dot the rural south. The remainder of women in the sample reported being raised in communities with populations exceeding 2,500. Sixteen of the women said that they grew up on mid to large-sized cities with populations over 50,000. Twelve of these young urban dwellers were nonwhite. Among the sample women who were not raised in rural areas, it appears that the white women tended to live in small cities, and the nonwhite women, particularly blacks, more likely spent their youth in larger urban areas.

Farming and sharecropping did not seem to be particularly lucrative for the families of the sample women. Most appeared to be reared in an impoverished environment that currently characterizes over a tenth of North Caroline families. Available national data indicate that, in 1979, 11.6 percent of the families in North Carolina lived below the poverty level. But this is a significant drop from 1969, when 16.3 percent of North Caroline families were below the poverty level. By way of
Table 6.1: With Whom Lived at Nine and Sixteen Years of Age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both natural parents</th>
<th>Solo parent</th>
<th>Natural and step-parent</th>
<th>Grandparents</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Alone</th>
<th>Husband or paramour</th>
<th>Total*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nine years of age</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixteen years of age</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Note: figures represent percentage of total cases in each category.
comparison, the percentages for the U.S. population were 10.7 and 9.6 for 1969 and 1979 respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).

None of the women said that their families were well-to-do or belonged to the upper-income stratum. Only 16 said that theirs were middle-income families, and 14 of these women were white. Thirty-two women reported their families to be low to middle income families and 27 said that they came from low-income families. Proportionately far more of the poorer women were nonwhite. White women tended to report higher levels of income for their families. Put simply, the women in the study sample apparently had financially austere childhoods and this tended to be more characteristic of the nonwhite than of the white women in the sample. Of particular note, however, is that this was seldom a source of complaint among the women. They tended to see their parents as good providers, doing the best they could for their respective families. The women often relayed that most other families in their communities didn't have much either so, as children, they rarely felt deprived or noticeably poor. Only now, as adults, have they compared their childhoods with higher standards of living.

Each woman in the study was asked with whom she lived at two points in her childhood: at nine years of age and at sixteen years of age. Table 6.1 illustrates their responses. At nine years of age, a significant majority of the women lived with both natural parents and another
sizable group lived with only one parent. Thirteen of the 14 women who reported living with one parent lived with their mothers. Ten women said that they lived with a natural parent and a step-parent. Seven of these ten women lived with their natural mothers and stepfathers. Seven women said that they lived with their grandparents and the remaining seven reported living with others not mentioned above. These others include aunts, uncles, siblings and institutions.

As Table 6.1 illustrates, the living arrangements of the group had significantly changed by the age of 16. Far fewer lived with both natural parents and fewer lived with a natural parent and step-parent. Also, fewer lived with grandparents or others. On the other hand, more lived with a single parent. Fifteen of these women living with a single parent lived with their mothers, a pattern similar to the one at nine years of age. Further, of the six women living with a natural parent and step-parentfill-in had as their natural parent their mother. This is also similar to the pattern at nine years of age. When their natural parents were divided, the sample women tended to stay with their natural mothers, at nine and at 16 years of age. This is probably not unlike the pattern one would find in the general population at present.

Of particular note is the number of women living by themselves or with a husband or paramour at 16. Seven women were living on their own and 12 were living with a male love
companion at this age. Taken together, these women represent exactly one quarter of the sample. Living alone or with another in a love relationship can be difficult at such an early age. Many of these women expressed regrets at their living arrangements. They said that they were ill-equipped to handle the special burdens of living alone or with another. They were hoping that these new arrangements would ease the pressures they were experiencing at home. They moved out but were met with new, sometimes greater pressures. Financial responsibilities hit them hard. The romantic notions of a love relationship that most had harbored were soiled by the day-to-day routine that they had not imagined. Most of these early-age love relationships did not endure, a few became violent.

Some of the women expressed great relief when they finally left home. They were in a minority, judging from the recollections of the sample women. What Table 6.1 shows most clearly is the general transience that characterizes the study group in their youth. A change in the constellation of one’s primary group, usually the family when one is young, requires significant adjustment. A common theme that runs through the life stories of these women is the expressed difficulty of this adjustment. When living arrangements change, one loses some roles and acquires others. When the change is rapid or frequent, the loss may be pronounced and the acquisition may be confusing. It is hard to develop one's sense of self and an ease with
the surrounding world when the social scenery keeps changing.

Male rather than female siblings appeared to predominate in the childhood lives of the sample women. Each woman was asked how many brothers and sisters she had. Only two women were without any siblings. Fifteen women said that they had no sisters while only five said that they had no brothers. Forty-seven women said that they had between two and five sisters. Forty-five women said that they had a like number of brothers. Six of the women reported having more than five sisters. One woman reported having as many as nine. Eleven women said that had more than five brothers, eleven brothers being the single greatest number. These figures include both natural and step siblings. It was often difficult for the women to sort out which was which, particularly those women from the large families that spring from several marriages. At least two women could not fathom a difference at all.

Already mentioned in this section is the changing homelife scenery that seems to describe the childhoods of the sample women. Among these women, there was also a good deal of physical moving about in childhood. Only 15 women reported never having moved before or during their eighteenth year. Sixteen had moved once or twice during their youth. Forty-six women, or more than 60% of the sample, said that they had moved three or more times. Nine reported moving ten or more times during childhood and four
of these couldn't recall a precise number of moves but said the number exceeded twenty. It appears that nonwhite women tended to move a bit more than white women in the sample. Perhaps this is related to their relative income levels reported earlier. Nonwhite women, who tended to be the poorer of the lot, may have moved more frequently as a result of forced eviction, the availability of low-income housing, or the peculiar demands of share-cropping or migrant farming. In any case, moving one's place of residence also requires some adjustment. One must leave old friends and neighbors behind and grow accustomed to new ones. Sometimes this can be quite painful, particularly for children. While the income level of their families was not a source of complaint among the sample women, moving around in childhood was. A significant number of women said that they disliked moving as a child because they had to leave their friends. They also did not enjoy the special status of 'new kid' on the block once they had relocated.

The changing familial and social setting in childhood is an important contextual consideration in understanding the life stories of these women. A change in the immediate social environment requires some adjustment. Too much change in the setting can be burdensome. For one thing, it is difficult to develop steady sources of support when the principle actors in one's life keep changing. The situation can worsen if a person has a problem but no identifiable or trusted helping network. Imagine that a close-knit group of
people of which you are a member is asked to fell a tree. Working together, each working separately but cooperatively, the task is accomplished in a short time. One might tether the tree with a rope, another might clear the area where the tree will fall, and another might operate the chainsaw. Now imagine the same chore but without the group network. Occasionally, someone will help you but they quickly leave. And their contribution is marginal at best. Perhaps they sawed off a tree limb or they held the rope only for a short moment. Understandably, your task would be made much more difficult. Worse, the tree might topple on you. A reliable support network can make the difference between the successful management of a problem and personal disaster. It is well worthwhile to consider the childhood experiences of the study women against this backdrop.

Childhood Loss and Dislocation

Loss may here be defined as an event characterized by some immediate withdrawal or absence from everyday life. It is understood from the point of view of the social actor. The death of a family member is one example, losing one's job is another. Loss is dislocating. It is certainly disruptive of everyday life. Psychic and social costs may accrue. One can feel some psychological pain at losing something or someone to which one had grown familiar or accustomed. The social consequences involve the loss of a role one had been playing. For example, unemployment can be traumatizing for both the psychic shock of the event and the
withdrawal from a work setting with an elaborate array of interdependent roles. Roles can be dependable channel markers in everyday life. In their absence or at the sudden loss of one of them, navigation through life is made more difficult. The texture of life has been altered and one must adjust to the new configuration.

· Death as loss

The death of an individual who is a regular in everyday interaction is perhaps the exemplar of loss. Primary relationships, those marked with a high degree of frequency and intensity of interaction, are the reference points of everyday life. They can be familial relationships. They can also be love or friendship relationships, to name a few. When death strikes a primary relationship, loss may be at its most pronounced form. The culturally encouraged and accepted state of grief that attends the death of a close one signals our recognition of the needs of survivors to mourn and adjust. Loss is phenomenologically rooted.

The sample women experienced a considerable amount of this type of loss in their childhoods. Sixteen women reported losing their fathers in childhood, that is to say on or before their eighteenth birthdays. Six women reported losing their mothers. The loss of either parent significantly affects the family group. There is the funeral and mourning period to endure. Financial resources may be strained by the loss of a wage-earner. From the child's point of view, the remaining parent often begins to
date others. New members may be introduced to the family through remarriage. Many of the sample women who had lost a parent reported these problems. While these said that they did not fully understand the parental death, they were well aware of the changes in the family that it brought.

The death of a sibling also alters the configuration of the family. Nine women reported losing at least one brother in childhood. Four of these reported losing at least two brothers and two women reported losing three. Eight women reported losing at least one sister and three women said that two sisters had passed away. These sibling deaths occurred in or before the eighteenth year of the sample women. Many more women would experience sibling deaths later on in life, as they would parental deaths. Of the sibling deaths in childhood, a common remark heard among the women was that they felt like they had lost a very close friend. This was true of the sample women from both large and small families. Perhaps this is a testament to the unique styles of role playing by siblings. No matter how many brothers and sisters one has, the loss of any can be acutely felt. Each adds something to the family group and that something is lost in his/her death.

Of apparent note is the gender difference in the familial deaths experienced by the sample women in their childhoods. More women lost fathers than mothers and more women lost brothers than sisters. In the face of this difference, there was no discernible difference in the
reported emotional responses at the time. The women reported a sense of sadness and loss, regardless of the sex of the deceased.

The sample were asked if, in their childhoods, any close individuals other than immediate family had passed away. Over half of the sample, 39 women, said that they had suffered at least one such loss in or before their eighteenth year. The deceased included grandparents, aunts and uncles, and school and neighborhood friends. Obviously, some deaths were more touching than others. Again, it appears that the closer the relationship is perceived by the subject, the more likely the loss is to be pronounced.

The emotional responses to death in their early years shared sadness and grief as their theme. Some responses were marked with anger or confusion. This might owe to the youth of the women at the time and the inexperience with the reality of mortality. Death is final and this is not easily digestible, especially for children. Here is a sampling of response from the study women as they recalled deaths in childhood.

I cussed God out. If you're so great, God, then why the hell did you let my brother die?

Well, they had gang wars when I was growing up. I was about eight years old. This older girl in the neighborhood, a friend of me and my sister, she got real bad off. Drugs, you know? They found her dead on a bridge, cut up in little pieces and put in a pillow case.

My grandfather passed when I was 17. I thought I was going crazy. It was my stepfather's daddy but we was real close. It was the first time it
happened to me. I don't know how I adjusted. I really don't. I wouldn't go up and see
grandmother after that because I knew he
wouldn't be there. I wouldn't admit he was
gone. The doctor put me on nerve pills.

He got killed, my boyfriend. I don't know whether
anybody shot him. I never knewed how it
happened. He was found on the side of a highway
with a gun. I know I don't believe he did
it (shot himself). I don't know. It hurt me, I
can tell you that.

My Aunt Lima died right after I started my
senior year. The summer before that, I found
out she had brain cancer. It spread, I guess.
When they opened her up to do surgery, they just
closed her back up. There was nothing they
could do. That summer, between my junior and
senior year, I stayed with her and sort of
nursed her. She got worse. She went blind.
She died three weeks after I started school.
Oh, it was rough! I didn't want to go to the
funeral home. But after I went, I felt better.
She looked more peaceful in the casket than the
last time I'd seen her.

My friend Maqqie stayed over my house one night.
We were pretty tight. Maqqie's mom was supposed
to call the next morning. We waited for a long
time. When the phone finally rang it was
Maqqie's older brother. Her mama and stepdaddy
had burned up in their house the night before.
It was hard. It upset all of us.

Occasionally, a woman would mention a public figure or
star with whom they identified. They had no personal contact
with such a person but the figure was considered to be a
part of their lives. The death of that person left them
feeling hollow. Elvis Presley was mentioned at least twice
and lesser known musicians were mentioned as well. While
these deaths were not formally recorded as deaths of close
individuals in the study, their impact upon some women is
not diminished. One woman, a politically active teenager who worked for Robert Kennedy in the turbulent sixties, recalls hearing the news of his assassination:

I wasn't old enough to vote but I worked for him. I heard it on the news. You know when you wake up and you're not sure what's going on. I wasn't sure I heard right. I thought maybe I dreamed it. Because I had a bad sense he was going to get shot. I knew somebody would shoot him. That's when he carried California. That's where he was. And when I woke up, I thought I heard but I didn't want to hear it right. It was so sad.

Other forms of loss

Besides the death of a close one, there are many other forms of loss that may attend childhood stress and an early sense of social dislocation. The women in the study were asked a variety of questions concerning possible loss in childhood and adolescence. Remember that childhood stress may have an immediate impact and a lasting one. A stressful life event may affect an individual on its occasion. It may also endure as a mental image that precipitates psychic pain and interferes with later role playing in everyday life.

Childhood injury and illness can be forms of loss. An illness or injury can interrupt the routine of day to day living for a child and an adult. A person may be confined to the home or a hospital and this can temporarily interfere with everyday role playing. A section of the experiential world is altered. The sick role involves a different set of expectations and behaviors than the "well" role. The patient sees him/herself and is usually seen by others as "out of service." The normal responsibilities of everyday
Table 6.2: Childhood Injuries and Illnesses.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood injuries</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood illnesses</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.*
living may be suspended. To many, this is attractive because it provides for a rare respite from the pressures of daily routine. Moreover, the patient may be pampered, catered to, and otherwise become a center of attention. Injury and illness have obvious drawbacks, however. Aside from the attendant social dislocation, injury and illness brings with it a recurring realization that the world is not free from physical pain. Recuperation can also be slow and boring, particularly when the condition is a severe one. Successful recovery often times requires a rather restrictive therapy of limited activity. Energy must be reserved for the anatomical defense system. The body must mend itself. One further point merits a mention. Injury and certainly many illnesses may be related to high stress levels. It is not always clear, however, when the condition is the consequence or cause of stress. It can be both.

Table 6.2 illustrates the responses of the sample women to questions about childhood injury and illness. In this case, injury and illness apply only to the more serious conditions. The common cold or scraped knee, while certainly bothersome, are not here typified as serious. Some examples of serious injuries include concussions, broken bones, skin lacerations that require stitching, and severe muscle sprain. Examples of severe childhood illnesses include tonsilitus, prolonged or pronounced fever, asthma, appendicitus, glandular disorders, and mumps. The table shows how many sample women reported having one, two,
or three or more injuries or illnesses. Forty-seven of the sample women reported having at least one serious childhood illness and 31 women reported at least one serious childhood injury. The most commonly reported illness was tonsillitis with 12 women reporting this condition as a childhood experience. Importantly, an aggregate category of respiratory disorders, to include pneumonia, asthma, bronchitis, and chronic shortness of breath applies to a greater number of women than does tonsillitis. Thirteen women reported such childhood respiratory problems. A handful of women reported more severe illnesses in their childhood: three reported recurring seizures of some type, two reported chicken pox, one reported sickle-cell anemia, and another reported suffering from spinal meningitis. Only two women reported a childhood mental disorder.

As for the distribution of injuries, 11 women reported serious lacerations, 10 said they had a broken bone in their youth, and ten reported a serious head injury. In comparison, Palmer (1960) offers data on injury and illness among 51 male criminal homicide offenders. Fourteen of the 51 subjects suffered from epilepsy in childhood, nine from pneumonia, and 11 from measles. Thirteen of the 51 suffered a childhood head injury, two reported broken limbs, and eight subjects apparently suffered severe lacerations caused by physical fight, animal bite, or car accident. Palmer typifies these illnesses and injuries as forms of childhood physical frustration that may have contributed to violent
expression later in life.

It may be that Palmer's thesis applies to the subjects in the present study. However, since this study has no comparison group and since the sample is far from random, it is difficult to assess the applicability of Palmer's thesis with any degree of certainty. Here, it will suffice to report that the women who reported childhood injuries and illnesses generally recalled that they disrupted the routine course of their childhood lives. The physical conditions were a nuisance. They were bothersome but not overly traumatic. Judging from the women's accounts of these conditions, it would seem that the more severe or serious the injury and illness, the more difficult was the adjustment to the malady.

The familial setting for these women was marked by still other forms of loss. Twenty-nine women said that they had been separated from the parents at some point in their childhoods. These separations lasted anywhere from one month to several years. Reasons for the separations included an unemployed parent leaving the home in search of work, the incarceration of a parent, marital problems, hospitalization of a parent, and the subject being sent off to a boarding school or institution. Nine women said that their natural parents had divorced on or before the subjects' eighteenth birthdays. This number does not include the divorce of natural parents before the subjects were born. It also does not include the cases where the
parents were permanently separated but not officially divorced. To be accurate, the parental situation of a fair number of women was rather amorphous. Some had no recollection of who their natural father was. The mothers of these women had lived in a common-law relationship with several men. During the course of the interviews, there were often instances where the mother figure was constant but the father figure was transient. The mother role was played by only one woman but the father role was played by several men over time. Understandably, the mother role became the central focus for the women who lacked a steady father figure.

Well, I wasn't raised with my real father so I don't know much about him.

I look back on my childhood and it was an in-and-out situation (as far as my father was concerned).

My step-daddy just wasn't around very much.

My daddy moved out and moved right across the street. He'd come over sometimes and my mama acted like she didn't even see him. Yup, she did. She acted like she didn't even see him. He got the message, I guess, and left. I had no idea. You know they're not divorced to this day?

The threat of suicide by a significant other is indicative of impending or possible loss. While no women in the study reported the actual suicide of a family member, a few remember threats of suicide by family members. In the study sample, there were three cases of a mother threatening
suicide and one case of a father threatening suicide. There were three cases of sisters threatening suicide and two cases of brothers doing so. The women reporting the threats said that they were shaken by them. Without exception, such threats were integral parts of the childhood stories told by the women who experienced them. Each of the affected women recalled thinking about the reasons for someone wanting to kill him/herself. They did begin to entertain what their lives would be like in the absence of these people.

One form of loss in the childhood lives of the sample women directly pertains to crime. That form is the criminal arrest of a family member. Often, it is the first time the women had contact with the criminal justice system. Twenty women said that, in their childhoods, their fathers had been arrested at least once. Eight women said their mothers had been arrested. Thirty-seven women reported the arrest of a brother and 12 reported the arrest of a sister. Clearly, in the childhood lives of the study women, male family members were more apt to be arrested than were female members. Eight women in the study recall themselves getting in trouble with the police but none report being arrested. Apparently, those with whom the study women shared familial life in childhood had greater formal contact with the police than they did themselves.

School experiences can be marked by certain forms of loss. Dropping out of school is perhaps the most pronounced form. As a state, North Carolina does not compare favorably
to the U.S. in percent of population with high school degrees. In 1980, slightly over 55 percent of North Carolinians over age 25 completed high school while over 66 percent of the total U.S. population had (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).

A vast majority of the study women, 63, dropped out of school before they could graduate. A few made attempts to return once they left but usually without success. Twenty-eight women said that they had to repeat at least one grade and six of these women did so more than once. Whether dropping out or repeating a grade, the individual is torn from an established interactional setting. This form of loss tended to be quite dramatic for the study women in general. Repeating a grade involved not only an adjustment to a new peer group but also subjects one to some ridicule by the established group. Many women expressed feeling a sense of failure at the time and also feeling that in some way they had disappointed their parents. Of course dropping out of school severs one completely from the school environment. It could be that some women met the feeling of failure with voluntary withdrawal from its source. That may have been their solution. At the same time, the majority of women who dropped out expressed regrets later on in their lives.

That's the way it is out there and I thought I was doing a big thing when I got to be eighteen and quit school. Oh, shoot! I thought I was doing something real big! But I found out the hard way. My daddy used to say, 'Hey, you get out there and find you got to row your own boat and you're going to find it's not so easy to
do.' And he told the truth. That was too young to quit school.

Dropping out eased the pressure at the moment but it may have intensified the pressure of adult life. Suitable employment is hard to find without a high school diploma.

The study women as a group did not tend to be joiners of organized clubs and activities, in or out of school. Forty-two women said they belonged to no school organization and 61 said they belonged to no organization outside of school. Some of this was due to the fact that many lived in rural areas and this militated against them staying after school for other activities. Getting to and from school took some time and effort. Still, this apparent lack of participation made the women more dependent on their family members and neighbors for recreation and support. Their overall support network suffers when the family network isn't strong. Excessive loss in the absence of a healthy support network can lead to a sense of increasing isolation.

One woman in the study provides a poignant illustration of this isolation, this loneliness. She moved quite a bit as a child. She lost her father to divorce when she was about six years old. Here, she describes how she felt when she had to adjust to new school settings.

When I'd get used to one school we'd be moving someplace else. I'd have to get used to another school. And there I was getting acquainted all over again with new teachers and new friends. Just sort of starting out all over. That's the way it seemed. I kept starting over and starting over. I got to the point where I hated school. I didn't know what the school kids would be saying. Maybe I was the new kid, but they'd look at me in strange ways. I always
rode the bus because we lived in the country. I'd get to school and not know where to go or who to talk to. I'd always be standing out in the cold. Nobody showed me anything. There I'd stand in the cold, you know? Sometimes I'd cry. After I got situated, it wouldn't be so bad. But there was always someone picking on me. Always somebody. It was really difficult for me. Because I was never the type of person who could come right out and introduce myself or ask where's this place or where's that place. I don't know. I always had that fear. I get that fear sometimes now when I'm out there. I guess I don't know if I'll ever get over it. But I'm more open to it now than when I was growing up. I'll push myself sometimes to ask somebody when I don't know where I am.

A childhood loss index

While the design of the study does not lend itself to between-group comparisons, it does allow for within-group comparisons. This is to say that the whole of the sample group can be broken down into subgroups of meaningful categories. These subgroups can then be compared with one another based upon other variables. Earlier in the text, two sets of subgroups were identified. They were drawn from other homicide studies where they proved meaningful in between-group comparisons. These two sets are racial subgroups and homicide type subgroups. In this study, the sample may be broken down into groups of white and nonwhite women. The sample can also be divided into groups of women convicted of first degree murder, second degree murder, voluntary manslaughter, and involuntary manslaughter.*1 By breaking the study sample down in this way, it is possible to see if there are differences between the racial groups and differences among varying homicide types.
The first dimension, by which these groups can be compared is the degree of loss that characterizes childhood. A childhood loss index was created to measure the degree of childhood loss. The index is comprised of 25 childhood experiences with loss (see Appendix Three). Each indicator was recoded as a dichotomous variable. A subject was given a score of one if the indicator was relevant to her childhood experience and zero if it was not. The value range of the childhood loss index is from 0 to 25 points.

Table 6.3 presents the breakdown of childhood loss by race and type of criminal homicide. The figures in each cell represent the mean index score for each group. The figures in parenthses represent the number of cases in each cell. The size of the sample, 76 cases, is relatively small and this renders some of the cells even smaller. The table addresses the issue of whether race or criminal homicide types are predictors of childhood loss, here the dependent variable. While the differences between the subgroups tend not to be statistically significant due to the small cell sizes, the table does allow for some broad patterns. It appears that the white women in the sample had a mean childhood loss score less than the mean for the entire sample. Given the rather large value range of the index,

1. In a crosstabulation of homicide type and victim-offender relationship, there is an indication of some relationship between the two. Women who killed strangers were more likely to be convicted of the more extreme forms of criminal homicide. Women who killed persons they knew (other than paramours) were slightly more likely to be convicted of the lesser forms. Women convicted of killing a paramour were more evenly distributed. See Appendix Two.
however, the differences between the two racial groups do not appear to be great. The white and nonwhite women in the study experienced similar levels of childhood stress characterized by loss.

Breaking the sample down by criminal homicide type, the two racial groups exhibit a similar pattern. For both white and nonwhite women, manslaughter rather than murder offenders exhibit higher mean index scores.

In a broad sense, a quantitative and qualitative assessment of childhood loss in the lives of the study women suggests several things. As a group and by their account, the death of someone close to them was the most traumatic of childhood loss events. It seemed to require the most adjustment. The death of someone close upset the constellation of relationships in the child's world. Moving from place to place was also quite taxing for a significant number of women. Finally, dropping out of school was described by the large majority of women as an event that precipitated life stress, as children and adults. All of these major stressors can be seen as extremely dislocating for a child. It is hard to navigate the social world when roles, the channelmarkers of interaction, are suddenly withdrawn or otherwise lost. One never seems to get one's bearing. Childhood events of loss seemed to similarly affect both white and nonwhite women in the sample. The pattern is less clear when controlling for type of criminal homicide.
Loss and dislocation are certainly not the only descriptive categories of childhood. There are many other events and conditions. The following section addresses another broad aspect of childhood living that produces stress. A clear picture of how the study women see the world and how they came to hold that view may benefit from an examination of childhood events marked by aggression.

Childhood Aggression

In Chapter Three, aggression is defined as any sequence of behavior aimed at the injury of some object. Aggressive behavior can take many forms. It may be an overtly physical attack such as assault. But a behavior marked by any degree of outward hostility can also have aggressive roots. Aggression can be both physical and verbal and it can have direct and indirect or generalized targets. Social situations may be better described by degrees of aggression rather than by mere presence or absence.

The present concern is with childhood events of an aggressive nature. Childhood events characterized by aggression may contribute to later criminal violence in two ways. First, a child for whom aggressive displays are routine may come to cast social relations in aggressive manners. Aggression may be assigned a place in the natural scheme of things by an individual who lives in an aggressive world. Exposure to repeated aggressive behavior may even reinforce its assignment as effective problem-solving behavior. The threat or use of force gets results. Second,
aggression may cause some discomfort, physical and mental, to the object of the act. Recall the medical formulation of stress—the 'fight or flight' syndrome. An aggressive act produces physiological and mental distress necessary to gear the individual for an appropriate response. An overexposure to such challenging situations can be physically and mentally exhausting.

One locus of aggression in the childhood lives of the study women is the family. Straus et al (1980) describe the family as the most violent of social institutions. At first glance, this may seem a bit odd since we often look to our families for shelter from the pressures of everyday living. As it turns out, there is strong evidence that the family is a setting where we express everyday tension in aggressive, often violent ways (see for example, Straus et al (1980), Straus (1979), Del Martin (1977), and Gelles (1974)). We sometimes harm those for whom we most care. Physical and verbal aggression may not only weaken the social fabric of family life but serve to further isolate the individual enveloped by such a family environment as well. Familial violence seriously threatens a valuable coping resource for a person already taxed by stressful living conditions.

Parental physical punishment

Physical punishment by a parent or guardian is a pattern that runs through the childhood lives of the study women. Table 6.4 illustrates the application of physical punishment threat in their daily lives. Note that such a
Table 6.3: Breakdown of Childhood Loss Mean Index Scores by Race and Type of Criminal Homicide.

Total Sample
\[ \bar{X} = 3.17 \]
\[ (N = 76) \]

White
\[ \bar{X} = 3.07 \]
\[ (N = 29) \]

- Murder
  \[ \bar{X} = 2.86 \]
  \[ (N = 22) \]

- Manslaughter
  \[ \bar{X} = 3.71 \]
  \[ (N = 7) \]

Nonwhite
\[ \bar{X} = 3.23 \]
\[ (N = 47) \]

- Murder
  \[ \bar{X} = 3.10 \]
  \[ (N = 21) \]

- Manslaughter
  \[ \bar{X} = 3.35 \]
  \[ (N = 26) \]
Table 6.4: Frequency of Threat and Use of Physical Punishment in Childhood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of physical punishment threat by parental figures</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Several times weekly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Total *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(N=75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of actual physical punishment by parental figures</th>
<th>9.3</th>
<th>16.0</th>
<th>10.7</th>
<th>49.3</th>
<th>14.7</th>
<th>100.0%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(N=75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.*
threat was a regular occurrence for a good many women. Over a third of those reporting said that they were threatened every day or several times a week. Strikingly, over two-thirds of the women were threatened with any frequency. The second row in the table represents the frequency with which the women were actually hit by their parents or guardians. While not quite as many women were hit everyday or several times a week as were threatened, a greater number were hit than were threatened with any frequency. Only 11 women reported never having been struck. This may suggest that, for some women, their parents or guardians did not premise their beating with a threat. Several women reported that their parents never threatened to beat them. They just beat them. In any case, it is important to note that both the threat of hitting and actual hitting are anxiety producing. The object of the aggression is placed on the defensive in both cases.

The reports of the study women on this matter would suggest that the mother or female guardian were more often the physical disciplinarians than were fathers or male guardians. By better than a two to one ratio, the female parental figure in comparison with the male parental figure was more likely to threaten or use physical punishment. Of some interest is the fact that this was slightly more true of the nonwhite women than of the white women in the study. For white women, the chance of being threatened by a male parental figure was roughly eight out of ten times. For
nonwhite women, the chance was less than four out of ten times. The same ratios hold true by race for actual physical punishment. In a general sense, nonwhite women were more apt to describe their mothers as the disciplinarians in the family. They rather than fathers were the keepers of family peace. The white women in the study were less likely to refer to this division of labor.*2

The actual use of physical punishment in the childhood lives of the study women was not limited to a mere spanking with the hand. Of the 64 women who reported actually being hit by a parental figure, 58 reported being beaten with an object. Most often this was a switch fashioned from a tree limb. Many women recalled that they would be required to select the switch that would shortly be used against them. A ritual such as this hints that physical punishment was not only a routine of their childhood lives but that the act itself was regimented. There were rules to follow and, when broken, there was another set of rules to the discipline. In a sense, one takes an active role in one's own punishment. Other women variously reported being hit with belts, the second most common weapon, and with bottles, hairbrushes, lamps, and an assortment of immediately available objects. Here again, the mother figure was most

2. One should be cautious about drawing any conclusions about black culture promoting more in the way of maternal familial rule than white culture. There is some disagreement about this. It may not be so much a distinction of race but of social class. See, for example, Wallace (1980).
often the primary attack parent.

As many of the study women recounted physical punishment as children, they did so with a surprising amount of acceptance. Often they knew the price of their transgressions and came to expect a physical response from their parents when they misbehaved. The women were more shocked when they didn't receive a physical reprimand than when they did. Still, physical punishment was generally not taken casually by the study women.

My mother was the type of person that if she asks you to do something, you do it! If you didn't, she wouldn't come and spank you with her hand. It was a belt or anything she could pick up. Whatever was in her reach, she would pick it up and throw it at you. I learned to duck quite well.

They would hit me when it was necessary... or when they felt it was necessary.

Well, my daddy, he beat me once that I remember. And when he beat you, oh he was rough and tough. But my mother told me I was the onliest child my daddy'd tell not to whip. Now she would whip me alot but he wouldn't.

I remember mama giving me the spankings. And if my daddy thought it was too harsh he'd say, 'Now that's enough.' We'd always be late for lunch. We'd get a spanking for that. I guess now that I look back on it, we were high-headed kids. One day my mom really gave us a good one and that was the end of that.

When it came down to whooping, when (mother thought I needed one, she didn't mind whooping me. It was the scoldings I hated. I would much rather take the whooping. Oh, lord though! I felt like I got a whooping everyday.

It would appear that although most of the women agreed that
they deserved punishment for their misbehaviors as children, they generally agreed that the form of punishment they received was excessively harsh. Many vowed as children that they would not strike their own children as adults.

**Fighting with siblings and others**

Another form of familial violence involves fights with brothers and sisters. Forty-two of the sample women remember physical conflict with brothers. In comparison, only 26 women recalled fighting with sisters. Clearly, brother-sister relationships were more marked by physical conflict than were sister-sister relationships for the study women. The women who reported sibling fights tended to paint themselves as the objects of attack rather than the provokers of them. This was especially true of brother-sister fights. Juxtaposing this information with that on parental attack, it would appear that the study women as a whole tended to be the objects of attack by mothers and brothers, certainly more so than by fathers and sisters.

This presents a rather interesting dynamic of familial life. Perhaps this is significant and perhaps it is not. Assuming some meaning in the finding, this characteristic of the early familial life world of the study women may extend to their adult familial life world. Most of the study women were convicted of killing a spouse or lover as noted earlier in this work. Many of these love relationships were abusive ones. It may be that when the victim grew physically
aggressive, that is they acted more like brothers than fathers, the women eventually responded with fatal force. The ability to be violently aggressive may be modeled after the violence displayed by their mothers in their childhoods. At the very least, they may have learned that they, as women, can use aggression to meet the demands of a situation. In any event, their early familial experience with aggression suggests that men can be provoking, like brothers, or less so, like fathers. The experience also suggests that women can be physically aggressive, like mothers, or less so, like sisters.

The study women had contact with the use of physical aggression as children outside the home as well. While the majority of the women had never been in a physical fight outside the home setting, 27 women had. Twenty of these women had been in ten or more fights with their childhood peers. As they recalled them, the fights were more in the way of scuffles than major fisticuffs. None of the women involved in the fights suffered any serious physical damage. It is important, however, to know that these women engaged in fights with both boys and girls. The opposition was about equally represented. This is contrary to the notion of fighting only with another member of one's gender group.

Boys used to have a habit of running up and hitting me on the behind. Now that would upset me real bad. I'd be fighting them then. And I don't think a year went by in elementary school where I didn't get into a fight. Somebody was always testing me.
The women in the study were also not without experience with physical discipline in school. In fact, more women reported being physically disciplined for misbehaving in school than they reported being detained after school as punishment. Only 17 said they had been detained at least once. Forty-one women reported being paddled in school. Eight of the forty-one had been paddled ten or more times. In the school setting, the study women were more apt to paint the physical enforcers in sinister colors. Teachers and principals who paddled them were described as mean-spirited people who seemed to enjoy the acts. Further, the women who were paddled said they were punished for mischievously minor things. Had they been in the positions of authority, the roles reversed, most of the women said that they would not have used such force. All of this sharply contrasts with the general attitude harbored by the majority about the use of physical force by their parents. Parents appeared to know what was best for their children, even though it may sometimes be painful. In the eyes of the women paddled, teachers decidedly did not know what was best for them.

Sexual aggression in childhood

In a survey of college and university students in the New England region, Finkelhor (1979) found that 19.2 percent of female respondents had been sexually victimized as children. The largest share of sexual abuse offenders were fathers, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, and
grandparents. Less than a quarter of the abusers were strangers. Finkelhor's study suggests that the sexual victimization of children is not uncommon and that children are often victimized by familial members or others with whom they are familiar.

The women of the present study were each asked about possible sexual attack in their youth. Sexual attack is here defined as including rape, fondling, genital manipulation, and other forms of sexual molestation. The threat or use of force is implied in each act. Seven of the 76 women reported that they had been sexually abused by their father figure on or before their eighteenth birthdays. Six of the seven women reported being attacked on or before their thirteenth birthday. The youngest to be attacked was six years of age. Without exception, the victimized women recalled these events with some difficulty. Their fathers' actions had violated what the women considered to be the role expectations of a male parental figure. These events were profoundly disturbing to the women. They were bewildered, confused by such aggression by someone in whom they invested trust and love. None of the seven women sexually assaulted by their fathers or stepfathers have successfully resolved the resulting trauma. The attacks haunt them in their adult lives.

I was nine at the time. My mom and I weren't getting along at the time so I went to stay with my dad. My daddy would work his way around and he'd always tell me to kiss him. I'd kiss him on the cheek. One night, he came in (to my bedroom.). I thought he'd gone to work and I was in the house by myself. It was nine c'clock
at night. He was drunk and he raped me. When it was over, I told him I wanted to go back to Mom. And I went back to Mom. She never asked me why. I just told her I didn't like it down there and wanted to come back home.

I don't remember too much about what happened. You know, about what led up to it. We were in the house by ourselves, my brothers, sisters, and stepfather. And I was going to take a bath like I was supposed to. He [stepfather] came in and started playing [with me] and stuff. He told me he'd kill me if I told my mother. And I believed him.

A frequent pattern among the victimized children was the threat of physical retaliation by the attacker if the victim told anyone about what had transpired. Most of the women told no one. To this day, such sexual victimization is something they keep to themselves.

Nineteen of the study women reported a sexual attack during their childhoods by someone other than a male parental figure. Sixteen of these women had been attacked on or before their thirteenth birthdays. The youngest was five years old at the time. Eight of those women attacked reported the offender as an uncle. Three attackers were brothers of the victims. Other attackers included mothers' boyfriends, a brother-in-law, another man living in the same house, and others whom they knew. Only one attacker was a stranger and only one was a female. The trauma of sexual victimization was also reportedly severe. Often the victimization continued over an extended period of time and, like the victims of father abuse, the women who experienced
such attacks tended to keep the attacks to themselves.

It happened when I was about ten. My momma was staying with this elderly man that couldn't quite take care of himself. He was always in bed. Momma's boyfriend would come over and care for him (the elderly man) when Momma was at work. I don't really remember. I always tried to block this out. I tried to forget it because it was such a horrible experience. (The boyfriend) would do his little thing with me. I was always afraid to tell Mama because I knew there would be a fight. I knew when there was a fight, Mama always got hurt. I'd just be so upset and scared. I'd try to get away from him. You're the first person I've ever mentioned it to. And for a long time I couldn't stand to be around men. I couldn't stand for one to touch me or even look at me in a dirty way. Just, oh, the fear grew up in me. I get a thing about it sometimes now. I blot it out because I get real upset about it.

When connecting childhood sexual victimization with characteristics of the criminal homicides by the sample women, an interesting pattern emerges. As stated, race of the offender seems to exhibit no pattern. Patterns do emerge when looking at the homicide victim-offender relationship and at the type of criminal homicide. A combination of reports of father sexual abuse and other sexual abuse yields a total of 26 reports of sexual victimization in childhood. Exactly half of these, 13, were reported by women who killed spouses or mates. Further, 19 abuse episodes were reported by women convicted of first or second degree murder. This may suggest that the victimized women carry to their adult sexual relationships the trauma of their childhood sexual abuse. It also suggests that the more severe forms of criminal homicide seem to be more
closely associated with childhood sexual abuse than do the lesser forms of criminal homicide. Both of these implications speak to the magnitude of psychological distress that may obtain from early-age sexual aggression.

A childhood aggression index

An index of childhood events and conditions characterized by aggression was constructed. Each of the fifteen indicators contained in the index embodies some form and degree of aggression. An indicator may be an overt form of directed aggression such as parental attack or it may be an implied form of generalized aggression such as parental gun ownership. Arguably, the indicators manifest a variable degree of aggression but, taken together, they might offer a fairly good measure of the aggressive quality of the childhood lives of the study women (see Appendix Four for a description of the index). The index was constructed in a fashion similar to that of the childhood loss index. The mean scores of subgroups, by race and by type of criminal homicide, can be compared to uncover possible meaningful patterns among the study women.

Table 6.5 represents a breakdown of the index scores. The mean scores of white and non-white women are remarkably similar. Both racial groups experienced only marginally different levels of aggression in childhood. Again, it is not known how these scores compare with groups of women who have not committed criminal homicide. It would be unwise to infer that these women experienced higher levels of
Table 6.5: Breakdown of Childhood Aggression Mean Index Scores by Race and Type of Criminal Homicide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Mean Index Score</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td></td>
<td>$\bar{X} = 6.13$</td>
<td>(N = 76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>$\bar{X} = 6.17$</td>
<td>(N = 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manslaughter</td>
<td>$\bar{X} = 5.29$</td>
<td>(N = ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>$\bar{X} = 6.11$</td>
<td>(N = 47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manslaughter</td>
<td>$\bar{X} = 5.77$</td>
<td>(N = 26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Murder: $\bar{X} = 6.45$ (N = 22)
Manslaughter: $\bar{X} = 5.29$ (N = ?)
Murder: $\bar{X} = 6.52$ (N = 21)
Manslaughter: $\bar{X} = 5.77$ (N = 26)
childhood aggression than nonmurderous women. Here, there is no basis for a comparison. What can be suggested is that, within the present sample, there is little difference between white and nonwhite women in their exposure to aggressive events and conditions in childhood.

There does appear to be some difference in mean index scores among the types of criminal homicide. For both racial groups, the higher index scores appear to be among those women convicted of the two types of murder. It would seem that the more serious the criminal homicide charge for both racial groups, the greater is the exposure to aggressive events and conditions in childhood.

It seems as though the criminal homicide type is a more powerful distinguishing factor for the sample women as to childhood aggressive experience than is race. Recall that the legal community discriminates the four types of criminal homicide by degree of intent and maliciousness. These elements often translate into degree of premeditation and violence implicated by the homicide behavior. First degree murder has relatively high levels of intent and violence. Involuntary manslaughter manifests the lowest levels of these two elements. Returning to the discussion of childhood aggression, it would seem that the women who most intended and most violently dispatched the homicidal act experienced the greatest aggression as children.
Why is this? It could be that early-age exposure to the aggressive behavior of others, directly or indirectly, may inform adult behavior. Stated earlier were several reasons for this outcome. First, living in an aggressive environment may pressure the individual to behave aggressively through a learning process. Aggression is reinforced and encouraged in the environment. Second, suffering at the hands of aggressive others may promote a rather hostile view of human behavior. Aggressive confrontations are stressful. Chronic or acute stress can be physically or psychologically draining. It may be that one adapts to such strain by developing aggressive abilities herself. Exposure to aggressive conduct may beget eventual aggressive behavior patterns among those exposed.

Replaying Janov's primal pain scenario may offer further explanation. A direct attack on one's childhood role-playing may leave an indelible mark on the psyche. Maladjusted behavior can spring from psychic damage, according to Janov. Events and conditions of childhood experience that proved most damaging to the women who recalled them included sexual victimization, excessive physical punishment in the home, and repeated physical confrontation outside family life. In the present study, Janov's psychic pain is phenomenologically rooted. The majority of women in the study approached pronounced aggressive intrusions into childhood living with long-felt pain. It still hurt to recall the intrusions. Most have
not yet reconciled the attacks. Finally, these childhood events in particular often resulted in understandable fears of certain individuals. A compounding of fears over the childhood years seemed to slowly contribute to a generalized anxiety with the social world. In turn, this dispersed anxiety with the world can inform styles of role playing. Perhaps for these reasons, childhood experience has life in adulthood.

Childhood stress and criminal violence

Given the design of the present study, it is not possible to draw any conclusions as to how the sample women differ from other women. It is not possible to state that these women experienced greater childhood stress than others since there is no means of comparison. It is possible, however, to phenomenologically address childhood stress from the point of view of the study women. This approach requires accepting the words of the women as they recreate their childhoods and by doing a little reading between the lines.

Childhood loss and aggression are two broad categories of events and conditions addressed in this chapter. Broadly summarizing the findings of childhood loss, it would seem that events such as death of a close one, moving from place to place, and dropping out of school had the most profound effect upon the study women, judging from their accounts. Most of the women seemed not to possess especially strong support networks that might help them cope with such
stressors. These and other loss events generally left them feeling hollow and somewhat isolated. They'd lost significant reference points by which to navigate the social world as children. As a result, role playing grew more difficult and the social scenery grew more confusing. The development of this life approach apparently applied to both white and nonwhite women in the study, particularly among the manslaughter offenders.

Exposure to childhood events and conditions characterized by aggression proved troubling, then and now, for the majority of the study women. Especially difficult events included sexual victimization and excessive physical confrontation inside and outside the home. Chronic conditions and acute events marked by aggression seemed to produce a slow developing anxiety with the outside social world. In the face of overwhelming anxiety, some women themselves adopted aggressive styles of role playing. While there appeared not to be any differences by race in childhood exposure to aggression, there did appear to be differences by type of criminal homicide. Women convicted of the more severe forms of criminal homicide seemed likely to experience higher levels of childhood aggression than women convicted of the lesser forms of criminal homicide. Perhaps this illustrates the power of early-age exposure to aggressive behavior in understanding criminal violence.
A review of the childhood recollections of the study women reveals the trouble most had with the specific events and conditions they faced as children. The women identified the problem areas of childhood and their responses to them. For the group as a whole, youth proved to be quite trying. This statement might strike skeptics as nothing new. That convicted felons report unhappy childhoods is a cultural cliche. Tcc often, say some, this tiresome cliche is used to exonerate convicted felons of criminal responsibility. It may be, however, that these skeptics are misinformed. The women in the present study were each asked to assess their total childhood experience. Their responses were typified as happy, neutral, or unhappy. Surprisingly, 51 women, almost two-thirds of the sample, said that they had generally happy childhoods. Seven gave neutral assessments. Only 18 women, far less than a third of the sample, said that they had unhappy childhoods. The findings of this chapter may supply good reason for many more reporting unhappy childhood assessments. That a substantial majority did quite the opposite is striking. Against all odds, the majority of women tend not to look to childhood experience for sources of their criminal homicides. This finding could speak to a general inability to meet childhood trauma head on. One tries desperately not to remember unpleasant times. Great psychic energy may be invested in forgetting. The well of memory is deep, however, and childhood trauma may surface later in life - often without cognitive cooperation.
One particular case in the study is outstanding for the childhood ingenuity displayed in the face of severe everyday stress. Saqitarria Reid, a young black woman, grew up in a large city on the west coast. The neighborhood was riddled with gang violence and drug use. Both her parents served time in prison, her mother for criminal homicide and her father for rape. Her parents fought constantly and vigorously with each other. Saqitarria was regularly physically disciplined. Once, her aunt hit her with a broom and broke her arm. When she was small, she fell down a flight of stairs while riding a tricycle and suffered a concussion. At nine years of age, she reports being raped by her father.

Saqitarria was a self described loner as a child. She didn't relate well to her brothers. They once glued her fingers to a bread pan. She tried filling the social void which enveloped her by playing with dolls. Her brothers would take her dolls, tie them to a doorknob and beat them until the stuffing came out. Saqitarria describes her subsequent coping strategy.

I had these two imaginary friends, Clarence and Anabelle. I'd sit in a corner, you know, withdrawing from my brothers and sisters. I was always the odd one out so I'd sit and talk to my imaginary friends. I really did. Me and my imaginary friends would play things like Batman or Superman. My brothers would tell me I was crazy. They'd yell, 'Ma, Saqitarria gone loony!' Like when it was raining outside, oh, we'd really have a good time—me and Clarence and Anabelle. My brothers and sisters would just sit and stare at me. I knew they were looking at me and I'd really go into my act then. Oh, I guess it was sort of a release for me. It was like talking to myself. I was going
through so many things. There was always something (bad) happening to me.

Through her imaginary friends, Saqitarria was able to focus and control interaction. She had little control over the real events of her childhood. Saqitarria even began to favor imaginary interaction over real interaction. She was able to extricate herself from the social engagements which caused her so much pain. She relished the escape.

In her early twenties, Saqitarria married and had three children. Her husband was a serviceman and was accustomed to moving around. Not long after the birth of the last child, a boy, her husband moved the family east where he was newly assigned. A few months later, her husband and two oldest children flew back to the west coast to visit relatives. The youngest child could not yet tolerate the long flight. Saqitarria was left virtually alone, a stranger in her new community. In monotone, Saqitarria recounts the events that led to her imprisonment for involuntary manslaughter.

My husband took the two oldest out with him. I stayed in North Carolina with my four month old son, Gerald. I stayed with him in the house all by myself. I remember Gerald had a slight cold and he was teething. It's like I was a different person. It wasn't me. I had headaches and everything and I was so depressed. It's like everything from the past started crowding in on me at one time. What I mainly remember doing is staring out the window. I'd sit in a rocker for hours and hours. Have you ever had the feeling you just wanted to die? When Gerald died, I walked into the room and he was dead. There he was on the bed with a little smile on his face. His eyes were open. I went to tickle him and he didn't move. I got angry with God because He didn't let me die instead.
When my son died and I didn't, I thought there was no god or else He would have heard me asking to die.

Withdrawal, the coping mechanism that had served her so well in childhood, had failed Saqitarria as an adult. Today, she remains a loner in prison, with few friends. Saqitarria says she still has a problem opening up. She keeps too much to herself. She reports that she has trouble sleeping and that her migraine headaches are bad. Like so many women in the study, Saqitarria is alone with her pain.

The case of Saqitarria Reid is an example of a rather passive form of criminal homicide that may have roots in her childhood experiences. Before exploring the marital lives of the study women in the ensuing chapter, it may be helpful to offer another case study. The case of Samantha Fletcher affords an opportunity to explore the childhood life of a woman convicted of an actively aggressive form of criminal homicide.
The Case of Samantha Fletcher

Samantha Fletcher is a white woman in her early twenties. She is tall, slim with short cropped hair. Her approach is direct. She talks openly, with a studied seriousness, and she is in the habit of pursing her mouth and throwing her lower lip forward when making a point. When Samantha was 19, she walked into a grocery store and, armed with a handgun, demanded the money in the cash register. Before the robbery could be completed, a young male store clerk was shot to death. Samantha Fletcher is now serving time for first degree murder.

The life story she tells is gripping and painful. Samantha's case is unusual because of her youth at the time of the murder. She was younger than most of the other women in the study. Her crime is also not like the crimes of the majority of women in the study. Samantha was convicted of felony murder - the killing of an individual during the course of a felonious offense, in this case robbery. In the face of these peculiarities, it is important to consider that Samantha's childhood is very much like the childhoods experienced by most of the study women. Her childhood is fraught with taxing events and conditions. They gnaw and tear at the tissue that normally protects one from the wear of everyday living. They also leave
behind lasting psychic scars that contribute to violent behavior. For some, the peril of childhood does not lessen with time.

I knew from the first interview with Samantha that she was not one to meet her childhood experiences with tears. This was extraordinary considering the course of her childhood. Samantha had developed a rather detached approach when telling her story. She was almost business-like about the matter, although raw emotion and recriminations would surface from time to time. I decided that Samantha would be a good candidate for a follow-up interview.

It was a balmy March afternoon. This was lamentable since the scheduled interview with Samantha would take place at the prison's diagnostic center. The room there was comfortable enough, with ample space but without windows to entertain the afternoon sun. I telephoned the administration building where Samantha worked and informed the guard at the front desk that she could send Samantha down to the center. Samantha arrived shortly thereafter. She was one for promptness. I greeted her and offered her a chair opposite mine. It struck me that Samantha eagerly anticipated our conversation. She was in fine spirits, perhaps due to the clear blue sky and warm sun. Her manner of dress that afternoon betrayed her eagerness. She wore a prison-issue blouse but she had knotted a
colorful kerchief around her neck. The talons of the kerchief were neatly positioned off to the side, across the shoulder, as is the fashion among some country western singers. Samantha's dress that afternoon was complete with crisp jeans and pointy-toed heels.

I summarized the nature of the research as I had done at our initial meeting. I again emphasized that all that she told me would be confidential but that I would like to use her life history as the basis for a potential case study. She offered that she understood but she seemed somewhat impatient with these preliminaries. I pointed out the tape recorder I had placed on the table and explained that she could turn it off if she wished. She smiled and signaled that she was ready to begin. Samantha lighted a cigarette when I suggested we start with her family.

"My mother and father," she began but started anew, "I was born at a pretty bad time. Their marriage lasted ten years. There's just one brother and myself. He's three years my senior. I came at a bad time. Their marriage was on the rocks and it was really falling apart by the time I was three. My father was pretty much my mother anyway. He was at the house. My mother didn't stay home much."

I asked Samantha why that was.
"I think primarily because...." Again she paused. "I can't talk to her very much about it but I've been able to piece most of it together myself. She married very young to get out of a large family. She just didn't get along very well. She married immediately to get out from under. It wasn't too long after they were married that she was with a baby. You know this type of thing: the ho-hum, the PTA meetings, the women's auxiliary, going to church, the church socials. Just the average American upper-middle class family. The husband works forty to sixty hours a week, brings the check home... that's it. I think after a while it bored her."

"So what did she do?" I asked.

"She started bucking," Samantha answered in earnest. "She really did. I think it was hard on her. My brother was a sickly little fellow, born with a lot of problems: allergies and asthma. Like it almost killed him a dozen times before he was a year old. I know that had to be very stressful for her. And I think by the time he started coming out of it, I was born. You know he was her baby and I was my dad's. I think by the time he started coming out of it, she needed some relief... some way to break loose and she didn't know how. I think she probably started feeling trapped. Responsibility, a sick child, another on the way, don't want it. She started trying to break loose."

She went back to work, started spending a lot of time with her friends, drinking, and trying to get out from under again. She felt bound into the family atmosphere which is what she didn't want."

"Did the marriage finally end?"

"Yes, they divorced when I was about three. As far back as I remember, my dad took care of me. Daddy was the one that I remember, you know, changing my clothes, seeing to it that I got my bath, fixing my dinner. I remember bits and pieces."

I asked Samantha how she felt about her mother at that point.

"I was extremely confused by that time. You see, after the divorce went through, my mother got custody of us. She was never home. There were many times when it was just me and my brother at the house. We weren't very old. A friend of hers started taking care of us in the afternoon. Pretty soon, Mom didn't come pick us up at her friend's house anymore. One day she just didn't show up. And eventually, Rosie, that was the friend's name, she got permanent custody of us. I guess we stayed with her about two years."

"What happened?"

"Oh, Rosie abused us excessively."

"What sorts of things would she do?" I asked.
"Mostly physical abuse. I mean she had the right idea now that I look back on it. It's just distorted somehow. We had a very nice home in the upper-middle class section of town. Between me and my brother, we had to do all the housework. All the floors were solid wood and every Saturday all the rooms had to be stripped and waxed with paste wax and then buffed. We did all the cooking, all the dishes, and we tended the yard. All of it was done under her eye. I think she had the right idea just the wrong application of it.

I pressed Samantha for more detail. She grew restive, shifted her position in her chair, and leaned toward me.

"Look, she started taking care of an infant child for a friend of hers that was going through a divorce. I watched that women beat that nine year...." Samantha stuttered for a moment, "I mean nine month old baby. A baby!" I thought that Samantha was about nine years old at this point in her life. Samantha continued, "You see, Rosie was trying to potty train this little baby boy. He kept wetting his diapers so she beat him."

"How?" I asked. "Would she hit him with her hand?"

"Belt. Same thing she used on us."

"How often would she beat you?"
"At least once a day, sometimes more."

"What would it be about?"

"Menial things. She had this thing about everybody eating everything on the table. I went through several beatings a day on account of my eating. All my teeth were displaced. They came in just enough wrong that I had a slight overbite. My bite is not correct in the back of my mouth so it took me a long time to eat. Most people can eat a whole meal in thirty minutes. I'd still be there working on my second course. Rosie would get frustrated with me and tell me that if I didn't finish in X amount of minutes that I would be beat. So I might be beat for that. I don't know. It's hard for me to make you understand because you weren't there. But it was hard. Crazy things like we weren't allowed to drink when we ate. Kids tend to force food down. They don't chew it. She'd let us drink once in a while but the majority of your drink was for after the meal. Weird little petty things. If you were caught, you'd be snatched up and beat."

"Finally, after a lot of abuse, the teachers in the school snapped to what was going on. I came in to school beat half to death one day. Most of the time, I'd just say I had a wreck on my bike. You know the possibility of getting hurt permanently was not half as scary or devastating as the next beating you'd get at
home for telling other people. So you don't. You lie. Well the teachers thought something was going on but they were limited to what they could do. Childbeating is a stiff accusation."

"Would you have marks on your legs?" I asked.

"Hey, the worst of it they couldn't see, the majority of it. I've got permanent kidney damage now because of it. And a lot of it was on my back."

Again I asked Samantha to describe what would happen.

"She'd aim for my back. There was no way I could get under the bed in time. I'd end up hopping around in a circle. Sometimes she'd hold the belt by the loose end and hit me with the buckle. She'd just swing the buckle. That's what happened the day at school. I came in with my face busted. My eye was swollen shut and half my face was black and blue. She caught me full in the face with the buckle. Busted it up pretty good. The teachers took me in the bathroom and stripped me and found all the other bruises. All across my back and legs and cuts on my thighs from the switches. The switches tended to wrap around your legs. I was scared to death they'd call Rosie and tell her. But they were smart and they didn't. They called the courts and social services and made them aware that they needed to take some pictures and do whatever they could to intervene."
"What happened?"

"Shortly thereafter my brother ran away. My father explained to him that there was nothing he could do since he didn't have custody of us. My father told my brother that the only way he could help was if my brother could show the judge what was happening. That morning my brother had got beat. He was a bed wetter. I think it was from hidden nerves. Rosie beat him all the time for it which only made it worse. He acted like he was going to school that day but he didn't. He robbed his piggybank and went downtown. He caught a bus over to the courthouse and went straight to the judge's chambers. The judge called my father and a physician. They stripped him and saw the bruises. They immediately gave custody of my brother to my dad. He was trying to get custody of me but he couldn't because at that time, daddys couldn't have little girls. He went out and married the first thing he could find to try and get custody of me. She was obnoxious from the get go! She had five brats from a previous marriage. Of course they were angels and we were monsters, according to her. Dad tried but it didn't work out. They'd get into fights over us. The judge decided it wasn't a good place for us to be raised. The judge put my brother and me in a juvenile detention home for a few months until they placed us in a children's home. I was raised there."
At the age of nine, Samantha was placed in a children's home by the court. The world had asked much of her by that time. The toughened attitude she began to develop and the suspicious caution she displayed when dealing with others were understandable responses to a life-world that betrayed her expectations. Her circumstance merited toughness and caution. Sensing this during the interview, I asked her how she adjusted to the children's home.

"I resented it. I hated it. I felt cheated," she answered without pause. "I felt it was really rotten that I had such a great daddy and that I loved him and I couldn't understand why I could not live with him. I didn't want to stay with my stepmom but I just couldn't figure out why it couldn't be me and my daddy and my brother. I was very confused and angry. I hated anyone and everything that had to do with the children's home. I hated the people there. They were trying to be helpful. It didn't make any difference. It was all just so much so fast.

"Would you get into scraps with other children there?"

"It would get past that point." Samantha was soft-spoken now, reflective. "I was just to myself. People, they wanted to talk to me but they never seemed to understand. They wanted to document my case and get it into their files but they didn't care enough to help
me straighten it all out, to help me understand it. At least that's how I felt at the time. Maybe their intentions were good. They were limited in what they did for me though."

"How were you doing at school at the time?"

"As the years rolled on, it got disastrous. We were pre-taught as being from the children's home. Like we were subhuman or something. There was a big rivalry between the city kids and us. They had families. They had homes. We didn't. They had nicer clothes than we did too. They made better grades. We were the school monsters. It's just that we were categorized like that. If there was a fight between me and a city kid, I would get expelled and he wouldn't."

I asked Samantha if all the teachers felt the same way toward her.

"Yeah," she answered, "unfortunately. I guess over the years they had had enough monsters. They had their fill of them. They seemed to be fed up with it all. They'd look at the roster the first day of school to see how many children's home kids they had. They'd say, 'Oh, no! I've got four!' You know, one of these routines. I was a monster but I got accused and punished for so many things that I didn't do that it finally didn't matter. At that point all I could see was that I was going to get punished whether I did it or not. So why not do it? That's how I felt. I made
that transition and that's where everything went downhill."

I recognized that Samantha often used the word 'transition' to connote a change in life conditions that she found unsettling or unpleasant. She cannot comfortably accommodate these 'transitions'. They trouble her partly because they are unexpected. Samantha does not anticipate them. As these transitions multiply, the life world in which she finds herself grows more peculiar. Relatedly, throughout our conversations, Samantha would speak of certain individuals 'flipping' on her. By this she means that the individuals do not conform to her expectations. They depart from the life script which Samantha has written. This can be mentally jarring since our expectations of our own behavior are intertwined with our expectations of others' behavior. Predictably, the thread that begins to bind people together, begins to unravel.

I wanted to know what types of punishment Samantha encountered at school since she still harbored resentment toward her teachers. I asked her about this directly and she answered without hesitation but with a certain stiffness.

"I might get punished by a number of teachers in the chain of command so you'd end up getting disciplined about ten times for the same thing. On the
lower levels, it would be paddling. On the upper levels, they used shoe soles and raised nice healthy blood blisters. Real shoe soles, you know? Size 13! They'd cut holes in the top of it so with the slightest swing it would hurt like hell." Samantha thought for a moment and added, "They were trying to cure something that abuse had put there to begin with by abusing abuse." Samantha's choice of words was somewhat confusing but her message was clear. She was well aware of the cyclical nature of physical abuse. It feeds on itself. Samantha went on about the shoe soles, "They'd hit me on my rear end. I had a nurse at the children's home that would draw the blood off the blood blisters. It didn't take much of an impact with those nice, heavy, thick flexible soles to raise a nice healthy blood blister."

By her own account, Samantha was suspended from school well over a dozen times. I asked her to relate to me one of the episodes that led to a suspension.

Well, I don't get sick very often but when I do, I'm usually very sick. When I was about eleven years old, I had a bad bout with the flu. I had an extremely high temperature. I was laid out and seeing monkeys and things. Hallucinating for about two weeks. I had it real bad. They were packing me in ice and a doctor would come around every couple days to fill me with shots. I liked playing with the empty syringes. When
I got better, I took one to school. You know, kids will be kids. I was just playing. I had a teacher who I didn't get along with very well. She told the principal that I was bringing syringes to school and showing other kids how to shoot up. Hell, I didn't even know what that was. I was just having fun. I had a little cup of water on my desk and I'd draw up the water and squirt it at somebody. Yes, I was wrong but they just blew it up out of proportion. It was things like that that seemed crazy.

"How did your parents feel about such things?" I asked.

"I don't know. Things fell apart when I hit ninth grade. Maybe it was total frustration after trying so hard and having none of it acknowledged. I really tried and none of it seemed to matter. After all those years of being in the monster category, I said that I was going to break out of all of it and prove to them that I could be somebody and that I could try, that I could be worthwhile. And it seemed like nobody cared. It didn't make any difference. All I got from my mother was 'Why can't you bring home A's like your brother? Why can't you be like your brother? Why can't you do this and that?' It was always a comparison. Daddy always tried to be fair about it. He would never say anything like that. He would never make a comparison. He would praise my brother but he
was encouraging me, too. He would never express his doubt about me or humiliate me. But I'd only see my folks on holidays."

"What happened in the ninth grade that things fell apart for you?"

"I'm not sure why except for a culmination of things rolled into one. I just flipped. I did. I guess high school itself was devastating enough with the transition. I had been messing with drugs, too. The in thing was sniffing spot remover. I was experimenting and drinking a little I guess. I stayed sick every time I did but you have to get through the transition."

"Was it mostly girls or boys that you hung around with then?" I asked.

"Mostly guys. I just wasn't very trusting of women. The few that I got close to flipped on me at one time or another. My brother and I were the veterans of the children's home. We'd been there a long time and had seen a lot of kids come and go. Anyway, I just started messing with drugs and drink, whoring around and stuff. I'd sneak out every chance I'd get."

"You mentioned the last time we spoke together that you had been sexually assaulted. Would you mind me asking about that again?"
"No, but I went through some transitions with several people. After we talked last time, I started remembering. I guess you jarred my memory. I started thinking back to when I was... gosh, I couldn't have been more than four years old. I was real, real little. I was living with my daddy and I think my parents were trying to get back together. There was a dude in the neighborhood." Samantha softened her tone at this point. "I don't know. I look back on it now and wonder how he could have done that to me. How could he do that to a child? The times he tried to mess with me and I couldn't have been more than an infant. Just a little kid, you know?"

"Four years old?" I asked.

"No more than that if that old. It sticks out in my mind now and I remember it. And I don't know why."

"What would he do?"

"Like, we used to go over to the restaurant where my mother worked. It was only a half mile from our house. He lived next door to the restaurant. He had a daughter my age and a son my brother's age so we played over there waiting for my mother. He was an ice cream man. It was neat because we'd help him clean his truck and he'd give us ice cream. And then it didn't make any sense when he tried to get alone with me all the time. You don't put two and two together at that age. You think that he's a nice man that's going to give you
ice cream. He starts getting you by yourself and he starts wanting to play in your panties. He wants you to crawl on his lap. It never makes any sense. Then there was a fifteen year old boy that lived behind us that tried to get to me. I don't know why that happened either."

"How old were you?" I asked.

"It was right around the same time. He was one of these kids that would tell you, 'I'll buy you this if you let me take down your dress and take down your panties.' You know, one of these numbers. He threatened me. He said that if I told anybody he would hurt me. I guess I wouldn't have thought it was wrong if he hadn't told me that. I guess the same is true of the other man. The grown man told me not to tell anybody, too. That's what clicked."

"When did it happen again?"

"Early teens, I guess. An uncle. Not that I was virtuous at that age because I had been messing around with boyfriends by that time. Still into heavy petting, trying to impress the older boys and get in with the in crowd. It freaked me out when my uncle approached me because I had spent so much time with him when I was younger. But he flipped on me. It didn't make any sense. I was confused."
"Were you alone in the house at the time?"

"Yeah and I didn't think nothing of it. Partially my fault, I guess. I was probably running around with too few clothes. But I thought of my uncle the way I thought of my father and brother. So, if I had my nightgown on, I didn't worry about it. He was part of the family. If another man came in, I would have felt differently and put on some jeans and a shirt or something."

"What did he do? Did he rape you?"

"No, he approached me and started kissing and feeling me and saying, 'Now doesn't that feel good?' And I'm saying 'Why are you doing this to me?' I get scared to say no, not knowing what to do, and I get totally confused. If it came from anybody else, I could have dealt with it better. I could have been strong enough to say, 'Get your hands off me!' I'd smack the hell out of him. Even as young as I was, I was not the village idiot. It wasn't that I didn't understand what was going on. But coming from him? It was as shocking as if it had come from my father or brother."

"Did you tell anyone?"

"I was scared to. I was too scared. I knew mother wouldn't believe me. That's the way our relationship is. She wouldn't believe me. Even if she had, she wouldn't have done anything about it."
Samantha left the children's home and school in her early teens. Her brother, a confidante and one who understood the trials of Samantha's life, had graduated from high school and left the home to join the service. It was a loss to Samantha. The event of his departure left Samantha feeling hollow and alone. Stripped of a vital complimentary role, that of a close sister, Samantha could not bear the emotionally stark environment of the children's home. She describes this passage in her life.

"My brother was leaving and, at the time, I really didn't put it all down to that but I had to get out too. I had been through enough and I wasn't going to go through anymore. Never again would they put a hand on me. The next one that put a hand on me I was going to do my best to kill them. I was sick of it. Strangely, now that I look back on it, it was the same year my brother graduated. Well, I thought if I got into enough trouble then I'd get kicked off the hill. That's how it worked with some of the other kids. They'd just kick them out of the home. But I found out then that I was a court-ordered commitment. I had to stay until I was eighteen. I had one way to get out and that was to get married."

I asked Samantha how old she was when she married.
"I was fifteen. Barry was twenty-six. He was just a friend of my mother's who agreed to marry me to allow me to leave the children's home. I had to lie and say I was sixteen and, with my mother's signed consent, I could get married. Of course, it wasn't legal at all because my mother didn't have custody so she had no jurisdiction over me. She didn't have the authority to sign. We did get the marriage license though. I just held onto it and told Barry that we'd get married one of these days. No big deal. One day, it was raining like hell and I called his family and said 'What are you all doing today?' They said nothing so I said 'Well, I reckon Barry and I'll get married today. We'll meet you over at the preacher's house.' I went over to the laundromat and put some clothes in the washer, went and got married, went back and put the clothes in the dryer. It was no big deal. I mean Barry was enflamed with me and he was tickled pink and all. I wasn't thrilled at all. I sensed Barry was getting a lot closer than I wanted him to be. I wouldn't consummate the marriage. I told him it wasn't part of our agreement. I was just totally turned off by Barry. I didn't want no part of him. Not like he wanted it anyway. I'd be his friend and that's about it. We lived with my grandma for a while."
"How did that work out?" I asked.

"There was a strange quirk of fate. There was a rapist in the area that had been attacking people. He raped me in my own home! He came to the door under the pretense of wanting to speak to somebody. I thought Barry was at the door so I opened the door. Something clicked that wasn't right. Before I could shut the door, this guy put his foot in the way. He pulled a knife. It ended up that he raped me, forced me to go down on him, and then raped me again. The whole time my brother who was home on leave was in the back bedroom playing his guitar with the stereo on. He didn't hear anything. Barry finally came home and something clicked for him that something wasn't right. Anyway, my brother and Barry found me crying in my room and I told them what happened. They called the police and did all of the handling of the situation. They caught the guy and convicted him. He's still in prison."

"Did you testify at the trial?"

"Oh, yes. I went through months and months of it. I felt like the defendant. Rape is so hard to prove. It was tough but they did convict him."

"Didn't you have an accident around that time?" I asked. Samantha had spoken of an accident in a previous interview.
"Yeah. It was right after the rape. I ended up laid up for a long time. I was blinded in my left eye, had permanent damage to my left leg. At the time, the doctors told me that I would never walk again. They saw no hope."

"What exactly happened?"

"It was the first time I'd been out since the rape. Barry talked me into going to the fair with him. He knew that I was a kid at heart and that I liked going to the fair. I never miss the state fair. It was the last day of the fair. Barry talked me into riding with him on his motorcycle. Well, we never made it back home. We stayed about an hour at the fair. I enjoyed it. I really did. It felt good to get out. It was on the way home that a car ran a yield sign and hit us."

"Did it hit you broadside?" I asked.

"Yeah, doing 55 miles an hour!"

"And were you on the back of the motorcycle?"

"Yup, with a sissy bar behind me. I tried to push myself off the bike in spite of the sissy bar because I saw the car coming. Barry passed the bike trying to get out of the way but it just didn't work. He got himself out of the way but the car still caught me. The bike was mutilated. It was a total wreck."
"How long did it take you to recover from the accident?" I asked, knowing from previous conversation that the injuries sustained from the accident were severe.

"It was better than a year, I'd say. I was in a waist cast. They just kept cutting it down. I was immobile for a long time. For eight months, I was confined to a hospital bed. I left the hospital after three months and they set up a hospital bed at home. I demanded to get to physical therapy to learn how to walk again. They were trying to get me to get used to a wheelchair because they thought I would never walk. I was determined though and, slowly, I was recuperating. Slowly but surely."

"What happened when you were feeling better?"

"Right after that, after I was up and about and maneuvering again, I got pregnant."

"Was Barry the father?"

"No. Barry and I just drifted apart. Between the rape and the wreck, I just couldn't deal with it. I had just finished up the rape trial, too. The court delayed the trial because of my accident. Here I was, looking like a walking disaster area, coming to court to testify. People couldn't believe my bad luck. I was on crutches by the time I testified. I was still solid black and blue on one side of my head and face. I looked pretty gruesome."
"How long did the trial last?"

"It stretched on for about eight months on account of my accident. I tried to go back to school then too to get my degree. The rapist's brothers went to the same school as I did. During the trial, they'd walk up to me in the hall and say crap to me. Hollered at me and stuff like that. I was still on crutches and I just couldn't take it all. I dropped out and started taking care of my grandmother."

"She was ill?" I asked.

"After I was raped, she started having strokes. I think it was because of my situation. She felt bad. She was wishing it was her and not me. She'd say, 'I'm old. I've lived my life. Why couldn't it be me?' She had about seven strokes in a four month period and it left her paralyzed on one side. I started taking care of her and, one time, we ended up in the hospital together."

"How did that come about?"

"She was in for her stroke condition and I had to go back in to have my legs reset. They were worried about a minor gangrene condition in my legs, too. The legs would start swelling and turning black. It was on again and off again. They drained some fluid off of the legs. I couldn't take care of my grandmother anymore so they put her in a nursing home. She died there not long afterward."
Samantha was still only fifteen years old at this point in her life. Her family had neglected to tell Samantha of her grandmother's death. Samantha learned of her loss from the newspaper. She told me later that her sense of loss was magnified by the neglect shown her by her family in not relaying the news. Her grandmother was buried before Samantha knew of her passing. Samantha also told me that she was terribly self-conscious about her appearance, particularly her face which had been badly torn by the pavement she fell upon in the motorcycle accident. To this day, when the sky is clear, the sun pronounces the red blotches of scar tissue on Samantha's face. Samantha was not feeling comfortable with herself and the world around her at fifteen years of age. Perhaps this contributed to her getting pregnant at such an early age. With the promise of a baby comes the hope of an unconditional love not often experienced by Samantha in her youth. Unfortunately, this promise and hope dissolved into pain and loss. The stress of everyday life seemed not to lessen.

"Who was the father of your baby?" I asked.

"I had been seeing Ken for some time but we broke up. We were friends more than anything. I moved into an apartment and he lived next door. I got pregnant. When I got pregnant, I quit seeing anybody at all. I moved back over to my mother's. Her and I fought like
cats and dogs. These crazy things, like saying she was going to try and kill me. She had butcher knives, she was throwing glasses and stuff. Her and I never got along. But, you know, that was another transition. The apartment building burned down. A lot of our things weren't hurt. There was a lot of smoke damage and the fire department chopped the place to pieces. They thought I was in the apartment sleeping because I was pregnant. I wasn't though. They ruined just about everything that was valuable. Chest of drawers, bureaus, and all. We stayed in a motel for awhile after that."

"What happened next?"

"Well, I started having complications with my pregnancy. I bled continuously. I was working in a restaurant for money because my mother wouldn't give me a dime. I quit because I was afraid I'd lose the baby from carrying all those dishes. The owner of the motel said I could manage the place, keep it clean. He said I could have twenty-five percent of all the money the place took in. Anyway, I had some vaginal surgery while I was pregnant but I still bled quite a bit."

"Were you sixteen years old by this time?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure I was. I finally had the baby and decided to put it up for adoption. I thought it would be best for my baby girl. I loved her. My own situation was just too tough. I hurt a lot from
that. I was hurt. They tell me now that that might have been my only chance to have a child. I may not be able to have anymore because of this low-grade vaginal infection I seem to have. And that hurts because I love children. At the same time, I know there is a general purpose in everything. It doesn't make it any easier even now. At least it pacifies me. Maybe the big man upstairs is trying to tell me that if I had been able to have any more kids, maybe something would be wrong with them. Maybe something would have happened to me."

"Did you have any second thoughts about the adoption?"

"I changed my mind a thousand times because I was caught between emotions and logic. Emotionally, I wanted her. I wanted to take care of her. I wanted to give her the love and attention I hadn't had. Even though she wouldn't have the best material things, she'd have the best I could offer. At the same time, I thought that I wouldn't be fair to keep her. She'd be cheated just like I was cheated. That's not fair to her. I didn't want her to wind up in a children's home like me. I was caught in the middle of emotions and logic. But when it came down to it, I wanted her. I wanted a chance. Mother flatly refused. She said, 'You're not bringing that bastard home.' If I did, she told me I couldn't step foot in her house again. I
didn't have any choice in the matter. Mother wouldn't even take me to the hospital when I was in labor. She said, 'Call an ambulance.' She didn't give a shit. She said, 'Call an ambulance.' I left town after the adoption. I couldn't deal with it anymore.'

The resentment Samantha held for her mother had solidified. The potential for a mutually satisfying triadic relationship between her mother, Samantha, and daughter was absent from the start. The triad splintered. The baby went to an adoption agency and Samantha left town. That Samantha could have left town with the baby and satisfied her mother's demand that she not set foot in the house again was a life choice not taken by Samantha. Instead, Samantha cut loose from both mother and child, perhaps a sign of her increasing anxiety and frustration with life conditions. Samantha has learned from experience that other people bring pain to her. At sixteen, Samantha may understand the possible pain she could bring to her baby and, as a consequence, to herself.

Samantha moved around quite a bit after she left home. She had several relationships with men, none of them long-lived. She told me that she would leave a man when he would begin to talk of marriage. Clearly, she did not wish to entangle herself in or commit
herself to a man who wanted to, in her own words, 'own
her.' Samantha worked odd jobs to support herself
during this period waitressing, cleaning homes, and
even some construction work. When she was seventeen,
Samantha met Carl, a private detective by trade. Carl
was married and saw Samantha on the side. She enjoyed
this arrangement because she thought a married man
would not demand the same commitment as would a single
one. As Samantha tells it, however, her relationship
with Carl soon grew violent.

"Carl is a good man in his own way. But he's got
a lot of hangups and he refuses to deal with things on
the level that they are. I couldn't see it then. When
it came time to break up, I realized that I wasn't half
as much in love with him as I was afraid to let him go.
He wasn't much but he was all I had."

"What kind of hangups did he have?" I asked.

"He was a super-overprotective, jealous man,"
Samantha said and I thought that these were the same
qualities that Samantha had studiously avoided in her
relationships with other men. "Carl was twice my age.
He had me by twenty-one years. He was one of these
guys who was battling his obligations at home and his
obligations to me. He said I was his wife's exact
opposite but, before long, he was trying to change me
into her. Like a fool, I was going for it. I didn't
see it all then."
"How was he overprotective?" I asked.

"He cost me more jobs than Carter has liver pills. Being so violent, I couldn't hold a job anywhere. He wouldn't let me be a waitress because he couldn't stand men talking to me. He was just so jealous of me around other men."

"Did you and he ever physically fight?" I asked.

"Like cats and dogs. In fact, he's the only man I ever fought with. I really mean fought with. Knock down, drag out fights. I always got the worst of it but I kept coming. The bad fights were at the beginning. After that, I told him that I would hurt him."

"Did you ever hurt him?" I asked.

"The times I hurt him I really didn't mean to. The times that I hit him was out of anger. I can horse around like anyone else, but don't smack or slap at me. Some people can slap-box and that's fine if they can deal with it. I can't. I guess it comes from being beat as a kid. Anyway, Carl knew that. This one time, I got off from work and Carl was two hours late from picking me up. I let him have my car that day. I was just trying to be civilized. I didn't ordinarily trust anyone with my car. It was my first car, my only car - a chitty-chitty bang-bang sort of car. It was my pride and joy. And he shows up two hours late in my car! Then, he doesn't want to go home. I'd worked a ten
hour shift on my feet in the restaurant. I'd just worked my tail off. So we went over to a friend's house and smoked a joint. I was tired but I went anyway. He started messing with me, smacking at me. I said, 'Carl, don't do that. Don't do it. Just leave me alone.' But he keeps it up, keeps smacking at me. Finally, he got one too many in. I got mad, gritted my teeth. I turned to him and POW! I clobbered his mouth with my hand. I busted his whole mouth. His mouth and nose were bleeding. They got bruised up pretty bad. Hey, I was mad. I'm not puny either so that didn't help. I said that I'd apologize for hurting him. I didn't mean to hurt him, but I meant to hit him. I wasn't going to apologize for that."

"Did you hurt him any other time?" I asked.

"Yeah, I broke his plate, fractured his jaw. It was over my pet gerbil. I had this little animal friend then. At that time, I must have needed something desperately to hold onto. Things would go on and off between Carl and me so I needed that little gerbil. Sometimes, Carl would call things off. That was his excuse for admitting that he could not keep up with me. That's what it boiled down to."

"How do you mean he couldn't keep up with you?" I asked.
"Sexually. I think he let his mental problems get in the way. He was going through a lot of changes. He wouldn't deal with them. He'd block them and let them turn into a volcano. He'd always bottle things up. He wouldn't even deal with them when it came to the frustration-anger level when he would just want to go out and kick someone's ass. He'd scapegoat something or someone instead."

"Would you ever get that way yourself?" I asked.

"Sometimes. But at least I tried to come out from under it. Most of the time, after the real anger would subside, the real hurt would set in. That's when I would hold my little gerbil. I had it since it was an infant. It was dying and I nursed it back to health. I think that gerbil really thought I was its momma.

"He didn't know any different. He was so spoiled. He had free run of the house. Most of the time, he'd sleep with me. Just a big old baby, worse than a child. That gerbil would get into everything. But he was my heart and soul. He was the child I didn't have. Carl was getting to the point where he was actually getting jealous of the gerbil. When Carl would hurt me somehow, I'd just sit in the living room and cry. My gerbil would sense it. Those times when I was crying and frustrated, that gerbil would sit and let me hold him. He wouldn't move. He'd nuzzle up to me and let me love him. Like he knew what I needed."
Samantha continued, "Well, it came down to bark and bite. Carl was jealous of the gerbil. One night, my gerbil chewed up one of Carl's wooden-handled screwdrivers. I scolded the gerbil, spanked his little butt. It was Carl's fault, though, for leaving his tools out. Then Carl acted like he was reaching for the gerbil. I knew he'd hurt him. Carl reached for the gerbil and that's all she wrote! I told Carl that if he laid one hand on that gerbil, he'd pay. I said, 'Don't mess around with the gerbil.' He said, 'No, I'm going to get that critter!' I hit Carl. I almost killed him. I'd forgotten that he had a plastic cheekbone from a car accident he'd been in years ago. He went through a windshield and it crushed his cheekbone. I broke his jaw in several places. The doctor who looked at the x-ray said that if that cheekbone had shifted a fraction of an inch more, it would have gone into Carl's brain. That scared the hell out of me. But I told him once again 'I didn't mean to hurt you but I did mean to hit you.'"

"Had he ever hit you, hurt you?" I asked.

A few times he did. One time he hit me with a belt buckle and busted me up pretty bad. He accused me of seeing another guy. I had been. I met a guy for coffee. He picked me up after work and Carl saw us. Anyway, I don't know what made Carl pull the belt. It had a big buckle on it. It caught me on the thigh.
I'd never seen such a bruise. It was white in the center, red all around it and then all purple and blue. The center was hard. I ended up with a black eye, too. Carl was crazy that night. I think he was hopped up on alcohol and yellow T."

"What's yellow T?" I asked.

"It's PCP in a crude form."

"Were you into drugs at all?" I asked.

"Up until I was seventeen, it was just a little speed and some pot, maybe some acid now and again. Carl was doing yellow T, morphine, and stuff. I was never one for downers. I figured life had enough downs anyway, I didn't need to take any more. I did a little coke too. Then I started getting into yellow T when I was with Carl. And mescaline. I ended up running it up (injecting). I eventually got strung up on all of it."

"How much would you do a day?" I asked.

"I ended up with a bad habit," answered Samantha.

"How much would you spend on your addiction?" I asked.

"Carl and I could easily sit down and knock off half an ounce of coke between us in a night. We stopped only when the money would. Before it was over, I was a zombie."
"Can you give me a ballpark figure on how much money you'd spend?" I asked again.

"When we were really strung out... see, we built up to it." Samantha grew restive. "But after I got strung out good, I was eventually doing more than he was. Well, between the two of us, maybe a thousand dollars a week."

"How did you get that kind of money?" I asked.

"We both worked. But mostly I was doing some selling on the side. I'd make enough profit to cover my own habit. I didn't like dealing, though. I was more concerned with my own high than with anyone else's."

Apparently, Samantha's habit was as costly physically as it was financially. She was eventually hospitalized for partial renal failure. While in the hospital, she claims to have rid herself of her addiction. Carl was arrested for breaking and entering and for possession of burglary tools. He was trying to burglarize a drug store. Once out of the hospital and with Carl out on bail, Samantha and Carl planned the robbery that would lead to their incarceration. At only nineteen years of age, Samantha shot and killed a store clerk.
"Carl talked me into robbing a store. He couldn't do it. He needed the money to pay his way out of the other offense. He planned most of it. I didn't know anything about that stuff. He got me to steal another car. He showed me how to hotwire it. He went to a theatrical make-up store to get a disguise for me. I looked like a man. I was dressed like a man with a little wig on, sunglasses, and men's clothes. Well it didn't work out very well."

"What happened?" I asked.

"I got in the grocery store and this night manager was in there. He wanted to play hero. He grabbed my gun, pulled me halfway into the cubicle and eventually, inevitably shot himself. Of which, I am responsible. I had the gun. I first told him to be still and quiet, put all the money in the sack, and just hand it over. He looked at me like I was crazy. Like 'Bitch, are you crazy?' He really wasn't going for it at all. Hero. He started working for the store when he was eighteen. I found this out at the trial. He was twenty-six, an upper middle class fellow. He had a family, four kids, and he went from bagboy to night manager pretty fast. So, the hero of the store, he was. He saw his way to make another mark on the company payroll. Carl told me that if the guy stalled to cock my gun. So I did. I told the guy that I wanted the money now. I guess I didn't sound very influential. I didn't know what I
was doing. The guy grabbed the gun and just hung on. He wouldn't let go. As the seconds passed, I thought that anyone who's crazy enough to pull a gun from me into their own guts is crazy enough to shoot me with it. If he got it from me, I thought he'd shoot me."

Samantha lit a cigarette and continued her story. "So, I've still got the butt of the handgun. The only thing that's keeping me from going into the cubicle with him is my belt buckle. He's got the barrel of the gun and he's hollering. He just about lost his grip. But he's trying to pull me in with him and get the gun at the same time. When he started to lose his grip, he reached up to grab it again. And I don't know. The only thing I can figure is that, when he grabbed the gun, that's all I had. And that's when it fired. It scared me so bad because I hadn't pulled the trigger. It scared me so bad that I just let go."

"What happened next?" I asked.

"It was all in slow motion. I didn't hear what everybody else at the trial says happened. They said it sounded like three or four shots. To me, it sounded like a pop or cap gun. Everything just slowed down. I saw him look up at me. His hand let go of the gun and the gun flew threw the air in slow motion. And I looked down. He had on this white shirt, black tie, and black pants. There were powder burns on his shirt. A big span of powder burns. There was already blood on
the shirt from where the bullet went in. I just stood there for a minute. I guess it was a full minute or two. I didn't know what to do. I thought, 'Hey! This isn't the way it's supposed to happen!' The war was shot and I was scared. I finally turned around. Outside, someone tackled me as I was getting into the car. I got free and ran to Carl's car. We took off. We left town. Carl talked me into leaving town. He said that that was the thing to do, run."

Samantha and Carl fled the state. They continued to live together and both worked at separate jobs for a time. They assumed aliases and made false driver's licenses. Within a year, both were apprehended and brought back to North Carolina for trial. The last time I spoke with Samantha, we had just finished talking over the events of her life. In a candid moment, I asked her what was the single most thing that troubled her about her life.

Samantha thought about this for awhile. She snuffed out the cigarette she left burning in the ashtray between us. She lifted her head slightly and looked me straight in the eye. "The lack of control for so many years," she said. "The total lack of control. Of course, you don't have any control at that age when you're young. You just don't have it. But
that was the frustrating thing at the children's home. And getting older, too. The total lack of control over my own life. It's frustrating because I get mad at myself. As I got older, I allowed people to control my life. And in doing so, I put myself here."

"Did you ever feel lonely?"

"Most of the time. Scared to death to put my neck on the block because every time I did, I got it chopped off. I wanted to have special and close relationships with family and friends and boyfriends, whatever. I was scared to death of them."

"Did you talk about your troubles with anyone?" I asked.

"Mostly kept them to myself," Samantha answered. I had heard similar answers from other women in the sample. "I would react to them, but not act," continued Samantha. I would just react. I wouldn't deal with it on the level where it hurt me because I couldn't understand all of it. Counseling and therapy and even some psychology and sociology courses have helped me since understand the causes and effects. But at the time, the only thing that came out was anger."

Samantha had mentioned to me several times that her childhood departed from her notion of the 'typical American family.' I asked her what she meant by 'typical American family.'
"You know," she said, "apple pie, Mom, Cheverolets. You go to see your parents years later and Mom's puttering around the kitchen. The dog's barking. And it just so happens that your brother's shown up at the same time and his baby's in the living room crying. But, you know, that's okay with Mom. The kids are home for a few days and that's great because she hasn't seen them in awhile. Dad's sitting there, reclining in an easy chair, watching the football game. Not everything as pat as that but close to it. The closeness of the family. That's something we've never had."

"Did you feel other people had that?" I asked.

"Yeah. I was jealous."

"Did you feel as though you were the only one that didn't have that?" I asked.

"It was so much intensified when we lived at the children's home. We'd see everybody else pack up for the summer and go to the beach. While I'd sit there. Even some of the other kids there with me. They always had a place to go over the holidays or vacation time whereas many times I didn't. And there I'd sit. I'd be one of ten out of two hundred on campus with nowhere to go."

"What does it feel like to be an only one?" I asked.
"So lonely and hurt," Samantha said in a whisper. "And the hurt and the frustration and the lack of control and the not being able to do anything about it, all that just rolled out in anger. I just wanted to tell everybody to kiss off. Leave me alone. If you can't be an active part of my life, don't come around me when your conscience bothers you. Just leave me alone."

"When you go through that," I started to ask. Samantha answered before I could finish.

"You come out burnt. It gets so devastating at times. Sometimes, the big things you don't react to get bottled up. You put a cap on them and say, 'I'll not bother with this. I'll not think about this.' And then something small triggers it all, opens up that bottle."

"Did you feel that way often?" I asked.

"I couldn't help but feel that way. I had to." Samantha stopped and looked away. "How many people my age could I have talked to that had been through what I had been through? They didn't understand it. And a lot of the older people didn't believe me."
Chapter Seven

Love and Marital Life

Erich Fromm (1956) believes that love relationships become problematic because of the manner in which most of us approach the affective condition of love. Most people, Fromm writes, strive to be loved by others. The healthier goal of loving, of developing one's capacity to love others, is not widely shared. The overemphasis on being loved rather than on loving calls attention to a need for acceptance and ego affirmation. When one is loved by another, one's assessment of self-worth appreciates. A love relationship, in Fromm's application, is an intimate interaction where affection is manifestly directed outwardly, toward another, but is latently directed inwardly, toward the self. Too often, believes Fromm, we enter love relationships to fulfill the latent and frequently desperate need for affirmation of our own integrity. We need to be wanted, to be loved by others. Sometimes that need can interfere with our loving others.

An intense need to be loved is understandable in modern mass society. Depersonalization and isolation can be psychically devastating. The feeling that one is alone in
the world produces anxiety. Fromm (1956:7) explains:

The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety. Being separate means being cut off, without any capacity to use my human powers. Hence, to be separate means to be helpless, unable to grasp the world — things and people actively; it means that the world can invade me without my ability to react. Thus, separateness is the source of intense anxiety.

To be loved means that you are recognized as a person. You have been plucked from the crowd, one among many, and you become an object of affection and perhaps adoration. Your selection as one to be loved is comforting and reassuring. It is in this way that intimate love relationships may buffer the effects of isolation and anonymity in mass society. Fromm (1956:8) continues:

The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity, because the panic of complete isolation can be overcome only by such a radical withdrawal from the world outside that the feeling of separation disappears — because the world outside, from which one is separated, has disappeared.

The theme of isolation and separateness and of their effects runs deep in the behavioral sciences. Konopka (1966) illustrates the sense of "alienated aloneness" shared by the wayward adolescent girls she studied. Konopka believes this feeling of isolation may be a source of adolescent adjustment problems. In the late nineteenth century, French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1952) addressed the effects of social disorganization upon individual and collective consciousness. If the bond between the
individual and her peers is weak, wrote Durkheim, the individual may feel socially set adrift. Everyday friction and pain are likely to arise. Durkheim believed that suicide may be a probable outcome of pronounced social isolation. Much of the current work on social stress is devoted to the relationship between isolation and poor mental and physical health (see, for example, fillin). Some of this same research suggests social support networks, such as love relationships, soften the impact of acute stress. As Fromm implies, it may be that we seek out love partners not to practice the art of loving, but to have someone love us — to shelter us from the fury of everyday life and to allay our anxieties that we are alone.

Chapter Six charted the childhood lives of the study women. Broadly speaking, their young years were laced with troubling events and conditions. Of particular note was the reportedly frequent experience with the aggression of others, particularly family members. Social loss and dislocation were also prominent forces in their childhood lives. Also documented in Chapter Six was the shared pattern of dropping out of school and leaving home prematurely. Most of these women immediately entered love relationships with men. Some married at a fairly young age. It may be that these women sought intimate contacts where they would be loved for themselves. It would seem that this affection had escaped their childhoods. Coming from taxing adolescence, they may have looked to love relationships for
reassurance and to deliver them from their aloneness. Sadly, these hopes were not realized for the majority. Rather than providing sanctuary, love and marital relationships were yet another source of life stress. And for a significant number of the study women, love relationships had scripts laden with violent episodes. These relationships often set the stage for criminal homicide, the sum of life distress.*1

**Framing love relationships**

As was the case in their childhoods, the study women moved quite often in their adult years. Only four reported never moving once they were on their own. Fifteen said that they had moved once or twice. Twenty-eight women reported that they moved from three to five times in adulthood. Twenty-six women, almost one-third of the sample, said that they moved six or more times in adulthood and 14 of these women said they moved more than ten times.*2 Moving from place to place can disrupt the structure of everyday life. One leaves familiar relationships and creates new ones. The constellation of relationships changes and this requires some adjustment. Since the study women tended to be young, most in their twenties and thirties, the number of moves occurred in a relatively short time. The compression of moves within a short time span, for most less than 15 years, may have accentuated the stress associated with moving.

1. It may be helpful to recall that 48 of the 76 study women killed a husband or lover.
Change in the physical and social surroundings became a chronic condition. The emotional effect is difficult to gauge but, as in childhood, getting one's bearing—a steady reference point—in adult life requires effort when the scenery keeps shifting.

There is some evidence that marriages in North Carolina stand a greater risk of dissolution than in the U.S. as a whole. In 1979, for example, the rate of marriages per 1000 population was 10.6 in the U.S. The comparable rate for divorces and annulments was 5.4 in the same year. In North Carolina, the 1979 marriage rate was 8.0 and the divorce rate was 4.9. While in the U.S. for every two marriages there is roughly one divorce, the ratio is less than that in North Carolina (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).

For the most part, moving was associated more with changing love partners than with changing economic conditions. Most of the women who moved, even those who had moved often, said that the new place was a better place to live than the old. Only nine women reported a downgrading of the quality of life when they moved. However, the generally positive assessment of moving to another place may be related to the fact that most of the women who moved did so to escape an unsatisfying love relationship. They moved in with a new lover or remarried and lived in their new mates' homes. The promise of a fresh start, the release

2. There are three missing cases.
from troubling relationships may have influenced the positive assessment of moving. Moving one's residence tended not to signal upward socio-economic movement. Judging from the accounts of most of the study women, socio-economic movement was lateral.

Thirty-six women had married in or before their eighteenth year. Of these women, 18 had married in or before their sixteenth year and three of these were as young as 14 when they first married. Eighteen women in the sample said that they had never married. The remaining women had married at least once. Fourteen women said they married twice and seven said they were married three times. About half of the women who had experience with marriage had divorced at least once. Eighteen women divorced once, six divorced twice, and three divorced three times. These figures are not a true appraisal of the start and finish of love relationships among the study women. Many women had informally engaged, often lived with, men in relationships beyond casual sexual episodes. The length of these relationships ran from months to years. Of course relationships such as this would not appear in tabulations of legal marriage or divorce. While love relationships could be distinguished by the presence or absence of legal sanction, marital and cohabital relationships were remarkably similar in almost every other distinguishable characteristic: shared residence, having children, pooled financial resources, and exposure to the mate's extended
family. Cohabital relationships were so similar to marital ones that more than a few women would refer to their respective paramours as husbands, without the benefit of marriage.

Some childhood events, such as sexual assault or observed male violence, may have informed adult love relationships among the study women. We often learn how to perform in certain roles by watching others perform the same role, or a complimentary one. Part way through the study, it became apparent that many women reported their parents fighting with each other. Regretably, a question about parental fighting was not included in the original interview schedule. Once the pattern of parental fighting began to emerge, a question on this matter was included in the 45 remaining interviews. Over half of these women, 23, reported that they had witnessed their parents fighting physically with each other. Fathers were clearly the victors in such conflicts. They inflicted far more bodily damage. Mothers struck back but with less success. These fights were unsettling. It was disturbing to watch two adults of opposite sex locked in physical combat. That the two adults are one's parents enlarges the impact of the violence. While acknowledging the distress associated with the witnessing of skirmishes between parents, it may also be that the frequent observation of such behavior informs a child's understanding of the nature of love relationships. Perhaps a child exposed to routine parental violence in the
adult love relationships of the study women to be presented shortly suggests this as a strong possibility.

Before addressing the qualities of love relationships as inherently combative. The evidence of violence in the adult love relationships to be presented shortly suggests this as a strong possibility. Before addressing the qualities of love relationships of the study women, it might be helpful to reconsider childhood experiential currents and the influence listed above. Most of the study women emerged from adolescence with some form of psychic scar. Certain events stuck in their consciousnesses and informed their approach to everyday life. Often these events were traumatic, painful. They were vivid reminders that the social world could be threatening. Most of the study women left school prematurely, perhaps seeking an escape from what they thought were troubling life situations. The shared pattern seems to be that the women involved themselves in love relationships with men, almost immediately after leaving school. Romantic involvement may have been a tool to fend off the anxiety connected with separateness and aloneness. To be loved is to be affirmed, to be comforted from distress. From the information above, it would seem that many study women engaged in more than one love relationship, marital or otherwise, as adults. Further, a change in residence seemed to reflect a change in love partner. The frequency of moves and the number of love partners may indicate that satisfaction in love
Table 7.1: Subjects' Assessments of General and Most Recent Love Relationships with Men.

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relationships was elusive for many of the women. All these factors combine as the backdrop of the love lives of the study women. The stage is set to entertain the description of love relationships given by the women themselves.

**Love and conflict**

A large majority of the sample women thought that their relationships with men were generally good. The truth is that many of the women said that they preferred the company of men over the company of women. This preference pertains to both love and friendship relations. The pattern is quite different when the study women were asked to assess their most recent love relationship with a man. Table 7.1 illustrates the response difference among the women when assessing general and most recent love relationships. Only 11 women characterized their love relationships with men as generally poor but three times as many women described their last love relationship as poor. Further, the researcher was impressed by the negative reviews given by most of the women when they described past love relationships with other men. While most of the women thought that their love relationships were generally good, they described specific relationships in less positive ways. When moving from the general to the specific, the assessment of the relationship depreciates.

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3. Most recent love relationship is the last relationship prior to the criminal homicide.
This pattern may offer some insight into the expectation-reality schism that seems to apply to the life worlds of the study women. That most of the women see their relations with men in general as good but with specific men as poor suggests two things. First, this discrepancy indicates that most of the women believe that the problems that arise in specific relationships have sources external to the self. They do not blame themselves for the disintegration of specific relationships. After all, they report that they usually get along quite well with men. The women tended to shift the blame for love failures to individual men. Second, the positive assessment of general relationships suggests that love still has promise, despite past failures. The majority of women did not entirely dismiss love relationships in the future because they had some unpleasant experiences in the past. With each new relationship comes the possibility of fulfillment in love, the chance that one will be loved. Unfortunately, the possibility would erode as the specific relationship progressed but it was not extinguished. "I knew," remarked one woman in the study, "there was a man out there who would want me."

The love relationships in which the study women entered were marked dramatically by conflict. The conflict was pronounced and tended not to be confined to minor disagreement. Most of the study women, much like their mothers, appeared to be more often the victims than
Table 7.2: Frequency of Subjects' and Mates' Verbal Attack in Most Recent Love Relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Several times weekly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjects verbally attacking mates</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>100.0% (N=76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mates verbally attacking subjects</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>100.0% (N=75)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 7.3: Frequency of Subjects' and Mates' Physical Attack in Most Recent Love Relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Several times weekly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjects physically attacking mates</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<td>(N=76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mates physically attacking subjects</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
perpetrators of verbal and physical attack. Many women openly admitted to contributing to the conflict but they also reported losing more battles than their mates. Tables 7.2 and 7.3 respectively catalog the responses to questions about the frequency of verbal and physical attack in the love relationships immediately prior to their criminal homicides. Table 7.2, addressing verbal attack in most recent love relationship, illustrates the frequency with which the subjects reported yelling at their mates and the frequency with which their mates yelled at them. Fewer women reported yelling at their mates at all than women who said their mates yelled at them. According to the women's reports, it would seem that mates verbally attacked with greater frequency than the women themselves. Most of these verbal attacks were described as shouting matches provoked by the husband or paramour and, further, were matches most women reported losing.

Table 7.3 catalogs the responses of the women to questions concerning the frequency of physical fights in most recent love relationship. Compared with the figures in Table 7.2, physical attacks occurred less often than verbal attacks in last love relationship. A qualitative rendering of the study interviews suggests that shouting matches often preceded physical conflict. Rarely was there hitting without a prior heated exchange of words. Conflict in love relationships among the study women appears to be escalatory, from shouting at each other to physical
violence. Many times, after a physical fight, there was a
denouement of further shouting, usually involving some form
of threat. The women would threaten to leave and their
mates would threaten further violence.

Table 7.3 also demonstrates that the study women saw
their mates as more frequently the aggressors than they did
themselves. Mates were cast in incitatory roles by most of
the women. Men started physical fights and they usually won
them, judging from the personal injuries the women reported
sustaining in such fights. A few women said that they won a
fight or two but this was a rare event and it called upon
the women to use some weapon or an object to throw. Of the
women who reported a physical fight, 30 said that they
received medical treatment as a result. Only 10 reported
that their mates sustained injuries requiring medical
attention.*4

An oft cited reason for physical fighting was the
mate's beligerent nature. He was frequently described as an
intensely jealous provocateur. Without sufficient reason in
the views of the study women, their mates would accuse them
of the attempted seduction of other men:

My husband was very jealous. Very, very
jealous. Once, we were walking to a store and
these guys passed us and spoke to us. My
husband and I both spoke to them. No sooner did
we get back to the house, my husband swore up
and down that I knew those guys from somewhere.
It was always accusations like that. I'd qc out
and I'd have a feeling someone was following me.
I'd turn around and there he'd be, following me

4. Medical treatment was operationalized as seeing a
physician or being hospitalized.
in his car. Or I'd answer the phone and he'd snatch it quick and say 'who is this!' Or when one of his friends come over looking for him, I could open the door but the screen door always had to be locked. None of his friends were allowed in the house without him being there. One time he hit me real bad. I can't remember what it was I did. He slapped me with his open palm. I got a black eye. I knew then what a black eye was because I sure had one.

The husband of one woman in the study would lock her in the house whenever he was away. The telephone was her only means of communication with the world outside her home. This was a severe case of role restriction but the behavior of the husband was shared by the mates of many of the study women. Jealousy and sexual innuendo often precipitated physical violence.

I used to wear hot pants and stuff before we got married. He loved that. The week after we married, I started to go to the grocery store in shorts. He told me to go and put some clothes on. He didn't want me running around in shorts nowhere! Lord, have mercy! He had our phone took out and made me give up my car a month after we got married. He wouldn't let me talk to nobody. He made me stay in the house all the time. He didn't want me going nowhere. Well, we had some knockdown, drag-out fights. He'd hit me and I'd hit him back. I told him that if he kept hitting me and made me mad enough, I was going to use a frying pan on him when he went to sleep. I mean... oh, we'd fight! He got a knife out after me one night. Once, he busted my face all up. I was blue. All the way down my face, I was blue. He knocked my glasses right off. I'd leave and he'd come after me crying. I'd feel sorry for him because I couldn't stand a man to cry.

After one particularly violent episode, the woman quoted above put ant poison in her husband's iced tea. He died three days later.
According to several of the study women, their mates were chronic abusers of alcohol. Sometimes, a mate's intoxication would work to a woman's advantage during a physical conflict. A drunken mate would be less accurate with his punches. For other women, a mate's drunkenness would be to their disadvantage. Alcohol depressed the mate's inhibitions to use a weapon against a woman. An elder woman in the study was repeatedly and severely victimized by an intoxicated husband.

Hit me? Oh my, yes. When he was drunk, he started beating and knocking me until I couldn't take it no more. I took my part of it. More than my part. One time, he was beating me. I don't reckon he knew the nail was sticking out of the board on the house. He was hitting me upside the house. He had a hold of my head. I could feel the blood going down my back. My head was hitting the nail. He's cut me twice. He cut me with a knife. The one time they couldn't stop the bleeding for a while. He cut the back of my cheek and he broke one of my fingers. He twisted it back. Can you imagine? He was just crazy. That wine. I don't know.

Later but before the same woman would kill her husband with a knife, she was herself the victim of a shooting involving her husband. There was a scuffle with her brother and her husband. All had been drinking.

I got the worst of it. I was hit by a ricochet. It hit me on the side and blewed half my head off. They pronounced me dead at the hospital. I got a plate in my head now and real bad headaches. All I been through, and still be alive!

Most of the women in the study saw themselves as the targets of mates' physical and verbal aggression. Further, most could not understand the rationales behind the attacks
Table 7.4: Subjects' Assessments of Parental Feelings Toward Mates and Mates' Parents Toward Subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approval</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disapproval</th>
<th>Total*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessments of parental feelings toward mates</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=71)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments of mates' parents' feelings toward subjects</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
of their husbands or lovers. Their roles in love relationships tended to be restrictive ones, controlled by a more dominant partner through verbal and physical intimidation. In the study sample, there were a few exceptional cases to this pattern. The exceptions would not tolerate any form of abuse from their mates. These women intimidated their partners much like the mates of most of the study women intimidated them. The adoption of such a strategy did not preclude violence, however.

Look, I told my husband from the beginning that there are three things you don't do. You don't squeeze the toothpaste from the middle. You don't leave the top off the toothpaste tube. And you don't ever hit me or I'll kill you. I solved the first two problems by getting two separate tubes. But the very first time he hit me, I shot him with a .357 magnum. I just went crazy.

As stated earlier, most of the study women who reported such abusive love relationships thought that their mates were largely to blame for the decay of the relationship. This view is supported by the ways in which the study women thought that their parents felt about their mates and that their in-laws felt about them. Table 7.4 illustrates the responses of the women when asked about the assessments of these two groups. Note that the reported assessments of the study women tend to be more positive than the reported assessments of mates by the women's parents. Clearly, the women did not see themselves as the difficult ones. They thought that they were fairly easy to get along with judging from their assessment of mate's parents feeling toward them.
Mates were less favorably received by subjects' parents. This pattern may have reinforced the women's views as to their mates - mates tended to be unreasonably aggressive provocateurs - but it also caused further friction in their lives. Parents' feelings were still respected by many of the women and negative parental feelings toward their love partners make the women feel inadequate. Several women said that they thought they had disappointed their parents in their choices of love partners. They thought that their parents believed they could do better in love. Some even hid their physical injuries sustained through conflicts with mates.

My mother asked me what happened to my face. I told her I'd run into a door in the middle of the night. The door was partly open and that I hit it. Mother did not know until I came here (NCCCW) that the bruises came from him. My sister told her.

Mom didn't need to know. It'd only bother her.

No irony is lost on this behavior considering that a significant number of study women had witnessed their mothers being beaten by men.

Sexual fidelity

Another source of strain in a love relationship may be sexual infidelity by one or both partners. Unless infidelity is an agreed upon component of the relationship, sexual involvement with a person outside the relationship may interfere with the existing quality of the love relationship. Extra-relationship affairs can intrude upon
understood love commitments of partners. In the eyes of the still loyal partner, the philandering partner violates the intimacy of the relationship. A sense of betrayal or inadequacy engenders stress. One's self worth may depreciate in the face of infidelity.

Infidelity was often a source of complaint among the study women when they discussed their love relationships. They also spoke of a double standard. Mates thought nothing of their own sexual involvements outside the relationship but forbade the study women to be so involved. Indeed, the mere opportunity for a subject's affair was enough to evoke fits of irrational rage on the part of a mate, according to the reports of a number of study women. So while the study women were constrained in rather restrictive roles in love relationships, it would appear as though they were also asked to tolerate the promiscuity of their mates.

Forty-seven women said that they never had an extra-relationship affair. In comparison, only 20 women said they were certain their mates had never had an affair. Twenty-nine women admitted to having at least one affair and 46 women said that they were certain their mates were having affairs.*5 Nine women reported that they knew of at least ten affairs in which their mates were involved. The point is not that the study women as a group never strayed from their relationships but that mates appeared to stray more often, according to the reports given by the study women.

5. There are 10 missing cases in response to questions concerning mate's infidelity. These women said that they didn't know whether or not their mates had affairs.
Forced sex in love relationships

In a recent survey of a random sample of Boston women, Finkelhor and Yllo (1982) report that 10 percent of the women who had been married reported that they had been forced, physically or through threat, to have sex. The researchers also summarize the findings of a similar survey in San Francisco (see Russell, 1980) where 12 percent of the married women surveyed had been raped by their husbands. There are varieties of coercion involved in forced sex, as the authors point out, ranging from subtle pressure to the use of outright physical force.

Unfortunately, a question concerning forced sex was not included in the original interview schedule in the present study. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that several women had been the victims of forced sex in love relationships. These acts involved the overt use of physical force. It was decided that a question about forced sex would be included in the remaining 31 interviews. The expressed trauma that attended force sex reported by some women seemed to merit its inclusion in the remainder of the interviews.

Of the 31 women asked about such episodes, 14 said that their husbands or lovers had physically forced them to have sexual relations with them. Forced sexual acts were usually reported as repugnant events but ones which the women could do little about. They said that they initially resisted the physically coercive advances but their love partners
overcame the resistance through brute force. A few women who had been sexually assaulted by husband or paramours reported vaginal or anal injuries.

Cookie Glover's account of everyday life in her second marriage provides an illustration of a love relationship interwoven with physical attack and forced sex. As a child, Cookie had been sexually assaulted by one of her brothers and by one of her mother's paramours. She had three children before she was 22 years old, and had miscarried once at the age of 21. Her first marriage was a failure. Cookie's husband was abusive and not a reliable wage earner. He was killed in an automobile accident when Coodie was 28. She married again at age 30 to a man she had lived with for a short time. A year later, her brother would die in a gun battle and her mother passed away from what Coodie describes as intense grief over the loss of her son. The same year, Cookie shot and killed her second husband. Here, she talks about her second marriage.

My second husband abused me from the start. My nerves were getting bad. He would force himself on me when I didn't want to be bothered. He was doing sexual things to me that he knew I didn't like. And he'd accuse me of stepping cut on him. I wasn't but he kept accusing me. He'd force himself on me and I'd tell him to stop. He'd say the reason I didn't want sex is because I'd been out messing around. He just kept right on at it. Sometimes he'd make me take my bloody Kotex off and do it. I'd tell him he was crazy. 'You insane,' I'd say. It just got worse. It got so bad that I'd break cut in a cold sweat everytime he'd come around me. I'd get the chills. I'd be hot and cold at the same time. It seemed like I could break out of my own body. It got to be a dirty affair. I didn't want him to touch me because he made it so dirty. It was just like rape, you know?
Things did not improve in Cookie's relationship with her husband. She was on the verge of a breakdown. She said she wasn't managing things very well. Cookie's relationship with her children, a relationship important to her, began to suffer. A few days before the killing, her husband had put a pistol to her head and threatened to pull the trigger. Cookie was involved in a minor car accident one morning. It shook her up. She describes what happened that evening.

It was about eleven o'clock at night. I was in bed. He came to bed and woke me up. He was cold. The first thing he did was poke me with his elbow. It seemed like a knife sticking in my side. He started to get rough with me. He pulled me into his arms and started working on me, yanking on my neck. I guess I was making too much noise because he reached over and turned the CB radio on. So the CB was on full blast, growling. He started putting pillows over my face. I kept trying to throw them off. Fighting him off me. He decided he wanted to smother me so he put his hands on my face. He wanted to smother me with his hands. Then he decided he was going to get him a little bit. He forced my panties off and he just got up there and got in. All this time I'm crying and begging him to stop. And on the inside, it's just building up and building up. I thought, 'Lord, if he ever gets off me, he won't get no more. He'll not bother me no more.'

Cookie continues:

My head hurts just thinking about it. He rolled off me and he lay there for a few minutes. I'm just crying. I tried to get out of bed and as I got up, he reached up and slapped me back down. I laid there because I felt so sick and I was scared he would start working on me again. After a few seconds, I eased up and went over to the dresser where the gun was. I cut on the light so I could see. When I cut the light on, he sat up and I had the gun in my hand. When he sat up, I pointed the gun and started pulling the trigger, kept pulling the trigger. The gun was snapping. When the bullet hit his heart, he jumped and hit the floor. Then he rolled over and sat up. He pulled himself up on his elbow
and looked at me. All I could think about was to reload fast because I thought he would get up and hurt me. I ran to the kitchen and called the sherriff. He was dead when they got there. I felt a sigh of relief. When I got to jail, I slept and slept and slept. I felt so relieved. Just like somebody had lifted weights off of me.

When asked about the motives of the killers in his book *In Cold Blood* (1965), Truman Capote remarked that the killers were human beings caught in a psychological cul-de-sac. This could well describe the mental state of Cookie Glover. Her mental strength had been sapped by life events of exceeding demand. She found herself in an abusive relationship she could no longer bear. Feeling weak and trapped, Cookie Glover shot her way out. Psychological relief was immediate.

The reasons for remaining in abusive relationships

The most sought after quality of a love relationship mentioned by the study women was love itself. The majority of women said they wanted a loving husband or paramour. Other regularly cited qualities sought by the women included understanding, communication, and companionship. These prized qualities speak to the needs of the study group to be wanted, affirmed, and understood. Fulfillment of these needs might rescue them from their aloneness, and affective state rooted in childhood and adolescent experience. When quierred about descriptive characteristics of their most recent love relationship, the women often mentioned fighting, jealousy, adultery, and drinking. As this and other findings presented in this chapter would suggest, the
reality of love fell far short of the expectations of love. For many of us, there may be a natural tension between expectations and reality of everyday life. But in the love lives of the women, it appears that this tension was great.

Why is it that many women remain in abusive love relationships? This is a puzzling question that captured the attention of researchers investigating domestic violence. After a survey of battered wives in Great Britain, Martin (1976) concludes that fear is the culprit. A generalized fear of physical victimization by an aggressive male, Martin writes, immobilizes abused women. Fear begins to rule their lives. An anxiety of this magnitude may paralyze the ability to leave an abusive relationship. A threat to bodily integrity engages the stress process—the flight or fight syndrome. If Martin is correct, perhaps the great fear experienced by abused women deprives them of the choice between flight or fight. There is no movement away from the relationship. Many abused women remain in violent relationships, locked in combat, where they endure repeated attacks on their mental and physical beings. Love relationships of violent nature generate chronic stress. The story told by Cookie Glover is an apt illustration of the causes and consequences of chronic stress in a love relationship.

Other researchers have tried to understand why women remain in relationships where they are victimized. Gelles (1979) conducted interviews with members of 80 families,
of which were characterized as violent ones. He suggests three reasons explaining the failure of women to leave abusive relationships. First, women tend not to seek outside help when the violence is sporadic or not pronounced. Presumably, abuse in this instance is neither chronic or severe. Perceived psychological distress is less evident and the need for intervention is not imminently experienced. Second, Gelles believes that childhood physical victimization may increase one's tolerance for victimization in adulthood. The more one is struck by one's parents, the more inclined one is to tolerate an abusive mate. Since many of the present study women experienced physical attack as children, this principle outlined by Gelles might explain their continuing presence in violent adult love relationships. Third, Gelles suggests that the fewer the resources such as education and employment, the more will the abused woman feel trapped. An abused woman with little education and minimal employment skills may believe that she could not make it on her own. This heightens her dependence upon her husband.

All these forces may operate in a love relationship marked by violence. And they may contribute to the role engulfment that seems to apply to abused women who remain in violent love relationships. Due to forces apparently beyond their control, they are chronic victims of attack by their mates. This is an especially stressful condition and one that applies to the love lives of many of the women in the
present study. As a group, the study women tended to leave home at a young age and usually without completing their high school educations. From the available evidence, it seems that many women had, as children, witnessed their parents in physical combat. A significant number had experienced physical and sexual attacks in childhood. The women were inclined to involve themselves in love relationships early in adolescence. Over half the women were married before their eighteenth year had passed. Still more were cohabitating with a love partner by the same age. The men with whom they involved themselves tended to be abusive, overly jealous and restrictive. The study women identified themselves as victims in abusive love situations. Mates were unreasonable provocateurs. The expectation to be truly loved by a man was not realized. According to the reports of many of the women, this was a source of great stress and of great personal pain.

This chapter began with an exposition on love by Erich Fromm. Most of us, believes Fromm, enter love relationships to escape an anxious feeling that one is alone in the world. We want to be loved and affirmed by another person. Fromm (1956) continues his dissertation on love. He explores submission and domination in love relationships. The submissive person in a love relationship, writes Fromm, escapes an overpowering sense of aloneness by surrendering the self to the other person. The submissive person makes him/herself the instrument of the other person. The
problems of everyday life are solved by the dominant partner. Life may not be pleasant for the submissive person - he/she may be chronically hurt, humiliated, and exploited as Fromm suggests - but the submissive person has still managed to avoid the worst of all fates: isolation. The dominator, on the other hand, affirms the self by incorporating the self of another. His/her self image is maintained through psychological and physical domination of another person. Fromm suggests that each of us exhibits some measure of submissive and dominant behavior. Some among us, continues Fromm, exhibit far more of one than the other.

Most of the women in this study had love relationships marked by varying degrees of violence. Generally, they were not the dominant partner in the relationships. There may be some truth in Fromm's words. Perhaps the women stayed in abusive relationships, painful as they were, because they feared the lesser fate: to be alone in the world.
The Case of Nikki Janes

Love relationships may offer the most intimate of human contacts. Intimacy can be a source of great peace and of alarming distress. Love and hate, the poles of affection, often simultaneously occur in human relationships. The closeness of human contact that attends marital and other love relationships may elevate the intensity with which one experiences both love and hate. There is strong evidence that we frequently harm, psychically and physically, those for whom we most care. It is an odd character of human relationships.

Nikki Janes is a 31 year old black female. A petite woman with an endearing smile, Nikki is a spirited sort with seemingly limitless energy. She bounces about as she speaks. Her movement is not distracting. Rather, she moves with an animated grace that complements the dialogue, giving it a meaning and a power that transcends the mere exchange of words. In the lobe of one ear, Nikki wears several small diamonds that catch the light when she turns her head. Together, the diamonds form the first initial of her Christian name. Her presence of self is immediately engaging.

Nikki is serving time for voluntary manslaughter. She had been arguing with a lover she had known only a short while. The police were summoned to her home on a domestic disturbance call. They would later report that there was some evidence of physical fighting. Still, the police were
satisfied when Nikki and her lover appeared to reconcile their differences. The officers left. Two hours later, the police were called to the same house. This time, Nikki's lover lay dying from stab wounds to the chest.

The love stories that Nikki reconstructs when talking about her life are not especially appealing ones. They could as easily be called hate stories or, at the very least, stories of hurt and pain. Nikki has had ample time to reflect on her past relationships with men. She thinks about them often in prison. Nikki acknowledges that she contributed to the failure of her relationships. She also regards those failures and the failures of other relationships to which she is privy as indications that something is desperately wrong with the current state of male-female affairs.

"Did your parents get along with each other?" I asked Nikki.

"From what I remember when I was real small, they got along fine. But the more I grew up, I guess I began to understand that my folks weren't happy. My daddy was jealous. My daddy was jealous of my mom and I guess she just grew tired of it. I remember her saying one day, 'You know, no matter what I do, I can't satisfy (Nikki's father). Nothing nobody can do to satisfy you.' I remember my mother and my daddy having lots of fights and I'd say, 'Gosh I'll
be glad when they're separated.' I really did. I think I told you before that my daddy spent 18 months in prison for hitting my mom. My daddy'd get jealous when my mom would go out with Carla, a friend of hers. Where they'd go, I don't know."

"Did your father think your mother would go see other men?" I asked.

"Yeah, he thought that because he was a jealous man. That's the most negative thing on a man's part. Thinking negatively. I never seen my mother cut out on my daddy."

"How violent were the fights between your parents?"

"Well, they were violent enough to wake me up!" Nikki smiled.

"They'd fight mostly at night then?" I asked.

"Mm-hmm. I remember once my mom got a gun out at my daddy. He went outside and she was mad. Evidently, she was real mad, you know? Because she went outside after him. He took the gun out of her hand. He snatched it out of her hand and while he was snatching it my mama said, 'To hell with it!' She went off and Daddy was screaming for my mom to come back. Then he said, 'I don't care if she don't!' He was really mad."

"How old were you at that time?"

"I was around eight or maybe nine. See, Mr. Kirkpatrick...let me think. Let me start from the beginning."
"Please do," I offered.

"My daddy was a carpenter," Nikki began, "he was a beautiful carpenter. Some weeks he'd have work and some he didn't. My mom just got tired of that. She was working in the fields, at barbecue stands, and at the peanut factory—all three jobs at once. Daddy'd get to drinking when he wasn't working. It started to get bad, his drinking. My mom would tell him to leave and he would. But he'd be back the next week. The fights, the drinking. Same thing over and over again. My mom just got plain old tired of it. One night, my daddy hit mama with an iron pole. That's when he went to prison. We saw him a few times in prison and after he got out. Then he took off for good. Mama got a job as a nurse's aide. She's been there ever since. She never married again."

I wanted to learn of Nikki's personal relationships with men. I moved to a different topic. "When did you begin to date boys?" I asked.

"Sixteen," said Nikki. "My oldest brother was real protective of me." Nikki has three brothers and two sisters. Nikki is the youngest of the lot. "They were all protective but my oldest brother was overprotective. My brother would make friends with the guys I'd go out with. He wanted to find out about them. This one particular guy, he hung out with. And I was going out with the guy. My brother would tell me the guy was messing with other girls, you know? Hey, I could take care of myself. My brother thought the
guy was cheating on me. I'd tell my brother, 'I can handle it. I'll be all right.' He didn't want me going out with the guy. We had a big fight about that. He was real overprotective and I didn't need protecting."

"Would they be physical fights?" I asked.

"Sometimes. I was so small that my brothers would whip me around. They use to throw me in the woodbox because I was so small. They'd sling me around and throw me in there. I'd hit the woodbox and that would be the end of that."

"Would you fight like that with your sisters?"

"No," Nikki answered. "They were small like me. We didn't fight."

A pattern appeared to be developing. Nikki's father and brothers were rather aggressive and intrusive. The female members of Nikki's family seemed likely to be the targets of such behavior. I asked Nikki when it was that she left home.

"I was 22 years old when I left."

"Where did you go?" I asked.

"I got myself a place downtown, just a little apartment. I had a baby the same year. My little girl. Things were okay. I kept my refrigerator full and my bills paid."

"Were you working?"

"No. I was on welfare and social services. I was always shying away from working because I didn't have a high school diploma. I couldn't get a job I wanted. I was
living with a man. I never married him. I couldn't work for all the fighting that went on with him. I was always having busted lips, busted eyes. Something all the time. We'd spend half the night arguing and the other half fighting. I couldn't beat nobody, small as I am. I couldn't go anywhere without him following me and raising Cain. We stayed together for a lot of years but it wasn't good. I finally left him. He had changed so much. His attitude changed. He had changed so drastically that I was really scared."

"In what ways had he changed?" I asked.

"Well, I'll tell you. He was a service man. I met him before he went into the service. Before he went in, we were friends. We got along real good. And I thought, 'Oh goodness! I love this man.' After he went in, I could see little signs of him changing. He got wild and crazy. He'd show off like a fool. Now, I'm going back to Jumps Street, you understand. When he was in the service, he'd take out other girls. Hey, that was fine with me. I'd say, 'Do what you want to do because I'm not married to you. But I'm going out with who I want to, too.' And I did. But he couldn't take that, you know. I wasn't going to stay home and twiddle my thumbs while he ran around. He couldn't take what he dished out. That would cause a fight. My god! I got so that I was on needles and pins every time he walked through the door. That was a living hell!"
"What sorts of things would he do to you?"

"He'd unravel a clothes hanger and beat me around my thighs. He'd take off his big thick belt and beat me across my back. Sometimes he'd just slap me or spit in my face. Once, the whole side of my face was blue from a beating."

"Blue?" I offered knowing Nikki had more to say.

"Oh, it was a blue-black. My sister called me bluebeard because a whole piece of my skirt hung over my tooth. I never let my mom see me. There ain't no telling what my mom would have done to him. Just before that happened, Mama had bought a pistol for protection. I didn't want my mom to get in no trouble."

"Did these beatings happen a lot?"

"All the time. He was jealous. He'd get hot if he saw me with someone else. I remember the day he was out chopping wood. I'll never forget this for as long as I stay black. He was chopping wood and he came inside the house. He started talking about this one guy he'd seen me with. He started beating me. Then he went back cut to the woodpile. I put my jacket on and went outside and told him I was leaving. He caught me and brought me back and threw me in some water. It was cold as hell because it was January. He threw me in the pond and tried to drown me! So that was when I left him for good."

"How old were you when you left him?" I asked.
"Twenty-nine. Exactly 29," Nikki said. She answered with a certainty of one who had marked time by the event.

"Where did you go?"

"I went to the mission and stayed there for about seven months," she answered. At age 25, Nikki had a second child, this time a boy. Her mother was caring for Nikki's daughter. Nikki had her young son with her at the mission. She continues her story. "From there I went to a motel because I felt I had been at the church mission long enough. That's when I had the first abortion."

"Tell me about that," I said.

"Ooh, it was awful! It was just awful. I got pregnant right before I left him. After I left, I went back to talk to him. I said I was going to get an abortion. He fainted. He really did. I told him that he wasn't going to fail me, that we were going to talk about it. He said, 'Well, you do what you want to do. Only don't come back and say I made you kill your baby. You make the decision.' That's what he said. And I couldn't afford to have another child."

"Was it difficult for you?" I asked.

"Yeah. But not too much because I knew I was doing the right thing. I had another abortion a couple years later."

"You mentioned to me last time we talked that you had been raped. That happened when you were still at the mission, didn't it?"
"Almost right after I got there. I was walking on my way to a friend's house. This man grabbed me and twisted my arm around. He took me to this warehouse type of a building. He raped me there. I told his parole officer and the last I heard the guy was back in prison. You know, I got a Valentine from him him recently. Can you imagine? It's somewhere in the garbage dump now. I tore it to shreds."

"How did you feel after he assaulted you?" I asked.

"Filthy! I felt really filthy. I felt filthy. I felt anger at myself. I was angry with him. The first thing I did was call his parole officer. The reverend at the mission helped me get through it."

"What happened after you left the mission and went to the motel?" I asked.

"You do ask a lot of questions," Nikki said with a mischievous grin.

"I'm interested in what you have to say," I countered.

"Okay, but this is the hard part," Nikki said, rearranging herself in the chair. "I was living at the motel with my little boy. I went back home for a visit with Mama and my little girl who was staying with her. My man, my ex-man, came over to Mama's house when I was there. He said, 'Nikki, would you consider coming back to me?' And I said to him, 'Not on your life! Not on your life!' And he
said, 'Well, before I'd hit you again, I'd cut off my arm.' Oh, he'd said that before. I knew I couldn't dance with him anymore. I took too much grief from him. I told him absolutely not."

Nikki grew uncharacteristically quiet at this point. Without prompting from me, Nikki said, "Look, I'm going to tell you why I killed this other dude. I think I killed him... I've had a lot of time to think about this now. Because my first man treated me so bad and so rotten, that's why. Gradually, I realized that I was a grown woman with two kids and I didn't have no business ruining my kid's home. As it was, my home was set up on a fear of some man hitting me and then me running from him. No! That wasn't going to happen again."

"The man you killed was another lover of yours?" I asked.

"Yes. I met him about a year after I left my first man."

"What was the second man like?"

"He seemed to be... I don't know, he had a very gay thing about him. He was always smiling and everything. He treated my kids real good. It started out pretty well. Then I noticed he started to drink pretty heavy. I was afraid because of that, afraid of what he'd do when he would get drunk. I told him, 'Take your clothes and get out of here. We're through.' He left but about a week later he came back. I had been out and he was there when I got back."
When I walked in, he said, 'Oh, you been out with your other nigger, huh?' It was about eight o'clock at night. I told him, 'Look here, it's none of your business who I've been out with.' That's when the fight started. I was fighting for my home. My peace of mind. I told him, 'Get cut! I'm not going anywhere. I'm not running anymore. This is my crib. I pay 164 dollars a month to live here and I'm going to live here. I'm going to live here!' So I handled the matter my way. Since I've been here, I thought about other ways I could have handled it. But why? Why? Why handle it another way when I'm hot?"

"Well," I began to say something to downplay the use of violence in conflict resolution. Nikki continued as though I wasn't in the room.

"And like today, I'm glad in a way that it's not me in the ground. I'm glad. I'm sorry for him. But I'm not going to take nothing from nobody. I'm no maniac, either. I'm not crazy."

"Why do you suppose the men in your life were so violent?" I asked. It seemed clear that Nikki did not view herself as the aggressor.

"You know what it is?" Nikki asked rhetorically. "It's maleness. Maleness. It's done a number on all of them. It's got them all fuddled. They take their maleness to the extreme. They know they're masculine. They know they can beat you up so they can have their way. Mr. Kirkpatrick, I know so many women living with men out of fear, it ain't
The man that Nikki killed may have represented to her the sum of her frustrations with male violence in love relationships. Nikki's father had abused her mother. Her brothers, under the guise of fraternal love, had interfered with her dating practices. On occasion, they forcefully restrained Nikki from dating certain men. Note that Nikki does not recall her brothers physically confronting her potential dates. In Nikki's world, men seemed to accept male aggression, sexual and otherwise, as a natural inclination. The violent aggression she endured in her long-term love relationship reinforced this view of men. The physical attack by her victim, a lover, occurred after Nikki had resolved that she would suffer no more at the hand of a man. Nikki struck back with lethal force. Nikki's fear and anger are evident as she continues:

"When I was at the church mission, I saw a lot of women who were beat by their men. I cried for those women. I cry now because I know there's a lot of women in that situation. I know how they feel. I know how men muscle their way into women's homes, into their kids' lives. They take over. Men beat women's butts so bad, it's pathetic. Then they leave and come back, leave and come back. It seems that men take out a lot of frustration or whatever in the form of violence against their women. It's a love - hate thing."
"A love - hate thing?" I asked.

"The biggest mistake a woman can make is letting a man know she cares about him. When she tells a man she loves him, she's through. He'll run right over her."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"I don't know. It may be this masculinity thing. But my guess is that it's women's fault, too. Women aren't what they're hopped up to be."

I began a reply. Nikki interrupted to explain.

"Now, wait a minute," she argued. "It's our fault. If a woman wouldn't let a man come back to her, she wouldn't get beat again. It wouldn't happen to her. It wouldn't happen to her, Mr. Kirkpatrick."

"Why does an abused woman allow the man who abused her to come back?" I asked.

"Because she thinks she loves him! She says, 'I love him!' And she does love him. And a lot of women don't think they can do no better than the man they're with. That's their downfall. Do you see what I'm saying? That's the lick right there."

Violence in marital and love relationships is more complicated than what Nikki suggests. Her commentary, however, speaks eloquently to the power of gender role socialization. Men tend to be steered to more aggressive styles of role playing, women to the more passive styles. This may help us understand situations where women remain in abusive relationships and where men continue to violently
aggress toward their mates. Further, abused women often have few alternatives to the abusive situation. Economic and cultural constraints may militate against many women extricating themselves from abusive relationships.

Nikki felt strongly about trying to help abused women. Her life experiences informed her understanding of male-female relationships. Women suffer at the hands of men. At one point in our discussion, we returned to this theme of female victimization. I wanted to learn what Nikki thought could be done to ease the condition.

"You once told me that women in American society live out their lives in fear. What did you mean by that?" I asked Nikki.

"Because of their men. The majority of men beat their women. These days, you can't talk to too many men who don't or to too many women who haven't been slapped by their spouse. Lots of times, a man who beats his woman can be thought of as okay by people. Just a regular guy. That's the impression they give on the street. But they go home and beat you half to death. They beat you to damned death! I'd get slapped around no matter what I did. Damned if you do, damned if you don't."

"What will it take to stop women from living lives of fear?" I asked.
"Women have to get educations and find their independence. They need God, too."

"Will it take anything on the part of men?" I asked.

"Not necessarily," said Nikki. "Know why?"

"Please tell me," I said.

"Because women have to let men know what's expected of them. Women can start being disrespectful to their men. You know, 'If you're going to hit me, I'm going to let you have it!' Some women let men hit them and then the women will say, 'I'm sorry.' Like it's their fault they got hit! Women got to make sure they hit the turkeys back."

"Do women contribute to their own..." I began to ask. Nikki broke in.

"Yeah...to their own...what?"

"Pain?" I offered.

"They sure do!" Nikki exclaimed. "Just as sure as I am black."

"How?" I asked.

"By letting their men get over on them. And you know men learn to beat their women. It's a known fact, statistics speak to this, that if a little boy sees his father hit his mother, then the little boy will feel like, 'Hey, I'm supposed to do this too.' There's no telling where all this will stop. I told my son before I came here, 'If you ever beat a woman, I'm going to beat you to death! If you ever raise a hand to a woman, I'm going to beat you to death,' ...unless if that woman is trying to hurt him."
"What?" I asked, referring to her last statement.

"Well, that's the only time I'd want my son to raise his hand to a woman."

Nikki may well be right. Violence in love relationships appears, in part, to be culturally transmitted. At once, Nikki admonishes her son for striking women and sanctions his use of physical aggression in particular settings.

The homicidal behavior of Nikki Janes should be viewed against her complete life situation. Events not mentioned in this case study but of some importance include here dropping out of school, the death of a 14 year old friend, and her house burning down when Nikki was in her twenties. Nikki also experienced a good deal of life stress resulting from the financial difficulty of raising two children by herself. Rarely did the men in her life help with the bills. Coupled with the physical violence she encountered throughout her life, these events and conditions were fairly stressful for Nikki. I asked Nikki how she met the circumstances of her life.

"My nerves were shot," she answered. "Oh, I had insomnia bad. And I wasn't eating right. When I came here I weighed 98 pounds. Ninety-eight pounds! Now I'm back up to where I should be - 115 pounds. Right after the house burned, the doctor said I was suffering from nerves. I was
jumpy. One time, I reached down to the barbecue and came real close to touching a hot coal, a great big hot coal. I don't know why I did it. A lot of things were happening. Sometimes I felt like crawling into a little bag and telling the world to go away. To leave me alone."

"Did you ever try to get help for your nerves?" I asked.

"I started going to a mental health clinic," Nikki said. This was only a few months before the homicide. "I was so ashamed of what had happened to me in my relationship. Being beat all the time. I would talk to the doctor about everything but my relationship. I was so ashamed I let it happen to me that I would just freeze up and talk about something else altogether. The doctor knew what I was up to. She knew it but she'd never say anything. I guess she figured I'd talk about it when I was ready. I never did."

"How would you describe yourself at that point in your life?" I asked.

"As a ninny. Sometimes I didn't even know the real me. I knew me when I was a teenager. I was a very sweet person. But as I got older, I got very tempermental and crazy."

"How are you coping now?" I asked.

"God has been so electrifying in my life since I've been here. I'll be lying on my bunk and I'll feel like He's over on the next bunk. It makes me feel damn good. When I was about eight years old, my sunday school teacher told me
one morning, 'Jesus is a very sweet person.' I carry that with me. I remember after that I used to look through my grandma's big red bible. I'd look through it everyday. I didn't always know what it meant. I only knew about Adam and Eve. And I knew about this man who laid his son across a slab and he's got a knife. He's going to sacrifice his son. Let's see, what's his name?"

"Abraham?" I suggested.

"Yeah, that's him," said Nikki. Nikki thought for a long moment and said quietly, "I don't know. Maybe all of this was meant to happen. Maybe He meant it all to happen. He hit me with a hurt and He took my freedom."
Chapter Eight

Having Children

Everyday life is ongoing. It is not possible to stop it for purposes of reflection and revision. These cognitive processes must take place as life proceeds. Neither is it possible to sort out roles while they are being acted out. Many roles are performed at a given moment although one role may dominate in a particular setting. An individual never plays one role to the complete exclusion of other roles. The unending flow of everyday life and the overlap of social roles are primary characteristics of human interaction.

Studies of behavior afford opportunities to do what cannot be done in real life. Through an examination of case histories, for example, a researcher is able to stop the action of everyday life and disect it. Role behavior can be sorted and compared with other role behavior or with past behavior in the same role. Motivation can be explored as well. The present study is an example of such stop-action analysis. By reviewing the life stories of the women as they tell them, the phases and arenas of their everyday lives are brought into sharp relief, piece by piece.
While this approach has great promise, there is a danger of treating life phases and arenas separately and without regard for the whole of everyday living. The dissection of life histories can obscure the true meshing of phases and arenas that occurs in real life. One must be watchful of this distortion in the present study. The work is arranged by chapters, each chapter devoted to a different facet of life. Importantly, this arrangement is not so discrete in reality. This chapter concerns the events of the study women in their roles as mothers. Much of what transpired in motherhood should be viewed against what was happening in their love relationships and in other arenas of their lives. The recognition that these events and conditions are intertwined, occurring simultaneously, furthers an understanding of the drama in their lives.

**Becoming a mother**

The most cherished role played by the study women in their everyday lives was as a mother. Having children was the highpoint in a life world characterized by everyday strain. How dear these women held their children cannot be overstated. Often in the interviews, talking about painful events drew grim faces and broken voices. But the mention of children would restore radiance to a spent constitution. Immediately, the tempo of the conversation would quicken and smiles replaced frowns.
Having children was the predominant response given by the study women to questions about the most important event in their lives, easily outpacing any other response. A less obtrusive measure of the importance and affection of motherhood among the women was serendipitously provided on visiting days at the prison. Children of all ages would fill the lobby of the administration building, eagerly awaiting clearance to visit with their respective mothers. Hair combed, faces scrubbed, and neatly appointed, the children would soon be smothered by the loving embraces of their imprisoned parents.

The emotion is difficult to convey in words, to commit to paper. Such affective displays were unbridled and obviously genuine—expressions of a strong desire to hold close to one another in the face of physical separation. Coincidental to the study interviews, the researcher was expecting his first child. This information quickly circulated among the study women. They would offer advice on parenting. Solicited or not, the advice was woven from good intention and generosity of spirit. Intended lessons on fatherhood, however, would often dissolve into bittersweet soliloquium on motherhood.

Motherhood came early in life for many of the women. Forty-three women in the study had given birth in or before their eighteenth year. Fifteen women had babies at 16 or younger—the youngest was 14 when she gave birth. Further, 14 of the 43 women who had babies in or before their
eighteenth-year gave birth a second time before they were 19 years old. In contrast, two women in the sample were 38 years old when they had their last child, they being the oldest to bear children. Fourteen of the 76 women in the sample were childless.

The relatively young age at which the majority of women became mothers was a common source of distress. Adolescent pregnancy disrupted one's high school education for one thing. A mother of seven children who first gave birth at age 17 describes a predicament common to many of the women who got pregnant as teenagers.

My daddy was strict but I managed to be with child when I was pretty young. It weren't no good. Well, naturally I couldn't go back to school. That's the way it was back then. Now, I hear you can go back to school when you're pregnant. But, back then, you was just kicked out.

The banishment from school because of pregnancy served to cut many women from an established friendship network. Importantly, the suspension also heightened the sense that the pregnant teen had done something wrong. Pregnancy was a visible clue to one's sexual activity. For women who had been reared in fairly strict and largely Baptist homes, it was often a source of shame.

Adolescent pregnancy was often disruptive of familial life as one might imagine. A few women who experienced youthful pregnancies were married and living with their husbands when they conceived. Most, however, were still living at home. For the pregnant but still homebound
teenagers, their statuses as young mothers-to-be strained their relationships with their parents. Leaving home was often a response to the strain.

Daddy turned Baptist real sudden when I was about 13. My Lord! He got to be a real bible thumper! We had to wear dresses all the time. He didn't believe in us wearing make-up and all the other stuff. We used to leave the house in the morning for school and go across the street to some friend's house and put on make-up. And then we had to make sure we washed it off before Daddy came home at night. He and me eventually ha a round and I left home. I came back home in a couple months - pregnant! (Laughs) I didn't dare tell him. I let it grow on him. I wasn't volunteering any information. I started to show and he found cut and then I had to listen to a lot of his junk. You'd have thought I was the only girl on earth that'd ever been pregnant and not been married. I mean, Lord, I had to listen to it all the time! When my girl was born, my parents wanted me to give her up for adoption. Well, I was a coward. I would not tell them to their faces that I wasn't going to give her up. I phoned them from another town and Daddy asked me, 'Have you signed the papers yet?' I told them I wasn't going to. He fussed. Mother got on the phone and she cried. Daddy got back on the phone and he fussed again. He told me not to let my shadow cross his threshold. I told him, 'Don't worry, I won't!' I didn't see them again until my baby was almost a year old.

Adolescent pregnancy precipitated substantial changes in the social networks of the study women. Some of these changes, such as those mentioned above, proved to be somewhat problematic. Too, initiation into the mother role is not without trepidations. First time parents are given to worrying about the day-to-day caring for a newborn. Changing diapers, feedings, bathtings, and an assortment of other parental responsibilities can be overwhelming to the novice. Support networks may be helpful in minimizing the
anxiety associated with approaching parenthood. Extended family, friends, and childbirth educators can supply information useful to the expecting. In the absence or erosion of these support systems, the new parent is likely to be more anxious. The parents and schools who distanced themselves from the study women who found themselves pregnant as teenagers inadvertently robbed these same women of important sources of support during pregnancy and early motherhood. Frequently voiced among the study women was the rather anomic introduction to mothering they received as teenagers.

Despite their initial ordeals as young mothers, most of the study women who had children found the mother role to be a comfortable and rewarding one. Each of the mothers in the sample was asked what she believed to be the most rewarding quality of motherhood. Well over a third of the women found the exchange of love between mother and child to be vitally important to them. As previously mentioned, many of the mothers truly warmed when speaking of their children. The love they found as mothers stands in sharp contrast to the apparently unrequited love that greeted them in their adult relationships with men. Other oft mentioned rewards of motherhood included parental pride, witnessing and directing the development of children, and the passing of one's self to progeny. This collection of responses provides a ready commentary on role priority among the study women. Emotionally scarred in their youth, losing in adult
relationships with men, the study women with children invested increasingly more of themselves in their mother roles. Perhaps there they found some sanctuary from isolation and life stress.

The mothers in the sample were also asked what they found to be the most troubling aspect of parenting. Their answers suggest that the mother role is not entirely free of troubling concerns. Generalized worry over their children's welfare, separation and disappointment in children's behavior were frequent responses. The labor of actual birth was mentioned more often than any of these, however. Eleven women reported that they had extremely difficult deliveries, and several of these women said that more than one of their labors was trying. The dominant response, however, was an expressed concern for adequately providing for children. Many mothers worried that they possessed too few resources to sufficiently meet the needs of their children. Food, clothing, and housing are elemental requirements in everyday life. Providing for oneself may be challenging when resources are limited. Providing for dependents under the same conditions multiplies the challenge. A majority of the mothers were either on government assistance rolls or were unskilled and thereby low paid workers. Meeting the needs of their children was a chronic stressor, particularly when mates were not reliable wage earners.  

1. Work roles and finances are detailed in Chapter Nine.
Table 8.1: Subjects' Assessments of Mother Role Performances.

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<th>Good</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<td>Subjects' assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>of mother-child relationships</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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<td>(N=62)</td>
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<td>Subjects' assessments</td>
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<td>of own performances</td>
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<tr>
<td>in mother role</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
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<td>(N=62)</td>
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<td>in mother role</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<td>(N=59)</td>
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*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
Supplemental to the love they experienced as mothers was the satisfaction the women felt in playing out the mother role. Further, the group of study women who were mothers generally thought they performed the role well. Table 8.1 offers some insight into the ways in which the women judged their role performances. The top figures in the table illustrate the responses given by the mothers when asked to describe their relationships with their children. The vast majority of the 62 mothers in the study believed those relationships to be good ones. None characterized their relationships as poor. The two bottom rows in the table concern assessments of mother role performance from two vantages: The mothers' rating of their own performances and the mothers' beliefs as to how their children would rate their performance as mothers. The former vantage suggests an introspective assessment and the latter requires stepping outside their roles and assessing role performance from their children's perspective - an inside looking cut versus an outside looking in comparison. As the figures indicate, there is substantial agreement between the two ratings by the group of mothers. Should there be any difference, it would be that the mothers tended to be marginally harder on themselves than they thought their children would be on them.

In the mother role among the study women, it would appear that role performance closely matched role expectations. The congruence was a source of satisfaction.
and fulfillment for the mothers. Many times this satisfaction helped lessen the distress encountered in love relationships with men. The mother-child relationship buffered the social isolation that haunted them. For many a mother in the study, parenthood was the lifeline that kept pulling them from their aloneness.

**Loss in motherhood**

Having children presents some emotional risk. When one invests so much in one role, the loss of that role is likely to be more acutely experienced than the loss of a less important role. Already established is the great investment most of the study women had in their roles as mothers. Many of the women who were genuinely attached to their identities as mothers experienced various forms of loss in parenthood. Forms of loss in motherhood targeted in the study include fertility loss, miscarriage, abortion, and death of offspring. Since these forms of loss were often pivotal events in the everyday lives of the study women, their relevance to the group is detailed in this section.

Of the 76 women in the study, 33, 43 percent, report that they are no longer able to bear children. This is rather striking when one considers that the study group is not an especially aged one. Just over 70 percent of the women in the study are 40 years old or younger. Fifty percent of the women are 32 years old or younger. Twenty-eight of the 33 reportedly infertile women had active surgery, either a hysterectomy or a tubal ligation. The
majority of the now infertile women found the change not to be a difficult one. Often they requested the surgery. They believed they had an adequate brood of children and they did not want to risk the addition of another. Twelve women, however, did find the adjustment to infertility to be a difficult one. Some of these women desired more children but were advised of surgery because of particular medical complications. A few of these twelve women reported that they were never able to have children. Indeed, this was a source of frustration since they desperately wanted to be natural mothers.*2 Only one woman in the study group said she never had or wanted children.

Miscarriage seemed to be more unsettling than fertility loss in the lives of the study women. Thirty-four women reported at least one miscarriage and 12 women said that they had miscarried twice or more. The youngest to miscarry was 14 years old at the time and nine women had miscarried in or before their eighteenth year. Generally, miscarriage afflicted the study women in young adulthood rather than in middle age. Twenty-three of the 34 women who miscarried did so in or before their twenty-fifth year. The oldest to miscarry was 39 years old at the time. Perhaps because of their relative youth at the time, perhaps due to their

2. Only four women in the study adopted children. In the course of the interviews, it was difficult discern whether these four adoptions were legally sanctioned. All four adopters reported that the adoptees were the children of a spouse.
attachment to the mother role, the study women spoke of miscarriage with pronounced remorse. Not only had they lost babies, planned and not, but they also experienced physically exhausting ordeals of the body naturally rejecting a fetus. A great deal of blood is usually lost in the process. Many women related that, in miscarriage, they felt as though they had lost something and that the act of losing the fetus was physically demanding.

Abortion can be likened to the intentional rejection of a fetus. A woman's uterus can be suctioned to rid the womb of an embryo in the early stages of pregnancy or, in the later stages, labor can be artificially induced and the fetus expelled. Eight of the 76 women in the study reported at least one abortion and two women said they had had two abortions. In a qualitative sense, abortion appeared to be less traumatic than miscarriage, even when the fetus was aborted in the later stages of pregnancy. As was the case with the women who desired hysterectomies or tubal ligations, the women reporting abortions uniformly stated that they could not support another child, financially or emotionally. In deciding upon abortion, the women believed they were following the necessary course of action.*3 This is not to say that abortion was met without difficulty. Physically, it may be taxing. But the major source of difficulty for the study women experiencing abortion was the absence of support from their mates. Husbands and lovers tended to wash their hands of the acts, much as did the mate
of Nikki Janes whose story precedes this chapter. The ages at which the women reported having abortions were evenly distributed between the ages of 18 and 35, inclusive.

By far the most hard-felt loss in motherhood among the study women was the death of a child. The psychic pain experienced by the women who had lost children was severe. The deaths seemed inexplicable and beyond their control.

The lack of control that attends the meeting of a child's death is similar, though perhaps more pronounced, to the lack of control in miscarriage. In contrast, abortion is marked by more directed, willful action. This may be why abortion was reported as less traumatic. Abortion may have been defined as a choice. Miscarriage and the death of a child were clearly not choices.

Thirteen women, about a sixth of the study group, reported the death of a child. One hapless woman said that two of her children had passed away. Ten women had lost a child in or before their thirtieth year, four were as young as 18 when their children died. Most of these women lost their children to chronic illness. A few children met violent deaths through automobile accidents or fires. Regardless of the cause of death, a child's forced and

3. U.S. Census data for 1979 indicates an expansion of the role of choice in abortion among American women. For every 1000 live births in that year, there were 9.4 fetal deaths—a crude measure of the prevalence of miscarriage. For every 1000 live births, there were 422 abortions. Further, in ten years, the abortion rate has nearly doubled while the fetal death rate has declined by about one third (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1982).
lasting departure from the everyday life of a parent is a very painful life event and condition. *4 Not only must one adjust to the immediate loss but one must also manage the persisting change in the constellation of close social relationships. An important role has been stripped from the survivor. This is true for the death of a close friend or family member. Perhaps it is more acutely felt in the death of one's child. Even today, many of the study women who lost children continue to grieve for them. More than one mourning parent in the study feels somehow responsible for the death despite any objective responsibility for the death. In the absence of any real control over such events, these women assumed the blame and it tugs at their consciences from time to time.

One unfortunate woman in the study had a son who suffered from a debilitating disorder from birth. The son required her constant attention during his short life. The events of his death and her assimilation of those events provide an apt illustration of the enduring pain that may attend such loss.

It was hard. I mean, I had more trouble raising him that I did with all the rest of them. When we'd bring him to the hospital for his treatments, I couldn't bring any clothing with buttons because he'd gnaw on them. He'd take the pins out of his diapers. He'd gnaw on anything. Sometimes he'd have fevers twice a day. He couldn't talk much and he could barely walk. I tended him like that up until he was

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4. Several writers have vividly captured the grief over a departed child. See, for example, Guest's (1976) *Ordinary People* or Kushner (1983) *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. 
five years old. We'd have to keep him closed up in the crib most of the time.

She continues:

Cars would race up and down our street. Sometimes he'd slip away somehow and we'd have to fetch him. He slipped away once and we couldn't find him. He was in the road and a car hit him. My daughter saw it happen. She ain't never...she ain't never been the same no more. I hated she seen him get killed. They were close. It was just the two of them. She went into shock and they took her to the hospital. They had to take me, too. I just lied down and they came and got me. I ain't never got over it yet. I loved all my children but he was special.

Recalling the deaths of children were undoubtedly the most tearful sessions in the study interviews. These women still grieve.

Aggression in motherhood

Various forms of aggressive behavior can arise in parent-child relationships. Parents often view themselves as the shapers of their offspring's personality and actions. Mothers and fathers may believe that they are entrusted with the responsibility to school their children in the folkways and mores of the social order. For many, this is a heavy responsibility.

There are several styles of meeting the duty of proper parenting. Some parents are given to rewarding accepted behavior with attention, affection, and material incentives. Conversely, the punishment of errant behavior may consist of the withholding of these rewards. A style of parenting such as this conveys psychological conditioning. The child is
shaped through the award or deprivation of goods and conditions. Of course, the manifest function, or intended consequence, of this style of parenting is to foster conforming or acceptable behavior in a child. A latent function, or unintended consequence, of such parenting, however, may be to encourage a child to expect psychological reward or punishment in all situations, perhaps even in adult life. An overly strict adherence to this style may produce a maladjusted child since everyday life does not always reward or punish behavior. A child who comes to expect reward or punishment may be sorely disappointed. Expectations may be dashed by the reality of everyday living. Many of us who have done well in our work roles are, at times, bitter when no superior or peer recognizes our accomplishments. Similarly, some among us grow depressed when friend and family don't praise us for a recent promotion or monetary raise. Oddly, many of us are mildly miffed when our transgressions go unnoticed. The occasion of negative consequences or reactions to behavior, at the very least, is something we come to expect.

Another style of parenting involves the use of physical means to shape acceptable behavior in children. A child is hit when he/she does something wrong and not hit in the absence of wrongdoing. Here, the manifest function of such parenting is the same as that for parenting by psychological means: the encouragement of conforming and acceptable behavior. The latent function of parenting by physical
conditioning is slightly different. The physically disciplined child may begin to view physical aggression as a socially acceptable means of meeting an end, usually of getting another to do what one wants that person to do. For a physically disciplined child, the display of physical aggression may later transcend the role boundaries of parent–child relationships. An abused child, for example, may later beat a spouse since he/she witnessed firsthand as a child the effectiveness of that form of control. The same abused child may, as an adult, hit his/her own children since it seemed to produce the expected results when used by his/her own parents. This patterning of aggressive behavior may contribute to the continuity of what some behavioral scientists call subcultures of violence.

The foci of the present study are life events and conditions characterized by loss and aggression. The preceding section attended to forms of loss in the mother role. Among the study women, the mother role was marked by some aggression. Aggression in parent-child relationships was one-sided, mothers being decidedly more aggressive toward their children than children toward their mothers. Only two women in the sample reported that any of their children had ever hit them and the two described them as isolated events. Children attacks upon these two mothers occurred only once or twice. On the other hand, the mothers in the study showed a general inclination to physically discipline their children, despite the pledges of their
youth never to hit their children.

In an extensive study of 43 Boston-area low income families, Longfellow et al. (1982) examined possible links between life stress and the quality of mother-child relationships. These researchers report that the more stressed mothers in the sample tended to be less responsive to the dependency needs of their children than less stressed mothers. They also tended to be less responsive to the nurturant needs of their children. Further, the interactions stressed mothers engaged in with their children were often aimed at correcting the behavior of the children. Interaction was confined to threats and commands directed toward children. These findings suggest that mothers experiencing stressful living conditions risk some interference with affective interaction with their children and they may also behave more aggressively toward their children. Of course, these stress consequences can themselves become stressors, especially for women who invest much in mother-child relationships.

Questions about the physical threat and punishment of children were put to each of the 62 women in the present study. The questions were aimed at finding out about two things: The frequency of threat and punishment of children and punishment used in the mother role and a comparison of these frequencies with the frequencies of threat and physical punishment they encountered as children. The two aims would help determine to what degree physical punishment
Table 8.2: Relation Between Physical Punishment Threat Experienced as a Child and the Use of Threat as a Parent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat of own children</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Several times weekly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times weekly</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total* (N=62)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
marked parent-child interactions among the study women and, at the same time, help in understanding the possible link between adult parenting techniques and childhood experience.

Table 8.2 provides a cross-tabulation of frequencies of threats of physical punishment the study women encountered as children and they themselves used with their own children. In a general sense, the frequency of threat used as a parent seems to be patterned from the frequency of its use experienced as a child. If there is any significant difference in the frequencies, it is that the study women threatened their own children with a greater frequency than they were threatened by their parents.

Most of the mothers in the study said that they would use threats to "keep the children in line." Threats were usually designed to discourage what the mothers believed to be unacceptable behavior on the part of their children. The great frequency with which these threats were expressed by the mothers suggests two possibilities. Keeping children in line through the use of threat involved a concerted, often daily effort. Second, it may be that threat of physical punishment was not an especially successful tool of parental control. Certainly, the strategy was not economical for the mothers, if economy is measured by the frequency of use.

Table 8.2 is complimented by Table 8.3. The latter table demonstrates a cross-tabulation of the reported frequencies of physical punishment in childhood and of physical punishment used as a parent. The comparison is an
Table 8.3: Relation Between Physical Punishment Experienced as a Child and Use of Physical Punishment as a Parent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical punishment experienced as a child</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Several times weekly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times weekly</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<td>(N=62)</td>
<td>(N=4)</td>
<td>(N=10)</td>
<td>(N=6)</td>
<td>(N=32)</td>
<td>(N=10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
interesting one, allowing for a limited test of whether or not physical punishment used as a parent is modeled after that used by one's own parents. The table would suggest that physical punishment was less a part of life as a mother than it was of life as a child. Proportionately more women were struck by their parents and with greater regularity than were their children struck by them. Judging from their accounts, the women as mothers lived up to their shared pledge as children not to hit their own children as much as they were hit.

Almost 85 percent of the study women were hit by their parents. About 80 percent of the women in the study who were mothers hit their own children. Perhaps there was some modeling of physical punishment parenting techniques. Even though many of the study women promised not to hit their children because of their own childhood experiences with being hit, the majority of them hit their children nonetheless. Importantly, the frequency with which the mothers hit their children may also be a function of the stress the mothers were experiencing in other life arenas. The findings of Longfellow, et al. suggest this as a possibility.

Tables 8.2 and 8.3 can also be loosely compared with each other. The parents of the study women tended actually to hit more than threaten to hit. The mothers in the study tended to threaten to hit more than they would actually hit their children. The mothers generally reported that they
were uncomfortable when physically disciplining their children. They did not readily employ this method either. Hitting was generally preceded by repeated threats to hit. When the threats were to no avail, actual hitting would follow. None of the children hit by the mothers in the study received medical treatment as a result, suggesting that the hitting they rendered was not as severe as they received in childhood. More often the mothers would use their hands to spank or smack rather than resort to the weapons such as switches or belts that their parents had used on them.

Perhaps there is some measure of role conflict implicated by these findings. The women may have been torn by their unpleasant encounters with whippings in their youth and by what they believed to be the role expectations associated with the mother role. The parent role required them to "keep the children in line" - to punish unacceptable behavior. The reluctance with which the women approached the physical control of their children's behavior belies the possible conflict they experienced as aggressive mothers who had been hit as children. In the situational context of a parent hitting a child, the women knew both roles.

Another aspect of life as a mother that suggests some modeling of role behavior concerns the part played by spouses and paramours in disciplining children. The mothers in the study tended to be the primary disciplinarians. Men played only secondary roles. Over half of the mothers in
the sample said that their men never threatened to or actually hit their children. Of those men that did, their aggression was not as frequent as was the mothers' aggression. Like mothers, however, the men tended to threaten to hit more than they hit. The division of labor in parental discipline found in the adult life of the study women is remarkably similar to the division of labor described by the women about their own parents. Their mothers were the agents of parental control, their fathers less so.

Several explanations may account for this differential assignment of parental responsibilities. In the life worlds of the study women, fathers were not around the children as much as were mothers. Their own father figures tended to be somewhat elusive, given to extended absences from the family group. The men who occupied those roles would change as well when marriages would break up or their mothers engaged in new relationships. So it is with the adult love relationships among the study women. Their mates would come and go. Such transience interferes with constancy in the father role. The lack of constancy gave the study women more opportunity to be the disciplinarians. Mothers may have also committed themselves to disciplinary responsibility since men had unwittingly abdicated their duty through their absences.
The reports of the women lead one to believe that mates, the fathers of their children were not especially active parents. Their mates did not greatly assist in the rearing of offspring. Several studies suggest that an inattentive mate-father can enlarge the stress experienced by a mother. A supportive husband and one who involves himself in the upbringing of his children may contribute to a mother’s confidence in her parental role (Zur-Szpiro and Longfellow, 1982). The absence of husband support and involvement makes the demands of the mother role more exceeding. In parenting, perhaps two heads are better than one. Many of the study women assumed near total responsibility for childrearing, often relaying to the researcher that there was no alternative. In light of this, however, it may be important to remember that most of the women saw this as their duty as mothers, that they enjoyed it, and that they thought they met the challenge of parenting well.

Children often became the objects of conflict in love relationships. Since many of the women in the study had accepted complete responsibility for childrearing, they often resented the occasional intrusion by their mates. What would begin as a husband’s verbal attack upon a child would end in a physical fight between the two parents. Mothers did not take kindly to a casual father’s reprimand of a child. This may be another reason why mate-fathers threatened and hit less than mothers. Mothers acted as
gate-keepers to the means of parental control. It is a somewhat complicated arrangement but one that describes the mate/mother - child - father/mate role relationships of a good many of the women in the sample.

My husband was pretty good most of the time. When he was pretty good, that is. But he'd get to drinking a little bit and throw up the fact that my daughter didn't belong to him and all this garbage. All this, that, and the other. He'd just talk junk to her and I didn't like that. Then he'd get mad and try to whip her. Tried to beat her with a belt. Well, we'd have some knockdown, drag-outs over that sometimes. I'd leave him but he'd come get me. We'd get along for a week or two and then he'd start in on her all over again.

Many times, a child would be a handy tool with which to start a fight. The women generally viewed men as provocateurs and saw their mates exploit the children to get at them - an escalation of indirect aggression to direct aggression.

You know he'd be out sometime late in the afternoon and he wouldn't come home until late at night. He'd get mad at the slightest thing Liz (daughter) would do. He'd hardly have anything to do with her normally and she wouldn't have anything to do with them. It's just like they started to dislike each other. I started dating this other guy after a while and he moved out. But he'd come over to the house sometimes and he'd say he was going to take Liz away. Any other time, you'd never see him around.

The role relationships of mate - mate and mate- child were overlapping ones. Violent conflict often resulted from one mate - parent overstepping the boundaries of what the other mate - parent defined as appropriate role behavior. One middle-aged white woman in the study had long suffered the abuse of her husband and his abuse of their two
children. She was a somewhat passive woman, never seeking professional help or shelter from him.

One summer night, she and her sister had planned to take the children for pizza. Her husband would not permit her to go unless he accompanied them. She had little choice in the matter. The five of them arrived at the pizza parlor. The two women and children sat at a table. The husband stood at the counter drinking beer. She grew angry at the image she thought he struck in the eyes of the children. After a few hours, they left, her husband slightly intoxicated and driving the car. They stopped first at their sister's house to drop her off. The sister got out of the car as did the husband. The woman slid over behind the wheel—she thought her husband too drunk to drive. The sister stopped to chat by the driver's window before entering her house. The husband stood urinating on the sister's front lawn. The woman considered his act to be a final public degradation of her and her children. As he entered the passenger's side of the car, she reached under the seat and grabbed the handgun he kept there. With the two children in the back seat, she fired once to his head.

Many of the study women deeply regret the lasting psychic scar they have caused their children through their criminal violence. The women tend not to mourn for the victims, but, instead, to relive the pain their children must now bear as a consequence of the killings.
Killing children

Infanticide is a generic term that refers to the killing of children. Five cases of infanticide were found within the study sample. Filicide is a more specific term referring to the killing of one's own son or daughter. Among the five cases of infanticide three were filicides. All three victims of the filicides were male. More specific still, neonaticide is used to define a type of infanticide, usually filicide, where the victim is killed on the day of its birth. There was one case of neonaticide among the three filicides. A woman delivered her own son behind a barn and, within an hour of birth, had smashed her son's head against a cinder block.

From an analysis of 168 case reports of neonaticide found in the literature on child murder, Pesnick (1970) reports that neonaticide offenders tend to be younger, less psychotic, and more often unmarried than women who kill older children. Further, neonaticide offenders were apt to kill their babies because the babies were unwanted. Pesnick reports that filicide offenders more likely kill their victims for a variety of altruistic reasons. The neonaticide offender in the present sample apparently fits Pesnick's description of neonaticide offender group characteristics. The woman became pregnant before her eighteenth birthday. She was not married. Her psychiatric profile was not known but her motive for killing her child suggests that the child was indeed unwanted. The woman had
had an active social life, enjoying dancing and frequenting night clubs. Her physical appearance was important to her and her slim figure, she claimed, made her a popular dance partner at the clubs. The pregnancy interfered with her social life. Men did not like to dance with a pregnant partner, according to the woman. She also anticipated that parenting would further hamper the life she so enjoyed. Successfully concealing her pregnancy from many, she would later deliver the child herself and promptly end the neonate's life.

The other two women guilty of filicide, but not neonaticide, include Saqitarria Reid whose story is told earlier in this work. Her son died from inattention when Saqitarria slipped into a spell of pronounced depression and isolation. The remaining woman guilty of filicide was an eighteen year old mother who killed her three month old son. She could not bear his constant crying and she told the researcher that she was not prepared for parenting at that time in her life. In an effort to cease her son's crying, she stuffed tissue paper down his throat. The young boy suffocated.

5. In an earlier paper on filicide, Resnick (1969) identifies five types of filicide based upon a psychiatric profile of the offender and an analysis of the situational context. The case of Saqitarria Reid may fall under Resnick's category "acutely psychotic filicide." This is when the offender is under the influence of delirium. The "unwanted child" filicide type described by Resnick may apply to the other case of filicide in the sample. This is when a son or daughter is killed in response to certain pressures of everyday living.
anticide, had inadvertently killed young children not their own. The first of these, a middle aged woman, knew that her lover was seeing another woman. She followed the two of them in her car. She fired several shots at their car, hoping to hit either or both of them. She missed her intended targets and hit the eight month old girl riding between her lover and the mother. The final case of infanticide involved a young woman who was angry with a friend. One evening, in a fit of self-described rage, the woman set fire to her friend's apartment building. A two year old boy, the oldest of the five infanticide victims in the sample, perished in the flames.

What biographical currents are shared by these five infanticide offenders? Small as their number is in the sample, what can we learn from these special cases of criminal homicide? Four of the five were convicted of second degree murder. Only Saqitarria Reid was convicted of involuntary manslaughter. Perhaps this is a function of the courts' reading of the degrees of intent and maliciousness, key factors in criminal homicide judicial processing, involved in each case. Four of the infanticides were apparently judged to reflect higher levels of these two dimensions than those found in Saqitarria Reid's criminal homicide. Four of the five victims were male. Four of the five offenders were relatively young at the time of the crimes, three were teenagers. Four of the women are black.
All five women had been beaten as children with some regularity. Three of these women, 60 percent of their group, had been beaten at least once a week. In contrast, 36 percent of the reporting study sample had been beaten with the same frequency. Three of the five infanticide offenders had been sexually abused as children. About 34 percent of the total sample had suffered sexual victimization as children. All five women reported childhood and adolescent activities to be seriously restricted by parents. Three of the five said that their adult love relationships at the time of the homicides were characterized by a similarly restrictive mate. Three reported frequent physical fights in their love relationships, all initiated by mates. This proportion is slightly less than but comparable to the proportion of women in the sample attacked by a mate at least once a month. On the whole, it would appear that these five women led lives marked by more aggression than that of the lives of the total sample group.

The quantity and quality of life events marked by loss was similar for the infanticide group and the total sample group. The only notable exception was the proportion of each group who dropped out of school before graduation. Sixty-three percent of the sample had dropped out. All five of the women guilty of infanticide dropped out. Of some note is the fact that all reported that they dropped out due, in part, to a pregnancy. This may or may not be
significant. It does suggest that a pregnancy for each of the five had partially precipitated a major form of adolescent loss: leaving school. Perhaps there is some measure of resentment toward 'children that emerges as a consequence.

The degree of aggression experienced in the lives of the infanticide offenders may have informed their criminal homicides. Gradually, through the living out of everyday life, aggression may come to be seen as a way to manage problems and people. Four of the five child killings were active forms of aggression, although two of the five victims were unintended ones. This type of aggression is instrumental, directed toward an end. Aggression may also be expressive of life stress as well. Importantly, the five infanticide offenders were experiencing similar if not greater stress as the other women in the study.

The three filicide offenders, all teenagers at the time, may not have been able to meet the demands of parenting and also manage the stress in other arenas of their lives. In response to these pressures, they successfully rid themselves of a demanding role, that of mother. This group of infanticide offenders is now a very troubled one, however. A subjective comparison by the researcher of the current mental health of this subgroup with the others in the sample suggests that the infanticide offenders demonstrate greater psychological impairment. This may be partially an outcome of their present statuses
as child killers. Within an institution where women greatly value the mother role, the killing of children is met with disdain and opprobrium. Most of the women, even those guilty of gross human atrocity, cannot fathom why someone or how someone could kill a child. Given this attitude, infanticide offenders have a hard time maintaining a positive self image in prison. Several of the five offenders would repeatedly ask the researcher such questions as, "Am I crazy?" or "Is there really something wrong with me?" These questions were largely absent from interviews with other women in the sample. Unexpectedly, the women who seemed to manifest the greatest psychological impairment were the two who had killed children accidentally, intending to kill or hurt others. The recognition that, through their actions, they had stripped innocent children of life brought with it an overwhelming remorse and sense of profound guilt. Even if they themselves were able to forget, others would not let them.

Piers (1978) suggests that the true prevalence of infanticide is somewhat masked. This is to say that many infanticides go undetected or are not legally defined as such. She writes of one episode where students who worked in the sewer system of a large city had discovered several neonates on a sewer screen. Infanticide involves other

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6. The researcher found this disdain for infanticide offenders to be shared by men in prison as well. Child killers were low in the prison status hierarchy. The amount of attention that child killing commands from the print and television news media suggests that this disdain is shared by other segments of society as well.
forms other than the mere abdication of caretaking responsibilities in the parent role, believes Piers. Sometimes there is institutional complicity in the act. Newborns abandoned by their mothers in hospitals, writes Piers, often die because of the lack of attentive nursing staff and the deprivation of contact comfort. Piers believes that it is in this way that diffuse hospital care of abandoned neonates can be deadly.

Piers may be correct in assuming that the true prevalence of infanticide goes largely unmeasured. She may overstate the case but her work does suggest a need for increased sociological and psychological attention to infanticide. We might benefit from assessing the magnitude of the phenomenon and encouraging more research as to the possible explanations, at the structural and individual levels, for its occasion. From an examination of the five cases of infanticide in the present study, it appears as though these five women experienced relatively high levels of everyday life stress. Further, the stress levels appear to obtain more from aggressive events. Perhaps this is a start in understanding infanticide.

Totaling motherhood

The mother role was one played in everyday life by 62 of the study women. Perhaps more than in any other role, these women found great satisfaction as parents. Too, the vast majority of mothers in the study thought they had good relationships with their children, believed that they played
the mother role well, and sensed that their children would believe the same. This was a role where behavior more often than not matched expectations. In motherhood, most of the women desired a mutual exchange of love. Generally they were not disappointed.

The study women tended to have their first child, most had several, at a relatively young age. For some, this was a source of consternation since pregnancy often necessitated leaving school and/or their families. Ties to important support groups were strained in the process. Nonetheless, the women accepted the responsibility of childrearing with seriousness and a sense of purpose. They, like their mothers, assumed the duties of disciplining children. Most used physical means though to a lesser degree than did their mothers. Mates tended not to be disciplinarians as the mothers often resented mates when they would discipline the children. Frequently, physical conflict between mates would follow a man's scolding of the children.

Motherhood also involved certain loss experiences. Infertility troubled those women who wanted children. Only one woman in the sample said she never wanted children. Miscarriage, rather than abortion, seemed to be the more unsettling of the two events. This may be the case because miscarriage is beyond the control of the woman. Abortion is marked more by choice than is miscarriage. A hysterectomy or a tubal ligation was often desirable for many of the study women who believed they had a sufficient number of
children. Most found the change not to be difficult. A sizable group of women who had either form of active surgery did want more children, however, and so they found it difficult to meet the reality of their infertility. This suggests that one's attitude toward such surgery, rather than the surgery itself, determined the degree of stress to obtain. The most severe form of loss to strike mothers, according to their reports, was the death of a child. Thirteen women in the study experienced such death. Not only do these women convey feelings of deep remorse over the loss but they also report a lasting guilt that they are in some way responsible for the death.

Five women in the study were infanticide offenders. As a group, these women seemed to have experienced more aggressively laced everyday lives than did their peers in the sample. The infanticide offenders appeared to the researcher to be suffering from greater psychological impairment than other women in the study. This may be partially attributed to the ostracization they experience in prison as a result of their statuses as child killers.

While the role of mother was a rewarding one, it was not without attending difficulties. Events, especially those escaping the control of the women, intruded from time to time - requiring mothers to alter the styles of role playing accordingly. At the outset of this chapter is an expressed need to view the events of motherhood against the events and conditions in other life arenas. The following
account of Cookie Glover's life as a mother permits us to look at a mother role set in motion with other roles: daughter, student, worker, wife, lover, and prison inmate.
The Case of Cookie Glover

In Chapter Seven, Cookie Glover's account of the sexual abuse that precipitated the shooting of her husband was presented. The following pages represent Cookie's reconstruction of her experiences as a mother. During the course of the study, Cookie and I talked with one another several times. We spent approximately five hours together discussing the events of her life. Cookie is a black woman in her early thirties. She admits to being overweight. She owns a compassionate face, framed by loose black curls that fall from an ill-defined part. Cookie impresses as a loving, motherly woman—willing to console those who are in need. Other women in prison seem to seek her out for this quality.

"Did you graduate from high school?" I asked Cookie.

"No," she answered. "I completed the eleventh grade. I went a couple of months in twelfth grade. I got pregnant and had to quit."

"How old were you at the time?" I asked.

"Seventeen because I was 18 when the baby was born. She was born in May. I tell her now that she was my graduation present. Only I didn't graduate."

"Were you happy that you got pregnant?"

"No. I wasn't happy. It was a mistake. I wanted to finish school."
"Was the father a steady boyfriend of yours?" I asked. Cookie was not yet married.

"Yes. He was a few years older than me. I went to live with my sister in another town the summer after eleventh grade. I met him there when I went to spend the summer with my sister."

"Did he know about the pregnancy?"

"He knew I was pregnant. Matter of fact, I told him I was pregnant."

"Did you get married?" I asked.

"No, not then," Cookie replied. "I did marry him but that was two years later."

"Why didn't you get married when you both found out you were pregnant?"

"Well, my momma said it wasn't no reason to get married. She said I wasn't the first to make that mistake and I wouldn't be the last. But she told me not to make no more mistakes like that. She gave me a lecture about it."

"So you lived with your mother during the pregnancy?"

"Yeah. When I dropped from school, I worked in the tobacco fields. Before, though, I didn't know I was pregnant. I got home from the summer with my sister and started school. After a couple months, I started getting nauseated - morning sickness and stuff. I'd have to run from the classroom and throw up. I'd have to stop the school bus to throw up. I got tired of it so I quit. I quit because I was having too much morning sickness. I had
it for about four months."

"What was it like living with your mother after you had the baby?" I asked.

"After I had the baby? Oh, it was like...she'd say, she'd tell me that I had a baby now and I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that. I couldn't go out. 'You got to stay home and tend your baby,' she'd say. 'She's (the baby) your responsibility.' Stuff like that. I got mad and I'd grab my baby and put her in the car with me. Me and her daddy would sit in a joint somewhere, the baby on my lap. My momma was working tobacco then. Most of the time I'd have to stay in the house and tend the baby. Momma just made up her mind she was never going to babysit. But then when I started to talk about marrying, she told me that I wasn't going to take my baby with me! Momma said, 'You ain't taking the baby. She was born in my house and she's going to stay in my house!' I just kept to myself. I thought that if I was leaving, my baby'd leave with me."

"Why did your mother want the baby to stay with her?" I asked. It would seem that Cookie was getting conflicting signals from her mother. Her mother would not care for the child but, at the same time, would not tolerate the child's departure. I was puzzled by her mother's apparent attitude and Cookie was equally mystified.

"I really don't know," Cockie answered. "She wouldn't watch the baby for me but, when I wanted to leave, she told me to go out and get a different baby because she was
keeping my first. It just so happened that I did get pregnant again."

"Before you were married?" I queried.

"Uh, huh. I sure did. My baby was only ten months old and I was pregnant again. But I lost that one. He was a boy."

"Now?"

"I had a miscarriage. I went into labor when I was six months pregnant. I worked real hard that summer. I worked the tobacco harvest and I was down in the field. I'd take my child with me when I worked. I guess I felt like whatever anybody else could do, I could do, too. Big belly and all. Maybe I just worked too hard. I don't know."

"What were your feelings about the miscarriage?" I asked.

"About losing my baby? It kind of hurt in a way because I felt like part of me was gone. He wasn't born dead. He lived about six hours. They had him in an incubator and they was sort of floating him to keep his heart going. I don't know. But after about six hours, he died. When they told me he died, I felt like a part of me was gone."

"You got married about that time, didn't you?"

"Yes. My baby was about two years old when I got married. One day he came over and asked to get married so we could take care of our baby right. So we did. It was raining the day we got married. Momma was still telling me
I didn't need to get married. I told her I was going to anyway. Momma wouldn't go with me to get married. My oldest sister went with me. I left Momma and went and lived with my husband in a little town further south. I took my baby with me."

"What did your mother say about that?"

"She didn't say nothing. She knew I had made up my mind and I was determined to take my baby with me. I'd always bring her back to visit with Momma - let them spend some time together. So, uh, there weren't no problem."

"How did your marriage work out?"

"It was nice for a year," Cockie answered.

"What happened after a year passed?" I asked.

"I got pregnant again."

"How old were you at this point in your life?"

"About 21 I think because I was 20 when I got married. We got married in March and I got pregnant in December. My husband decided that he wasn't making enough mcrey and he started talking about going to New Jersey. He told me he wanted to move us to New Jersey. He had family up there. I told him I couldn't go right then. I asked him if he couldn't wait until the baby was born. I'd had one miscarriage already and I was scared that, if I traveled, I'd lose this one. He said he didn't want to wait that long. I told him to take me back to where he found me and to go ahead. So I went back, me and my baby, to Momma. I was poked out pregnant again. I lived there for a while.
We didn't have no income coming in. It was just us because my husband had left. Momma started bitching at me again. She'll preach in a minute, that woman. This girlfriend of mine told me that her and her kids were on welfare. She said I could get welfare, too. I didn't know nothing about it so she showed me how to do it. I went down to the welfare office and got everything squared away. They sent this lady out to the house to investigate and then she started the check coming. They gave me 90 dollars a month but only on condition that I pay Momma 20 dollars a month rent. Momma thought that was okay."

"But, you know," Cookie continued, "before the check started coming, Momma had gotten tired of us. She kept saying that I had to leave, to get out. Then the check came and everything got all right again. I'd try to save a little money every month. It was hard, though. I'd cry when Momma would start asking us to leave. My husband had said he'd send money when he got settled but he never did. I'm the type of person that doesn't forget nothing. If my feelings are going to be hurt, then that's the time to move on. So I was saving my money to get a place by myself, away from my momma. Eventually, I rented this rabbit box around the street from her."

"Was it a house?" I asked.

"Yeah, but I called it a rabbit box. It only had three rooms, one right behind the other. It was 22 dollars a month. So I'm poked way out by this time, couldn't do that
much. But that's how I got my first house on my own. After I started giving Momma some of my welfare money, she didn't want us to leave. But I saw that I couldn't make it there with her."

"When did you give birth to your baby?"

"In August. I carried her, poked out, all summer long. When I was in the hospital, I tried to talk the doctors into giving me the operation so I wouldn't have no more children. They said they wouldn't because I hadn't been separated from my husband long enough. He came home to see the baby but he didn't stay very long. We stayed separated like that for seven years."

Apparentlly, Cookie was denied control over her own reproductive system. The attending physicians, according to Cookie, had arbitrarily rejected a tubal ligation desired by Cookie. She was not certain she could financially or emotionally handle more children. Her husband was not meeting his financial responsibilities to Cookie or his children. Cookie would see her husband on occasion during the seven years they were separated. When Cookie was 28 years old, her husband was decapitated in an automobile accident. She received some insurance money as a result and, after arranging the funeral, used the remaining money to pay long overdue bills. Before her husband's death, Cookie began seeing another man with whom she had a third
"What was the father of your youngest child like?" I asked.

"He was real nice," answered Cookie. "We had a good relationship. Always got on well. He'd even help out around the house!"

"That was something you hadn't experienced before?"

"Sure wasn't! Sometimes he'd even bring me breakfast in bed. He was just real nice. I told my children to look at him as their father because he was always around. They called him Daddy."

"What happened to that relationship?"

"After about two years, he left. He hung around until the baby was born. I don't know. Seemed like everytime I got pregnant, things started going haywire."

"Why did he leave?" I asked Cookie.

"I don't know," Cookie said, genuinely puzzled.

"Do you think he was afraid of the responsibility?" I suggested.

"I really don't know. I never really questioned it. I never had a man around during none of my pregnancies. Everytime I got pregnant, it seemed like my husband would have some place to go or he'd just leave. I started taking a close look at me. Was it me? Was I evil or was I hard to get along with? Things always went wrong. When things go wrong, I always look at myself first. I try and sort things out within me. Am I the cause of it all? Is it something I
did wrong? Where did I go wrong?"

From what little I knew about Cookie's temperament, the blame for her predicament was not entirely hers. She is not an especially contentious or threatening sort. Nevertheless, Cookie began to internalize the sources of difficulty in her life. She began to accept herself as an inherently flawed individual. Such a mode of adaptation to the role strain between mother and wife evidenced in Cookie's life world is not a generally healthy one. External sources of distress are ignored. But the fact is that men left her. Why Cookie felt the way she did is not difficult to understand.

I was interested in how Cookie managed the rearing of her children by herself. I asked her if she found this to be arduous.

"Well, I didn't look on it as being difficult," Cookie replied. "I felt it was a challenge, you know, something that I had to do. I felt capable of doing it. I got a job in a hair salon. I always found somebody to look after my children. So, uh, I didn't find it difficult at all. I've always been a very independent person. If I have to do something, I do it."

"You seemed to take your responsibilities as a mother quite seriously," I said.
"I knew I had a family. There wasn't nobody to take care of them. So I accepted the responsibility and just went on with it. I finally did get an operation so I couldn't have no more children."

"Tell me about that." I remembered that her first request for the operation was denied by her doctors.

"My third child was a breach birth. That was enough. I went ahead with a tubal."

"How did you feel after that?"

"After the stitches and all the pain had healed, I felt okay. I felt I could enjoy sex without worrying about getting pregnant."

"Was it a relief?" I asked.

"It was. I didn't have to worry about protection or holding back none to keep from getting pregnant. It was a relief. And before that, I'd always had a female problem. Some kind of tube infection. My stomach would hurt and I'd have to go to the doctors for antibiotics. That would clear it up. After the operation, it didn't bother me so much."

Mentioned earlier in Chapter Eight, Cookie's brother was killed in a gun battle she had witnessed and her mother passed away the same year. Cookie later married a second time. Her husband was restrictive and abusive. She shot him one evening after he had sexually ravaged her.
Cookie Glover has been active in a prison group comprised mostly of women serving life terms. The group periodically speaks to adolescent boys and girls who show early signs of criminal careers. Even in prison, Cookie salvages her mothers role. She counsels and consoles these wayward young adults as if they were her own children. One afternoon, I sat in on a meeting of the group with some teenagers brought in from the outside. The groups approach to these adolescents is decidedly not in the manner of Scared Straight programs. There is not aggressive posturing on the part of the female felons, no manifest threats to act as an alleged deterrent. Rather, the NCCCW residents display an empathic regard for the problems most of the teenagers experience. The women are soft-spoken and sincere, whether or not the program is successful in helping the teens is not easily determined. But it is comforting for many of the youths who come to know that someone seems to understand their special problems and needs. Cookie is especially able in her role with the children. Perhaps she understands well their life worlds. After I had witnessed the group in action, I had the opportunity to speak with Cookie again. I asked her about the children she works with in prison.

"I've seen so many bad things happen to so many kids," Cookie began. "They're being abused by their own parents and by other people. Sometimes I wonder what's happening to my own children out there. My daughter's now a teenager and
I don't know if she's into drugs or drinking or whatever. In here, she's not going to tell me but just so much. I'm trying to help other kids with their problems and mistakes. It just grieves me on the inside that I can't be with my own children. To be able to take care of them and to talk with them about problems. Each and every week that they come to visit, I can see a change in them. I can see them getting away from me. I can just see the hostility building up in them. They've been without me for so long now. They want me back home. There's nothing I can do about it. I don't know."

"Do you think the group helps the children that come in here?" I asked. I didn't want to dwell on Cookie's own children because I knew she truly missed them. Her daily absence from her children's lives troubled her.

"When we talk to them, one on one, they sort of open up. They're pretty comfortable with us and they feel free to talk. I think it helps them sometimes to just talk."

"Did you have anybody to talk to before you came here?"

"Well, I'd talk with my sister. But I'd never tell her everything because I thought she'd get upset. I'd just talk to her sometimes. I couldn't tell her everything..." Cookie began to stumble over her words. "I wouldn't...I couldn't just tell her, you know, everything. I'd just talk to her sometimes."
"Would you talk about your difficulties with anyone else?" I asked.

"No. Just certain people. Not much. I never would, you know, just open up to anybody."

"Did you ever ask the husband you killed to talk with someone about his violence?"

"He'd tell me I was the one that needed help. I just dropped the subject right there. I could see that he needed someone to confide in. He was beaten as a child and I knew that he saw the women in his family treat their men real bad. Maybe that had something to do with the stuff he was doing to me. But I could see him getting more and more mentally ill. He needed somebody to talk to. He wouldn't accept it, though. He just pushed it all aside."

"Many men think that to get help with their problems is a sign that they are weak. They believe they should be able to handle them themselves," I suggested.

"What's all this about men being strong? That they're not supposed to cry? That's not true," Cookie said. "Everybody has to cry sometime."

There is a simple wisdom in Cookie's words. We, both men and women, diminish ourselves and others by locking away our problems in mental closets. What should be public issues all too often remain private troubles.
Chapter Nine

Working and Other Life Arenas

In recent years, one of the most notable compositional changes in American society is the increasing employment of women outside the home. William Chafe, in his book *The American Woman* (1972), argues that employment is a powerful "engine of change" in the lives of women. Stepping outside the home and into the paid labor force means taking on a new role, that of breadwinner. In more traditional societies, this role is largely reserved for men. The gap between male and female life worlds is wide in societies where gender-based divisions of labor exist. Increasing female employment may narrow the gap. As men and women assume similar work roles, Chafe believes that the two sexes share similar experiences in everyday life.

Despite women's greater involvement in work outside the home, the type of work they do still differs from that done by men. More women than men are employed in the less prestigious and the less financially rewarding occupations (Kirkpatrick, 1979; Simon, 1975). Most working women occupy what some have termed "pink collar" positions. Pink collar jobs are those associated with the traditional
nctions of the female role: cashier, waitress, nurse, secretary, and school teacher to name a few. Moreover, the median annual income of working women is about 56 percent of the median income of working men—a significant disparity of earnings.

The gender disparities in job prestige and earned income can be stress-producing realities for women. An introduction to a world where one is reimbursed for one's labor, where money is achieved and not solely ascribed, may meet with the recognition that one can not always have what one wants. Opportunities may be limited where there is an excess of claimants. Overt or subtle discriminatcry labor practices may interfere with advancement. Such stressors apply to both men and women, of course. But working women frequently encounter other work-related stressors that many working men do not. In addition to meeting the demands of their jobs, many women must attend to child rearing and home management duties. Conflict among the roles of worker, mother, mate, and housekeeper may arise. Role conflict in everyday life can be unrelenting for many a working woman.

The working lives of the study women are detailed in this chapter. Finances, health, and other life conditions are also addressed. In Chapter Six, indices of childhood loss and aggression were constructed and discussed. Similar indices of adult loss and aggression appear later in this chapter. Lastly, a case study of Barbara Russell, a woman convicted of first degree murder, illustrates the many life
Table 9.1: Distribution of First and Last Job Types.

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<tr>
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<th>Factory</th>
<th>Food service</th>
<th>Farm</th>
<th>Clerical</th>
<th>House-keeping</th>
<th>Health care</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total *</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First job</strong></td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(N=71)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Last job</strong></td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=71)</td>
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*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.*
themes exposed in this and other chapters of the study.

Starting to work

Over three quarters of the sample, 54 women, started working in paid positions in or before their eighteenth year. Most of these women began working immediately after leaving school or their families. Only five of the women in the sample said that they had never worked outside the home. Most often, work would be sporadic, interrupted by pregnancies, moving, or marriage. The jobs held by the women were largely confined to the unskilled trades. Table 9.1 shows the distribution of the sample over several occupations at two points in time: the job held when they began to work and the last job held before the criminal homicides. The job categories are broad and intended to reflect the work environment of the women. The 'other' category is a catchall and it includes interior decoration, groundskeeping, garment care, and daycare service.

The figures in the table indicate little job mobility and advancement. There is slight movement toward factory work from first to last job. Most of the women remained employed in the same work environments in which they began their working careers. As one can see by the distribution in the table, the work done by the women was predominantly unskilled labor. Factory workers tended not to be skilled machinists. Instead, they were laborers - relegated to the bottom rung of the job ladder in industry. Even those employed as clerical or in hospitals were not professional
secretaries or registered nurses. Most of these women were "girl fridays" or nurse assistants. Perhaps the tendency for the study women to perform unskilled labor is related to their general lack of education. Most of the study women did not hold high school diplomas. Wages were correspondingly low.

Most of the women who worked outside the home believed that they did their jobs well. It was not that they saw themselves as model workers. But they did believe that their respective employers were satisfied with their performances. When asked how they got on with their employers on their last jobs, 67 of the 71 working women in the sample said that they got on quite well and that their bosses were satisfied with their work. Only two women reported problems with their employers. The remaining two women gave neutral responses. As a rule, the study women met the expectations set for them in their work environments. They worked to get paid, most needed the income to provide for themselves and their families. "You work. You get paid. You go home," said one woman in the study who concisely relayed the sentiments of others.

While economic need motivated many to work outside the home, other benefits besides money accrued in the work place. Most of the women found respite in their paying jobs, far from the madding and often tedious environment of the home. Forty-three women said that the reward of working was in meeting people, getting out of the home, and the
diverse activity found in the workplace. Only ten mentioned money. Yet most of the working women seemed to separate their working lives from their family lives. Despite the increased contact with others in their jobs, they tended not to socialize with their work peers. Forty of the seventy-one working women said that they never did. Relationships were confined to the workplace. Apparently, they did not extend to after hours. Perhaps, again, a single woman expresses the feelings of many in the sample, "You work. You get paid. You go home."

Generally, the working women had few specific complaints about their jobs. Thirty women had not a single complaint to voice. Of those who did complain, physical demand in working was a common theme. Long hours, monotonous work, mandatory overtime, the strain on the body from standing for long periods, and the physical danger posed by the factory setting were frequent complaints. Conditions such as these would interfere, at times, with family life. Some social critics identify these conditions as symptomatic of the exploitation of the working class by the more powerful societal groups.*1 The women in the study, however, did not connect these individual complaints with structured exploitation. Rather, these conditions were understood to be inherent consequences of working. There

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1. For discussions on the relationships between class inequality, power differentials, and crime, see Quinney (1970) and Thio (1979). These and other like-minded theorists suggest that crime is a function of the domination of one class of people by another.
was little that they believed they could do to remedy the conditions. As in other arenas of their everyday lives, control escaped them.

**Discrimination and attitudes toward gender equality in the workplace**

For many women, it was clear to them that they were paid less than their male peers in the workplace. But this was seldom an overt source of complaint. Many seemed to object to but tacitly accept the inequitable labor practice. Men were paid more for the same job. Moreover, other expected complaints about the workplace were not voiced. Sexual harassment, for example, was mentioned by only one woman. This is not to say that sexual harassment did not actually occur with greater frequency in the work lives of the study women. It is to say that only one woman complained about it.

If the majority of the working women were not particularly aware of structured inequality, how would they address the goals of the feminist movement? While not all interviews included discussions of the women's movement or about the Equal Rights Amendment, such topics did arise in a good number of the interviews. The attitude most widely shared among the women reflected support for general feminist goals of gender parity. Importly, support had its limits. Most of the women who spoke about the ERA, for instance, wanted it passed. At the same time, they were leary of stripping away all gender differences.
I'm part of the movement and I'm all for it. I believe a woman should have a free choice in who she wants to be. Maybe she wants a career. But that doesn't mean she has to be emasculating. That's what a lot of women feel about the women's movement now. They see other women becoming very aggressive, trying to imitate the male. Trying to get construction jobs. And some women saying, 'I'm not going to wear makeup.' You know, that's going in the wrong direction. It's going too far.

Another woman expresses a similar disposition:

You can have equal rights and anything you want as long as you don't take it to an extreme. I want to be a lady 24 hours a day. Women should have equal chances. They can be teachers, bricklayers, construction workers. Whatever they want. But be a woman. Get your rights, you know, that's cool. But give a man respect in his place. If he earned it, give it to him. You get what you earn. When women earn it, they can get it too. But it's the extreme to watch out for. These ladies who won't even allow a man to hold the door open for them, it's strange.

In some ways, what many of the women said indicated a more moderate than radical position on women's rights. Most sensed a need for formal legislation to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex. But they were also concerned that such legislation might erode what they considered to be important elements of their feminine identities. In a few words, then, most of the women were supportive of equal rights but cautiously so. This may seem somewhat paradoxical but it accurately reflects the women's common sense understanding of the goals of the women's movement. The paradox is illuminated by later comments of the same two women above. From the first woman:

The ERA is a long time coming! They found out during the second world war that women were capable of doing heavy work. Then, all of a
sudden, women were thrown back into the home again. You know, 'Thank you very much, dear. Now put your little rivetting gun over here. Park your welding shield. We showed you how to put a tank together and now I want you to go back home and wash the dishes.' Come on! Who are they kidding?

And from the second woman above:

The fact is that women doing the same jobs as men are still being paid less. But they have children to support, too! Some women choose not to marry but they can still have a family to support. And they need to raise their children just like a man has got to raise his. Women are going to have their way. I know what I'm talking about. They're going to get their way.

The guarantee of equal opportunity in the work place and the maintenance of selective gender-related folkways appear to be two goals to which many of the working women in the sample subscribe.

The housewife role

For a group of women to whom the mother role meant so much, home management activities were an integral part of everyday living. Sixty-two of the sample women had children and most of these women considered motherhood to be the most cherished arena in their lives. Understandably, providing a rich home environment was a primary concern. Yet the home was an important arena to nearly all of the sample women, with and without children, with and without mates, and with and without outside jobs.

Cooking, childcare, and housekeeping were frequently mentioned as enjoyable chores of housewifery. Many might greet this finding with disbelief since we often regard such
daily work as drudgery. Many of the sample women, however, found great satisfaction in these chores. In the home, some authority was achieved. The women made decisions in preparing meals, rearing sons and daughters, and managing the physical and financial environments of the home. Fulfillment and recognition followed the making and execution of these everyday decisions. It was somewhat gratifying to successfully manage a homelife. If we, men and women alike, take time to review our own performances as cooks, parents, and housekeepers, many of us would have to admit to some satisfaction in these roles.

If each of us were asked what he/she most disliked about home management duties, we might give answers similar to those offered by the study women to the same question. Not surprisingly, boredom, loneliness, and physical exhaustion were common responses to queries about the negative aspects of housewifery. The routine of home management can be a monotonous one. For some, it can be tiring and isolating, especially if outside contacts are limited. These aspects of home management may be the elements of drudgery so often associated with such labor.

Among the study women, these complaints were loudest from those who also held jobs outside the home. Forty-seven of the 76 women worked while married or living with a man. A majority of these women, 40, held full-time jobs. Forty-nine women worked while raising children, 42 of them full-time. These figures underscore the financial
contribution to home management made by the study women. Their earnings were vital to the support of their respective families. At the same time, juggling family and job responsibilities was a considerable effort. Twenty-seven of the working women reported that the job-family balance was difficult to achieve. Role conflicts of mother-worker, mate-worker, and home manager-worker arose in everyday life. Roles competed for time, a finite and precious commodity in everyday life. The working women in the study generally agreed that the competition of roles was stiff and, importantly, tiring.

The delegation of household chores to family members seemed to be a practice either wholeheartedly adopted or discarded by the study women. This is to say that the large majority of women either enlisted family members in household chores everyday or not at all. For example, 22 women said that their mates helped with the chores everyday and 23 reported that mates helped not at all. Similarly, 26 women said that their children did daily chores and 23 reported that their children never did chores. The remaining women reported that mates and children helped with varying frequency. The distributions of mates and children over frequency of household helping behavior are conspicuously curvilinear, with the majority of mates and children evenly clustered at both ends of the continuum. As one might imagine, the women who had helpful family members generally found housework to be less of a burden than those
Table 9.2: Subjects' Assessments of Home Manager Role Performances and Regard for the Home Manager Role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' assessments of home manager role performances</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Total *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' regard for the home manager role</th>
<th>Liked</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disliked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100.0%

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.*
whose families were of little or no assistance.

Table 9.2 illustrates the responses of the study women to questions concerning a self-assessment of housewife role performance and a general regard for the role. Clearly, most of the study women thought they performed the role well and genuinely liked doing so. A greater number of women disliked the role than the number who were willing to give themselves poor marks for role performance. Still, the findings suggest a remarkable agreement between assessment of role performance and regard for the role: most liked the role of housewife and thought they were good at it. As taxing as the responsibilities of home management could be, playing the role of home manager in everyday life seemed to produce some sense of satisfaction.

Other Life Arenas

Financing everyday life

Many life events and conditions are thought to have an emotional resonance in styles of role playing. What one experiences as a child, for example, may inform certain adult roles such as parent or lover. The effects of deteriorating family life upon the quality of one's work may be another example of emotional resonance. The life condition that, perhaps more than any other life event or condition, resounds in all areas of everyday life is financial status. The amount of money one has can determine how one recreates, raises children, where one resides, and with whom one regularly associates.
The distribution of financial resources in American society varies by race, age, and ethnicity. As groups, whites are substantially better off than nonwhites, the middle aged are better off than the young and old, and certain ethnic groups are enriched, others less so. Sex is another social characteristic by which financial status varies. Citing figures from the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity in 1980, Belle (1982) reports a national trend toward the feminization of poverty. The chance that a female head of a household would live beneath the poverty level, writes Belle, was greater in 1977 than in 1967. Currently, one in three women who head households is poor. Belle further suggests that the financial status of women in the United States may have a significant impact upon their mental health. Since finances appear to be an important element of everyday life, this study would not be complete without some mention of the financial conditions in which the study women found themselves.

A telling indication of the financial status of the study women is their representation in the ranks of welfare recipients. Forty-one women, over half of the sample, had received state or federal assistance in their adult lives. Some women relied on assistance throughout, but most received assistance sporadically. They would go off welfare only to receive it anew months or years later. While the women generally did not enjoy their statuses as welfare recipients, they could see no other alternative with
children to support and in the absence of a reliable wage-earning mate. Most admitted that making ends meet was a chronic concern but that they, like their own parents, managed to adequately provide for their families. Judging from the women's accounts, the relative financial status of the majority of the study women would be termed low income. Only a handful could truthfully be tagged middle income women.

Forty-one women rented rather than owned their homes just prior to their criminal homicides. Twenty-four women owned their homes and the remaining 11 women lived with relatives, friends, or acquaintances. Four women in the sample had, at one point in their lives, experienced a foreclosure on a mortgage. Eleven women had once built a house and 25 women had once extensively remodeled their homes. Twenty-one women had lost a home to eviction, fire, flood, or other natural catastrophes at least once in their adult lives. These events are noted because some researchers identify them as inherently stressful experiences (see, for example, Dohrenwend et al., 1978). Each of these events requires some level of individual adjustment in everyday living. Of course some of these events are more positively encountered than others.

Limited financial resources put some restraints on behavior. One cannot always do what one wants when expendable income is not available. For example, 31 women in the sample said that they never went on vacations because
they could not afford the expense. But impoverished living conditions can also strain important interpersonal relationships. American culture places a high premium on wealth and success. Advertisements that suggest that one can be a better person through ownership of a particular product signal the acquisitive nature of our culture. Frustration may accrue when the attainment of goods is impeded.*2 That frustration may be vented against the people with which we have the most contact, family members or friends. Nineteen of the study women reported frequent fights with mates about money. These 19 women said that such fights would arise when bills outstripped available cash. Creditors' demands would precipitate domestic violence. According to the women frequently faced with this situation, financing everyday life was a constant concern and the violence that followed arguments about money only worsened the quality of their lives.

Other women in the study stayed with abusive mates only because they feared a financial fate worse than the one they were in. When they considered leaving, they were uncertain as to how they would provide for themselves and their children.

There was always the problem of money when I didn't work. I thought about leaving (an abusive mate) and then I'd think to myself, 'Well, what are you going to do? I haven't got anywhere to go. I haven't got a job. How am I

2. Merton (1957) suggests that the schism that exists between the culturally defined goals of wealth and success and the legitimate means to attain those goals can contribute to crime.
going to support (my daughter)? If I go to work, who'll take care of my daughter? Sometimes it was easier just staying where we at least had a house than to be faced with everything else. Having to worry about where he was going to sleep and where he was going to eat. I couldn't take all that. I guess I got to a point where my reasoning wasn't very good.

Financial resources can indeed determine the course and texture of life. In the above case, a woman could not accept the financial responsibility that would attend her independence from an abusive husband. She believed there to be no reasonable alternative to her living conditions. Because of her fear of having to meet the financing of everyday life alone, she remained with her husband. She later killed him.

Contact with crime and criminal justice

One theory developed by social scientists to explain criminal behavior relies upon learning principles. Sutherland (1974), for one, believes criminal behavior to be a function of the frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of the contact with criminal elements and definitions. If an individual has frequent contact with crime, then that individual presumably stands a strong chance of behaving criminally. Since all the subjects in the study behaved in a criminally violent manner, it might be useful to review their contacts with crime prior to their homicides.
Recalling from Chapter Six, 20 women said that their fathers had been arrested at least once. Eight women said that their mothers had been arrested at least once. The brothers of 37 women in the study had been arrested and the sisters of 12 women were at one time arrested. The study women were also asked about the arrests of family members in their adult lives. Forty-three women said that their husbands or lovers had been arrested at least once. Sixteen were arrested for violent crimes such as assault, rape, and robbery. Eleven arrests were for property offenses and the remaining 16 were arrested for drug and alcohol related offenses, among others. Ten women reported that at least one of their children had been arrested at least once. Four arrests were for crimes of violence, two for crimes of property, and four for other offenses. Unfortunately, no corresponding data on offense type for childhood family member arrests were collected. Many of the women could not remember the offense for which parents or siblings had been arrested. Information on arrests of adult family members, however, indicates a preponderance of arrests for violent offenses.

When asked about friends in adulthood who had served time in jail or prison, 42 women said that they had friends who had been incarcerated. Twenty-five of these had more than one friend who had served time. Coupled with the number of arrests of childhood and adult family members reported by the study women, the large number of women who
had close contact with incarcerated individuals in adulthood strengthens the possibility that learning principles of criminal behavior may operate. At the very least, the possibility cannot be dismissed in this study.

Most of the study women had never been accused of a criminal offense prior to their murders or manslaughters. Fifty-nine women said that they were never crime suspects or arrestees. Sixteen women, almost one quarter of the sample, reported that they had been either a suspect or an arrestee. Like adult family members who had been arrested, many of the women said that their prior offenses were violent ones. Seven reported arrests for violent offenses, six for property offenses, one for narcotics possession, one for prostitution, and the remaining woman was arrested for a lesser crime against public order. From all of this, one might say that the sample group generally had little personal contact with criminal processing. When they did have contact, chances are that the contact resulted from felonious crimes of violence or property.

More women said that they were themselves victims of crimes than said they were prior offenders. Twenty-nine women reported some type of criminal victimization. Of these women, 13 said that they had been criminally victimized more than once. Sixteen were victims of property crimes and 13 were victims of violent crimes. Criminal victimization, without regard for the type, often instills a sense of violation in the victim. The victimized women in
the study spoke of the crimes against them as violations of their persons or property. Generally, they could not understand why anyone would want to "rip [them] off" or "hurt" them. Too, most were not satisfied with the manner in which their victimizations were processed by the existing criminal justice system.

The total of the information on crime and criminal justice contact in the lives of the study women may provide a speculative clue as to the applicability of subcultural, learning, or transmission theories of crime etiology to this study. The fact that so many women reported having friends who had been imprisoned suggests some previous exposure to criminal action, criminal values, and criminal processing. That many had childhood and adult family members who had been arrested implies more intimate contact with such actions, values, and processes. The dimensions of frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of criminal contact are not especially great in the lives of the study women. But indications of moderate measures of these dimensions suggest previous exposure to criminal elements and definitions that might have played some part in the criminal homicides. A qualitative accounting of conversations about these matters in the study interviews may help in understanding the link between contact and later criminal behavior. Most women who were victimized felt personally attacked or violated in some way. Yet most of those who had family or friends accused of crimes or
incarcerated sympathized with the offenders they knew. The criminal justice system abused them, their families, and their friends in the processing of both offenses and victimizations. Perhaps, in a phenomenological sense, contact with crime and criminal justice contributed to a developing common sense understanding that people in the world were conspiring against them. This seemed to be as true in crime as in other life arenas.

Mental and physical health in adulthood

Poor mental and physical health can be both cause and consequence of life stress. A physical illness, particularly a chronic malady, may require significant, sometimes abrupt change in everyday living. The illness may thus produce stress. Colitis and migraine headaches are two examples of illnesses thought to obtain from everyday stress. In this section on the mental and physical health of the study women, it is important to keep these relationships between well-being and stress in mind.

For fourteen women in the sample, physical illness was reportedly a weekly occurrence. On the other hand, 27 study women said they were the type who never got sick. The remaining 35 women reported that they would be physically ill on a monthly or yearly basis, most of these yearly. Significantly, 25 women reported suffering from chronic illnesses such as asthma, hypertension, back pain, and bronchitis, among others. Twenty-four women said that, in their adult lives, they had suffered an acute illness such
as appendixitis, tonsilitus, pneumonia, cyst, gall bladder attack, kidney problems, and the like. For the 49 women afflicted with either chronic or acute illnesses, general physical well-being was an admitted preoccupation in their everyday lives. Most worried when health problems took them away from their children.

Exactly half of the sample, 38 women, said that they had experienced at least one serious injury as an adult. Fifteen of these reported more than one adult injury. Eleven reported a serious head injury, six reported broken bones, and three reported gunshot wounds. Other reported injuries included whiplash, general bodily injury, serious lacerations, and back injury. As was the case with Samantha Fletcher whose story is told earlier in this work, recuperation from serious injury is often prolonged and tiring.

The study women were also asked questions concerning their mental health prior to their homicides. Twenty-one women said that they had received some form of therapy or counselling prior to the criminally violent acts. Judging from the amount of stress that seems to mark the live of the sample women as a group, one might expect that number to be higher. But many of the women said that they needed therapy at various points in their lives although they did not know whom to seek out for help or they were certain they could not afford the costs of treatment.

3. A majority of the study women informally relayed to the researcher that their general physical and mental well-being had suffered in prison. The subjects assessments of their current physical and mental health, therefore, are likely to be poorer than what the figures in Table 9.3 would suggest.
Table 9.3: Subjects' Assessments of Physical and Mental Health Prior to the Criminal Homicides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Total*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjects' assessments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of physical health</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>(N=76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects' assessments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of mental health</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>(N=76)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
Table 9.3 offers a comparison of the study women's assessments of their physical and mental health prior to their criminal homicides. The figures would suggest that the women were generally less positive in their assessment of mental health than of physical health. Ten women defined their physical health as poor whereas 21 women defined their mental health as such. This disparity might speak to the greater facility in physical health care over mental health care. The women knew where to receive medical assistance for a physical health problem. They were less certain where to receive help for a mental health problem.

One measure of life stress could be the prevalence of stress-related physical symptoms. Life stress is not tangible. We cannot see it or touch it. One way to determine its presence or absence is through the detection of its more tangible consequences, usually certain physical illnesses. Medical scientists have identified illnesses such as ulcers and migraines as partially induced by stress. In the present study, a note was made in each interview when mention was made of a stress-related physical ailment. After the interviews were completed, a finite list of such ailments was made. The list included the ailments most often linked to stress: ulcers, hypertension, migraine headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, vertigo, neuralgia, hot and cold skin flashes, insomnia, and body tics. Of the 76 women in the sample, 53 reported one or more of these symptoms. That over two-thirds of the sample women reported
stressed illnesses offers some insight into the demanding nature of their everyday lives.

Importantly, many women said that the onset of a stress-related disorder seemed to coincide with a particularly taxing life event. The death of a close friend or relative appeared to be a precipitating event. Below, one woman recounts the death of her first husband.

He laid down that afternoon. He slept pretty hard. When night came, I didn't wake him. I just let him sleep but I went to bed too. He was dead then but I didn't know it. Next morning, it was just getting light. I woke up. I thought he was still sleeping so I asked him what was wrong. I looked over and he was laying there like he was. I went to shake him and he was cold and stiff. You know, dead. I went into shock. It really mixed up my nerves. I was shaking like I was freezing or something.

Later in the interview with the same woman, she talked about what she called her "nerve" problem. Asked what she felt like when she had an attack of her ailment, she offered:

Oh, I hurt up in the head like something's pressing down on it. Sometimes I shake so that I can't hold nothing in my hands. I'd just shake. I believe it come from when my husband died in the bed near me. Have you ever been so cold that, between your shoulders, you feel like you'll pop in two? I shiver so much I hurt.

Another life condition that seemed to bring symptoms of neuralgia and migraines was an abusive love relationship. Women who felt trapped in a home with a violent mate often reported such illnesses. Nikki Janes, whose story appears

4. Thirty-nine women reported losing a friend or family member in adulthood. Sixteen said that they had lost more than one, one woman experiencing five deaths in adulthood.
earlier, speaks for many in the sample when she describes what it's like to live under such conditions.

Reviewing work, finances, crime, and health

In summarizing the life arenas addressed in this chapter, a number of themes common to the study of women are discernible. Working outside the home was usually confined to unskilled, low wage occupations. Most women worked out of an economic necessity to do so. They had families to support and mates were not generally viewed as reliable wage earners. Those with children found the management of job and family to be stressful, particularly since the women considered childrearing of paramount importance in their own lives and to the development of their offspring. Perhaps resulting from the conflict in perceived obligations and the time both demanded, the women tended not to socialize after hours with their work cohorts. While exhaustion was a frequent complaint among the women, "most found their work in and outside the home to be rewarding. In a broad sense, the regards had much to do with feelings of accomplishment and contribution.

Financing everyday life was a source of chronic concern. With wages low and the chance for job advancement impeded by the lack of a high school education, a majority of women relied upon public assistance to meet economic demands. Most women rented rather than owned their homes and many had lost a home to natural catastrophe or eviction at least once in their adult lives. Financial constraint
could be a source of conflict with a mate although many women who lived with an abusive mate were loathe to leave and face a financial situation worse than the one in which they found themselves. Given the life currents surrounding working, housewifery, and finances, most women favorably appraised the Equal Rights Amendment but were leery of the elimination of gender-related identities and folkways.

Most of the sample women had no previous experience as offenders in the criminal justice system. Almost twice as many women had been criminally victimized than had criminally transgressed. A significant number had friends or relatives who had served time in jail or prison. The sum of contact with criminality may suggest the operation of learning principles of criminal behavior. How this contact tempers a common sense understanding of the world is made more evident when it is set against the general disdain with which the women regarded the criminal justice system. The system misused them as victims and offenders. In their eyes, the system more often enlarged rather than lessened the stress of resolving criminal matters. Perhaps this impression tarnished their faith in official channels of redressing injustice.

The adult mental and physical health of the women was reportedly not especially good. Mental health was less favorably assessed than physical health. The perception of poor health may be an outcome of the demands these women believed to be placed upon them in everyday life.
Fifty-three women reported suffering from various stress-related psychosomatic illnesses. This large number reveals a common subjective acknowledgement that the autobiographical currents described in this and other chapters were strong and swift. Health and, importantly, behavior suffered in their wake.

Indices of Adult Loss and Aggression

In Chapter Six, two indices of childhood experiences are presented. The first index concerns events and conditions characterized by loss. The second index involves events and conditions marked by some form of aggression. Here, similar indices are constructed for adult life experiences. As is done with both childhood indices, breakdowns of loss and aggression index scores by race and type of criminal homicide are presented to see if adult experience differs along these dimensions.

An adulthood loss index

The adulthood loss index includes 18 life events marked by loss or social dislocation. Each of these events requires some adjustment in everyday living. Many times an important social role is lost and the individual must manage the disruption in social relationships. Others among the 18 loss events involve some form of material loss, such as the burning of a home. The events found in the loss index include the death of a close one, divorce, abortion, miscarriage, physical illness, mortgage foreclosure, and
Table 9.4: Breakdown of Adult Loss Mean Index Scores by Race and Type of Criminal Homicide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Nonwhite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 6.80$</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 7.10$</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 6.62$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$(N = 76)$</td>
<td>$(N = 29)$</td>
<td>$(N = 47)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 6.95$</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 7.83$</td>
<td>$\bar{x} = 6.24$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$(N = 22)$</td>
<td>$(N = 7)$</td>
<td>$(N = 21)$</td>
<td>$(N = 26)$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
death of a pet, among others. A complete list of the index events can be found in the appendix. Each item is equally weighted in the index. A subject is awarded one point if she experienced the event at least once in her adult life and no point if she did not.

Table 9.4 offers a breakdown of the adult loss index mean scores by race and type of criminal homicide. Whites show a slightly higher mean score than nonwhites in the sample. In a breakdown of the childhood loss index, this pattern is reversed. Nonwhites showed a slightly higher mean score than whites. In both cases, however, the difference is not great.

When breaking down both racial groups by type of criminal homicide, the pattern manifest is similar to the pattern found in the childhood loss index breakdown. For both racial groups, those convicted of manslaughter apparently experienced greater loss in everyday life than did those convicted of murder. Again, the differences are not pronounced. However, it does appear as though the differences between mean index scores are greater for types of criminal homicide than they are for racial groups. Type of homicide seems to better determine the amount of loss than does race. For heuristic purposes, one might proffer that the less malicious and less intentional? the criminal homicide, the greater the social loss the offender experiences in everyday life, through childhood and adulthood.
Table 9.5: Breakdown of Adult Aggression Mean Index Scores by Race and Type of Criminal Homicide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Mean (X)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manslaughter</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manslaughter</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Sample

- Mean (X) = 4.26
- N = 76
An adulthood aggression index

The index of adult aggression is comprised of 14 life events marked by some form of aggression. Aggressive events are often interpreted as direct attacks upon the self. The consequences of exposure to aggressive events may be two-fold. First, increased exposure to aggression may increase the chances that an individual will accept aggression as acceptable behavior. In this sense, one may learn to be violent through others. Second, aggression may be stress-producing. An individual may come to see the world as a threatening place if all around her seem to attack. Both these themes run throughout the case studies presented in this work.

The events in the aggression index include physical and verbal fighting with mates, children, friends and others, accidents, criminal victimization and accusation. A full listing of the events can be found in the appendix. As in the other indices, a subject is given a point if she experienced a particular aggressive event and none if she did not. All events are weighted equally.

Table 9.5 provides a breakdown of adult aggression index mean scores by race and by type of criminal homicide. As the figures in the table suggest, whites in the sample experienced greater adult aggression than did nonwhites. When controlling for type of criminal homicide, both racial groups exhibit the same pattern. Those convicted of murder exhibit higher mean scores than do those convicted of
manslaughter. These patterns in adult aggression index scores are similar to the patterns found in the childhood aggression index scores. For both childhood and adulthood, white women in the sample exhibit higher aggression scores than do the black women, although the disparity is greater for adult aggression. For both life periods, murdereresses exhibit higher aggression index scores than do manslaughter offenders and this is true for both whites and nonwhites.

The information presented in Table 9.5 suggests that type of criminal homicide may determine the amount aggression experienced in adulthood. Race appears to be a better predictor of adult aggression than of childhood aggression. In any case, a grounded hypothesis subject to future verification can be stated. The more malicious and intentional the criminal homicide, the greater the aggression encountered by the offender in everyday life, through childhood and adulthood. The findings of this study provide strong evidence for this hypothesis and the hypothesis stated in the preceding section. Of course, this study used a nonrandom sample of female criminal homicide offenders in North Carolina. Future research could determine if these relationships are true for other female samples, for male criminal homicide offenders, and in other parts of the country.

A case study of Barbra Russell's childhood and adult life follows. Her life story is told in her own words and uninterrupted by intrusive remarks by the
researcher. Barbra's story, the events and the way she talks about them, offers poignant illustrations of the many themes developed in this study. She is a woman rapacious for love and success, caught in a life world rife with loss and aggression. The roles she tries desperately to play well seem to unravel her. Throughout her life, social relationships are held together by the most delicate of bonds. Often these bonds abruptly snap and she is lost. Against all odds, she picks up the pieces and continues on. But time and circumstance do not work with her. In middle age, Barbra Russell is accused and found guilty of first degree murder.
The Case of Barbra Russell

Barbra Russell is a white woman in her late thirties. Several years ago she was convicted of the contract slaying of a businessman attending a convention in the state. According to police reports, Barbra and her male co-conspirator broke into the victim's motel room. The victim was asked to lay on the floor and it is said that Barbra then fired five shots to his head. She and her companion were paid a sizable sum for the killing. Barbra currently serves time for first degree murder. She insists upon her innocence and hopes to win an appeal.

Barbra Russell strikes an attractive pose, beautiful in an exotic way, although she makes frequent self-deprecating remarks about her appearance. Her hands are often stowed in the pockets of her smock. She takes them out only to reach for her cigarettes, kept in a red leather pouch that resembles a change purse. Barbra's clothes are always neatly pressed, her hair perfectly coiffed. Her presentation of self is a product of attention and practice.

She and I spoke together several times. She talks at a fast clip but her speech is both thoughtful and deliberate, sometimes overly so. Told in Barbra's own words, the following was pieced together from our many discussions. Barbra Russell begins by describing what she was like as a child.
"Oh, I was a coker all right. I'll admit that. You know, I was an independent type of a kid and I guess I had to be. I had two brothers - I was in the middle. I idolized my older brother, used to follow him around like a shadow. Jack was more than a big brother, much more. He was sensitive and he was.... Oh, I don't know. I'd tag after him unmercifully. He'd get the measles and I had to go and make sure I got them too so I could be with him. Once, the dirty dog, he got the mumps and then I went and got them. But he got over them and I didn't. I was in bed a week longer than he was. I never forgave him for that one.

My younger brother, now that's a different story. You know we lived in a project in a poor area that depended upon the soft coal mining industry. I guess you'd call it a ghetto now, right? The old ringer type washing machine. Tiny, tiny apartments. I can remember standing outside our apartment building on the doorstep and all the grownups just standing around. My mother was in labor. Years later, I found out that she had an awfully difficult time with it. But, you know, I wanted to see my new little brother. All I can remember is one of the grownups saying to me, 'Go away, you're not needed here.' That stayed with me a very long time and I resented my younger brother for it. That's amazing, you know? It shows me how impressionable a child's mind is. Nope, I guess I didn't much like my little brother.
I was born during the second world war. My father was working in a factory making airplane parts. Then we moved to another city. I guess I was about five and a half years old. I had just started first grade. And Dad started travelling a lot, he was a salesman in this job. He ended up with an eleven state territory to to travel. We had a visiting father because he'd gone on trips for anywhere from four to six weeks at a time. He'd come home sometimes for a weekend, sometimes for a whole week. Then he'd be off again. Boy, though, when he was home, why he'd be the king of the castle.

Now Mother, she really raised us with Dad being away so much, she was a hollerer. We couldn't do anything right. Well, Jack was a straight A student and he was ... how do I put it ... a saint! I guess I was the one that sprouted horns. I was always into something. Not that I was that devilish or anything. You know what it was? It was a rivalry between me and my mother for my father's attention. That's exactly what it was. Heck, I was the apple of my dad's eye, what with being the only girl and all. He'd come home from trips and have little surprises for me and I'd spend a lot of time with him. I don't know, Mother might have resented it. We discussed this years and years later. It was very difficult for her to admit that she was really jealous of the affection my father was giving me.
I didn't understand this rivalry when I was younger. I just couldn't figure it out. I couldn't figure out why Jack and Franky, my little brother, could do things right and I wasn't able to. I was always the one to be told to do the chores. Once I had to iron my dad's underwear. Mother bought me this little ironing board when I was eight years old. Little tiny ironing board with a real live little iron. And I was ironing my dad's boxer shorts. I swore then that if any man I went out with wore boxer shorts, I'd strangle him. Handkerchiefs were easy but boxer shorts had all these little pleats that had to be pressed. I hated ironing them. And, you know, Mother was really very prudish and pristine. This is what fractures me now. Here she is, such a prude, and yet she would make me iron something of my father's that was so private. It just didn't balance out. I mean there were a lot of inconsistencies like that.

When I was not quite nine, maybe about eight and a half, I started my period. Early, huh? I thought I hurt myself and the nurse at school sent me home. Mother never explained to me what was happening to my body. So I began to develop this sense of guilt about my period. I was beginning to wonder if I'd done something terrible to myself. I started having real bad cramps and that only made me feel worse about myself. It wasn't a fun time for me at all. To this day I have cramps and I don't know how to
break the chain of it.

Makes me wonder about childbirth too, I'll tell you. Sex and everything that goes with it were taboo subjects in our house. Not allowed to talk about anything like that. Now, heck, all kids wonder where they came from, right? Well I did too. Mother and Dad wouldn't say directly. You know, they'd make up things about cabbage patches. Well, when you finally learn about sex, you think your momma and daddy wouldn't do anything that nasty, that dirty. You know I had a difficult time with my own pregnancies and I wonder if this happened partly because of what my parents did or did not tell me about such things. I guess the pregnancies themselves didn't bother me as much as the actual labors. During labor, I felt exposed. Everything I had and tried to hide all those years was suddenly out in the open for everyone to see. Hey, don't forget I was raised as a good little Catholic girl, just like I've been telling you. Well, it's not exactly a very lady-like position when you have a baby. I mean you put the legs up in the stirrups and off they go, poking and probing your privates. I was raised where you wear your skirt well below the knees and you strap in your boobs so they don't show too much. My labors were something else again.

I went to parochial schools. The nuns and the whole bit. Things about the body were not discussed. Not even health was discussed or biology - hey, that's a normal subject. They'd get into all the sciences except for
biology, isn't that something? I remember I couldn't go see Marilyn Monroe in *Bus Stop* because the church put it on the banned list. Well I saw it years later ... there was nothing sexual about that movie. I couldn't figure out what the church found so offensive about it. Now combine this with all the rest of the stuff that was happening. Why, I was some kind of mixed up. Mother not talking to me about menstruation, the nuns, the cabbage patch and the dirty ideas ... then the rape.

The rape? I was about nine. On my way to ballet class ... probably why I don't dance to this day. Funny, huh? I'm great at analyzing this stuff. Now why can't I do anything with it? Anyway, mother had determined that I was going to be a little lady. So part of that was to go to ballet classes. I can still remember I had one of those little round cases with a handle that you keep your tutu, tights, and slippers in. Mine was imitation brown alligator. It must have cost my mother a pretty penny but I guess she wanted to impress the neighbors. Well I had to make transfers on the buses to get to class. All the way to downtown south. I got off the bus downtown and walked the two blocks to the building where Miss Peters' ballet classes were held. There was this man, I think he was the janitor, he was standing by the door to the basement. He said I had to come in the building his way because the other door was locked. I did and then I don't remember too well what happened next. It was ugly. I guess I blocked a lot of
what happened out of my mind. They got the guy - brought it to trial. I don’t remember the courtrooms all that well either. You know, though, I can’t understand why they took me into the courtroom for a thing like that, a kid my age. Heck, I’m an adult now and I still don’t understand it.

After the rape, I remember I became kind of withdrawn. I don’t think I would have been that withdrawn had mother talked with me a little about it. Dad says he didn’t find out about the rape until I was 16 and that’s why he didn’t talk with me about it right afterwards. I question that a little bit. I mean, how could Mother keep something like that from him, what with the trial and all? Anyway, I withdrew into my shell and I got ostracized from the other kids in the neighborhood because of it. You knew you get ostracized if you’re different. I was different from the start because I went to Catholic school. Withdrawing after the rape didn’t help the situation any. I didn’t play much with the other kids much after that. I preferred to read. I learned how to crochet soon after, probably when I was about ten years old.

This rape stuff, heck, I was raped again when I was in high school. It’s interesting because Mother was involved both times, indirectly. The second time, I was working as a cashier in a drug store at night after school. I guess I was about sixteen. Mother was supposed to pick me up after work one night but she didn’t show. It was ten o’clock and getting later so I decided to walk home. I took this short
cut home and these two dudes came along and started following me. They followed me, alright. They surely did.

This time, I didn't withdraw. I reacted with anger. I threw it up in Mother's face. Then I threw it in Daddy's face. That's when he told me he didn't know about the other one. Well, Mother just reacted to my rage with silence. Oh, she was a great one for silences. She could never discuss anything she couldn't quite handle. She reacted with total indifference, like I was a piece of wood in the corner or something.

Things got kind of rocky with Jack at that time too. You know he would play with me and my privates. I hadn't told you about that. You have to remember through all this that I was just a kid, learning about life and all. Well Jack started making advances when I was about four or five years old. He was about seven, I guess. We were both going to parochial school. I had a room downstairs, next to Mom and Dad's. Really all I had was a cot but I called it my own. My two brothers were upstairs, they had maple beds. Jack would get me to go up there with him and he'd fool around with me. One time, I remember Jack saying that he had gone to confession and the priest told him that what we were doing was wrong. But see, it wasn't really. We were just seeking each other out ... touching and exploring each other. You know, the relationship with my brother continued until I was in my late teens. Jack went into the navy. We were close, still are in a way.
The first time I ran away I was only 15. I had this whole plan. It was pitiful. The night before, I packed two suitcases and hid them under my bed, right? A big one and a small one. Then, in the morning, I waited for Mother to take a shower. I ran into the room and got the car keys, ran out and opened the trunk of the car, put my two suitcases in, and then ran and put the keys back. I had to be pretty quick, you see. Well, Mom took me with her to the chiropractor for her treatment. Afterwards we went shopping for new shoes. We were down in the bargain basement of this department store and somehow, when she wasn't looking, I reached into the purse and grabbed the car keys. I told her I had to go to the bathroom. But I just took off. You know, I lit out for the car in the parking lot. I backed the car out. Hey, you gotta remember now I didn't get my driver's license until I was 18 and here I am 15, right? My ability to drive then was strictly from watching my parents. I got into rush hour traffic in downtown Atlanta. Imagine! How I avoided an accident was a miracle. I remember getting panicky when I started approaching this cop, a traffic cop. I made it though. You see I got by him and went to the parking lot at the bus station. Now I had made arrangements with the bus station before this. Paid them in advance to store the car there overnight. I dropped a note in the mailbox, okay? The note told my folks that the car was at the station. Anyway, I went in to the station and bought a ticket to Dallas. Just like that – a ticket to Dallas. It
was 25 dollars. I remember because I started figuring my finances. I went into the ladies room. In the bus station, they had like a little pay toilet thing. Like not just stalls, but they had a mirror and everything in there. Well I hid in there for a long time. It was getting close to the time for my bus. I had already checked my two bags, you know? Anyway, I decided I was getting pretty tired of sitting in that stall. I was bored. So I started heading toward the lounge area. Just as I came around the corner, I saw the nurse from the chiropractor's office heading for me. I didn't quite get back into the stall in time. You talk about mortification. Having to go back and cash my ticket in, pick up my luggage, and tell them where the car was. Mortified. Yessir, I was mortified.

When I was 16, I did it a little bit better. There was this guy at the drugstore where I worked. Can't remember his name. Think it begins with a B but can't be sure. Memory is funny stuff, huh? I haven't thought about this for a long time. Anyway, this guy came over to my house one day to see me and I told him I was fixing to run away. He said he'd help me. He drove me in his car over to the next town and dropped me off. I went hunting for an apartment. Found one, too. I believe it was $12.50 a week, or $12.00 a week, something like that. Pretty cheap when you think about it. There was this sweet little old lady with her old converted house. Paid her in advance. You see I'd been saving from my wages at the drugstore. Well that same day,
I also found another job as a cashier in a restaurant near where I was going to live. I was to start the following Monday. On the Friday or Saturday right before that, I moved out of my parents' house. Big deal, huh? What's his name came over to help me, he brought his car again. I loaded up all my stuff and he dropped me at my new apartment. I was set as far as I was concerned. I didn't need nobody.

Out of consideration, I called Mother and Dad to let them know I was fine and that I wanted to be on my own. I said I got a job and a place to stay. And Dad lied to me. He asked me to meet him somewhere just to talk. I didn't trust him. So I told him to meet me at St. Mary's Church downtown. Well I was late because the buses weren't running right. Dad wasn't there when I got there so I wandered around a piece. Ended up in a soda shop. Listen, did you ever have anyone judge you for the way things lock rather than the way they are? This soda shop was about the only thing open in the city on Sunday. Blue laws, right? It was crowded because of that and there was only one place to sit. All the counters were full, the counters and everywhere. This lady asked me if I minded sharing a booth with another customer. Happened to be a guy. I remembered what I ordered, a grilled cheese and a coke. Afterward I was going to go to high mass which would have been around 11 o'clock. Anyway, I was just ready to ask the waitress for two slices of tomato on my grilled cheese when in walks my dad. He
comes over and looks at the other guy sharing the booth with me and asks who he was. How the heck did I know? Immediate assumption, right? Dad starts accusing me of being a whore. He tells the guy in the booth that it's his daughter the guy's whoring with. Dad's yelling all this right in the middle of the soda shop ... and it's crowded as all heck. That really blew me. You can't imagine. I mean I hadn't been doing anything and here he is calling me a whore. Well I stood up finally and screamed back at him. I told him if he's going to accuse me of screwing around, then I might as well start doing it. Then I stormed out and Dad stormed out, I can't really remember. I just know I was mad.

I think I called home shortly after that. Dad was very apologetic and he said he was coming over to talk. He came over, alright, and he threatened to call the police unless I put my things in the car. I really didn't have much of a choice if you want to know the truth of it. Dad was the kind of a person that you either did what he said to do, or you were going to pay hell. I remember once when I was about 13 I was having menstrual cramps and I didn't feel like going to mass. But with Dad, I mean you went to church even if you were halfway on your deathbed. We lived in this beautiful house then. I can't say that it wasn't. But we didn't have anything else that went with it. I'd much rather have a smaller house that had a lot of love and warmth than a big house that was empty and cold like ours was. I mean at that time we were living beyond what Dad was
making. Sure, Dad hit the recession of '58 but so did a lot of other people. He could have gotten out from under the burden of that house instead of trying to live on his pride. Strange, huh? Anyway, we had this walk-in closet and when I refused to go to mass on account of my cramps and all, Dad tried to bodily throw me in that closet. He broke my toe in the process, stepped on the damn thing. He made me get dressed anyway. Made me put socks and shoes over my bloody foot and I had to walk out to the car, walk up all those steps to the church and come home afterwards. It hurt, alright, but in my family you didn't complain. Pain was something that was in the mind. You were expected to conquer it. I guess that's why Dad never thought there was anything wrong with me in the first place. You know, 'Cramps don't exist so get ready for mass!' I couldn't win.

One time, when I was 12, I had a pick-axe fall on my foot. Same foot as the one Dad stepped on a year later. I was playing when I wasn't supposed to be playing. I was made to feel guilty about that too. There was a kid up the street. The kid's mother was considered by my parents to be of questionable morals. I guess it was because she had several boyfriends. She was divorced and my parents didn't go for the boyfriends or the divorced part of it. Anyway, this lady's daughter and I are out playing. There was this narrow passageway between the house and the toolshed. There was a pick-axe propped up against the wall of the shed. I guess I was chasing this girlfriend, just clowning around,
and she went tearing past the shed and through the passageway and then I came through right after her. I guess the axe dislodged and it fell right through the center of my foot. It went almost all the way through. You should have seen the blood. Scared the living daylights cut of me. You'll laugh but with all the blood and all, my immediate reaction was, 'Oh, no, now I'll have to tell my parents where I've been.' You know, playing with the whore divorcee's daughter. Amazing quilt. So we tried to tape it up and everything but the blood just wouldn't stop. I wrapped the foot and went home.

Now remember that Mom and Dad didn't accept illness, didn't accept infirmity. You were supposed to conquer that. So the foot was never examined the way it should have been. You know, the ax hit the foot with such force that it fractured some of the bones. After awhile, a knob-like calcium deposit the size of a walnut started to grow from the first joint of my big toe. I had to have a special shoe. Why sometimes, I'd just cut a certain portion out of a regular shoe and put that on. I started to limp and that didn't help my self confidence any. I had to wait until I was 21 years old until I had my first operation on it. My parents wouldn't do anything for it. They told me it was my crutch to bear ... or my cross to bear, whatever.

The doctor I finally did go to years later told me that there'd be a fifty-fifty chance I'd still walk with a limp after the operation. He tried to show me how to fill out
the forms for lifetime disability payments. I told in not very polite and lady-like terms what he could do with his disability and where he could put it. I'd be damned if I was going to limp around the rest of my life. I don't limp now. Know why? I walk on the side of my foot, that's why. You've seen me walk. I don't limp, right? Let me show you my secret. See I put two tacks on the sole of my shoe and it makes up for the fact that I really walk on the side of my foot. I sound like I have tap shoes on all the time but, heck, it works. Least I don't limp near as much as I would without those tacks.

Another time when I got hurt when I was a kid was when I was in a scuffle with my younger brother, Franky. I'm trying to think how old I was but I can't recall exactly. A teenager most likely. Franky was trying to cop a feel from me. I do remember that. Again, we were where we weren't supposed to be: in Mother's off-white living room. A cream-colored sofa, cream-colored carpet, the whole bit. We were watching the TV, okay? Why is it that when these things happen I'm always in the wrong place? Have you noticed this? I swear. Anyway, I wouldn't let Franky cop a feel. He had this scout knife - not a switchblade or anything like that - and he started jabbing at me with the thing. I think he was just clowning. I kept telling him to quit or I was going to slap him. I put up my hand and just as I did, he came up with the knife and jabbed it into my hand. You can still see the scar. Well, it gushed blood.
My blood, it gushes when it comes out. Mother was out in the kitchen. I ran out to her with my hand bleeding like crazy. You know what she said? She said, now these are the first words out of her mouth, 'Did you bleed all over my carpet? Did you go and bleed all over my cream-colored carpet?' Can you believe that? She held my hand under the cold water in the sink. I'd lost a lot of blood. I was about to pass out. I mean the blood was just flowing all over the place. Heck, the sight of blood used to make me ill. Real sick. It did for a long time ... hmmm. Are you thinking what I'm thinking? The sight of blood and the menstrual problems I had. Well, that's a link right there. True enough.

I was twenty-one when I finally left home for good. I got my own apartment in town. It was about six months before I got married. Now remember I'd taken off for three months when I was eighteen. Run to Nashville when Jack went in the navy. I thought I'd lost my whole family when Jack went in the navy. Anyway, at twenty-one, I just felt I was old enough to be out on my own and that was that. I figured my parents couldn't stop me then. They couldn't do a damn thing. That makes ... what, four tries at running off from the time I was fifteen till I was twenty-one? I probably would have tried more if I had the guts.
I didn't graduate high school because I dropped out in December of my junior year. I had a serious kidney problem. It was chronic kidney failure and I was quite sick with it. You should have seen me. I was like a blowfish. My face was all swollen and red, swollen all the way to the back. Well, I couldn't concentrate on what I was doing in school. I just went to work, drugstores mostly. That's how I wandered into cosmetics. Did I ever tell you about the lady that I met when I was thirteen? See, I was the ugly duckling in the family because of this nose. It's like when I introduce myself to people I wisecrack about it. It's more self-defense than anything else, saying this resemblance to Streisand is surely incidental because, believe me, if I had a voice like hers, I'd have the money too. In a way, I do have a voice like hers, you know the quick Yiddish stuff and all. But I was so, so self-conscious. Here I was thirteen years old and being called Jayne Mansfield. I had a big chest too. Big chest and a big nose to go with it. Looked very Jewish but wasn't of course. I don't have anything against the Jewish people, mind you. Anyway, this lady came into the drug store I worked for. She was some kind of representative from Beautiglo Cosmetics. She made me feel like something very special. First time in my life that I ever had that feeling. She said that I had beautiful skin and that I should use such and such a lotion on it. You know, she was probably just trying to make a sale but she was very good at it and very kind. And she said that if I
took care of my skin and everything, I'd be a very pretty girl. Now look, you tell this to an ugly duckling and you sure have them hooked. I swallowed it hook, line, and stinker [nc typo]. So it was after that that I wound up in cosmetics - scrt of accidentally.

When I was around 21 and on my own, I became a Beautiqlo representative at Daltons. Daltons had opened up one of their new stores and they were trying a new concept. It wasn't just the old Daltons catalog. They were becoming real fashionable. It was a different approach to merchandising and they were using window displays and all. They had these exclusive-locking little stores within the big store. They never had those before. I got in to one of the new stores in a ritzy suburb of Atlanta. Boy, I was an ambitious person then. I had frosted streaks in my hair and walked around with an attache case - big businesswoman. All my evening hours were taken up trying to sell to other women outside the store. I offered my services to different functions to try and sell or get my name around. That's how I met my husband, Bill.

Gosh, I must've been 22 by that time. Bill became the father I never really had. He'd buy me things and treated me like a tender little kitten. I wasn't used to that. Truth of it is that I wasn't used to having someone be tender with me. I liked it. I enjoyed it. I mean the guys I'd gone out with were always rough. Oh, I could really pick them. They expected that if they took you out for an
evening, you knew you just had to put out and that was that.

Bill was a gentleman. I mean the first night we met he was a typical pushy chauvinistic bastard. And he apologized for that afterwards. Well we were in this place, it was a pretty good sized place - a motel and bar - and there was a combo playing music. Tiny little tables, you know? So this girl that I was trying to talk into becoming a representative for the cosmetic company and I were sitting at a table. I got up to go to the bathroom or something. When I got back, two guys were sitting at our table. One guy was talking with that girlfriend and the other was just sitting there. That was Bill. Well, Bill was just as bored, disgusted, and uninterested in me as I was in him. The situation was thrust upon us, you know? Bill was a widower and his friend was trying to show him a good time. You know how it goes. Anyway, this other guy kept drinking and drinking and all he could talk about was Lemon Drop. Lemon Drop was a girl he just met. Lemon Drop this and Lemon Drop that. On and on. So later we walk out to the cars. They were going to give me a ride home. Well we were going to stop at Bill's apartment first and they decided that we're all having one more drink.

You know, I shouldn't go to the bathroom. I think I went to the bathroom before I even sat down in his apartment. That night, they waited till I went to the bathroom to pull something. When I came out of the bathroom at Bill's apartment, my girlfriend and the other guy had
left. Bill made his play for me and I got very indignant and made him call me a taxi. I think I walked out of his apartment or something and he called me back and called me a taxi. Later the next day, Bill called me and apologized and wanted to make amends. We met at a bar which was like home territory for me because I knew everybody in there. I used to hang out there a lot because I felt safe and protected. I mean from the bartender on down, they'd adopted me. I was the youngest one that ever went in there. See it was a piano bar and piano bars are notorious with the thirty to fifty set. Here I am, twenty-one. You know it must have looked kind of strange. I became the baby of the Surrey Lounge. Well, to make a long story short, Bill and I started dating after that meeting in the Surrey Lounge. I soon fell in love with his son, Daniel. Daniel was six years old at that time. Six years old, two front teeth missing, and spoiled rotten. But I fell in love with Daniel before I fell in love with Bill.

Bill and I decided to get married on St. Patrick's Day. I was all of twenty-two years old. I would have loved to see Bill's telephone bill on that day alone. We must have called Detroit, his home town, seven or eight times. I sat on Bill's lap - we were drunk as two skunks. He kept calling up his old buddies, telling them he was going to get married. We laughed, oh boy did we laugh. We fell into bed afterward. That's probably the most successful time we ever made it. Yes, I spent the night. Instead of going home, I
spent the night. And I know for a fact that our son, Jimmy, was conceived at that time because we didn't make it for awhile after that night. See, because I got pregnant, I got an acute attack of my kidney problem. I was in the hospital, matter of fact. Bill and I finally got married on May 15 but I was in the hospital until the first week in May. Oh, it worked itself out but I was very, very sick.

Hey, can I go into a dumb thing I remember from around that time? Idiotic - I mean plain stupid. I can barely piece it together accurately, right? Because my parents were so .... Sex talk was taboo but sex did go on, right? Well, right when I came out of the hospital, in the week or so before I was married, I couldn't take care of myself. I went over to my parents house so they could tend to me. I mean I had to ask someone to hold up my head and give me the water to swallow my pills. Anyway, I slept in the den on a couch right across from Mom and Dad's room. And I couldn't sleep one night. Mom and Dad's bedroom door is closed, it's like two o'clock in the morning, and I'm laying on the couch reading. Now, remember, I'm 22 years old at that time. Dad comes out of his room very angry. Orders me - orders me! - to turn off the light. It just didn't make any sense. But when I thought about it years later, I knew what was really going on. See, Mom and Dad were having sex. Dad did not want me awake. The apartment walls were real thin. Here I was right across from them. And he felt self-conscious. Here I am right out of the hospital and very sick. I'm
sleeping on a lousy scfa and I can't sleep. I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm just lying there reading. And I get told like a little five year old to turn the light out and go to sleep. I didn't know what that was all about at the time. Oh, I was hurt. That's one of the reasons Bill and I decided to get married the next week instead of waiting awhile longer.

How did the marriage start out? Well, let's put it this way. Mother sewed me into my wedding gown and Bill had to take cuticle scissors to get me out of it. I had gained some weight around the waist. Pregnancy will do this to you. The hips expand. So the dress that had been bought a month previously didn't quite fit the same even though I really hadn't gained all that much weight. You know, from the time that Bill cut me out of that dress up until three years later, there was nothing that you could properly call sex between us. I started doubting myself from that time on as a woman.

He was impotent. He just couldn't do anything. Years later he asked me why I didn't kick him in the ass. Like why was I so god damned understanding. Bill's fifteen years older than I am, so that's quite an age jump. Mom and Dad have about eleven years separating them but fifteen years - now there's a difference there. I was pleased about that difference at the time. I didn't know I was marrying a
father image. I found out years later that that's what it was. I was living in a dream world. I was a very sheltered young lady for 22 years old. I mean I knew very little about sex. Where was I going to have a chance to learn? I had no normal experiences. The one time I came close, it didn't work out. I was in high school and Jack, my older brother, was pledging a fraternity at the university he attended. Because Jack was being pledged, the fraternity invited me to a tea. I suppose it's a way to check out the guy's family. So a fraternity brother of Jack's agreed to drive me home, right? Now nothing happened between the two of us. I told him some of my thoughts about the world as we drove to my house. He kept explaining how socialistic he thought I was. God! He had to be kidding. I was a little girl. In more ways than one, you know. Shit. But he drives up into our driveway. And there's Dad standing there holding a .22 rifle. That does tend to discourage a guy from asking a girl out on another date. My dad, the .22 rifle toter.

In the beginning of my marriage to Bill, I thought his impotence was from his still mourning over his dead wife. It was painful for me. He's the only man - now this is getting personal - but he's the only man I have ever known who could fall asleep in the middle of me trying to arouse him. That's how much interested he was in our sex life. It's a pretty good destroyer of the ego. I mean I was carrying my first child and was just coming out of the
latest bout with my kidneys. It was hard. And my mother and the doctor were trying to talk me into an abortion to top it all off. Can you imagine? When I was in the hospital right before I got married, they actually gave me medication to try and abort. Mother admits this to me years later. Boy! You know that she does not even know the ages or birthdays of my children?

Oh, my kids hate her. I can't blame them any. She's not a grandmother. She's my mother and that's all. She didn't want me to have Jimmy. Two or three years after I gave birth to Jimmy, Mother told me what a bad mistake I had made in my marriage. She just lost her temper once and blurted it out. You know that made me more determined to make my marriage work. Hey, I had more than grounds to divorce Bill. I was a Catholic girl. I was going to make that marriage work... I guess I felt like Bill's savior, which is a pretty stupid reason to go into a marriage. I did help him some. Yes, I did help him. My parents weren't what you would call real interfering types but, lord gsd, the very rare family dinners we did have were always very strained. Everybody tried so hard. Well, you know me. I'm not really the diplomatic type. I'm going to say what's on my mind. I don't like the dishonesty when people are trying so hard to be polite. Dishonesty. That's what those dinners were all about. Everyone tangled with niceties. It was so phoney. Oh, but the undercurrent were marvelous. Every once in a while, Dad would slip a personal
dig in the conversation. It would slide right past Bill with his inebriated scotch-scaled brain. I'd catch it alright. I didn't miss a trick. Dad and I were too much alike. I can have a very, very sharp tongue. I can talk quickly and use words that someone doesn't know and cut the hell out of him and really enjoy it. I get the satisfaction of knowing I can do it. Dad could cut you down in a heartbeat. Dinner time at our house, for all the time I lived there, was the survival of the fastest and sharpest tongue. A constant picking session, you know? And if you just sat there and took it you would get it ten times worse. You had to fight back. So you ended up with a sharp tongue. It's like a joke I tell. It's about when I was born. About my nose. Well, my nose isn't that big but, when I was born, the doctor used it to pull me out. When he sharpened his pencil to write on my chart, what he actually did was sharpen my tongue. What can I do? I'm stuck. It's too true. Anyway, there was a big gap between my family and my marriage right from jump street.

Bill and I didn't have a honeymoon because no one would take Daniel, his six year old. I mean my parents would not even think of it. They'd sooner babysit a python. So we had one night together at a fancy hotel. It was nice, the room and all. You know I had all these fantasies about my wedding night. About what was supposed to happen. Bill fell asleep. How could you call that anything but disappointing? I think that was the beginning of my
insomnia. It continued for many years.

Right after our honeymoon of one night, we were over at my parents' house. And Dad takes Bill out on the porch. Are you ready for this? Dad says to Bill that I might be a Russell but to him I'd always be a Sanger. Sanger, that's my maiden name. What big philosophical thing is that supposed to mean? 'She changed her name but she's still ours.' Virtually told Bill that he wasn't accepting him as family. Well, it wasn't giving the marriage much of a chance. Bill was marrying me to give Daniel a mother. And doing the noble thing because I was pregnant. I had already decided that if I hadn't been pregnant, I wasn't going to marry Bill.

I don't think Dad said those things to Bill because he didn't want to let me qc. I think Dad wanted to choose my husband himself. My parents had chosen someone for me when I was in my teens. They were grooming me for him. He was a very wealthy man. I did have a crush on the guy when I was thirteen. I wrote him what you call a mash note. It said I was madly in love with him. Oh, god. I can't believe it now. But because my parents wanted to force the situation, it turned me against the guy. Probably didn't qc with him just to spite my parents. I don't know.

Bill was an alcoholic. And from the day we married he went from being a sociable drinker to two bottles a day. Bill could hold liquor like you would not believe. He could be skunk drunk after two bottles but he'd be bright-eyed and
bushy-tailed the next morning. I never understood that. I'd never met anyone that could do that. I told him that he must have two wooden legs to do that. Had to.

So, there I am a wife all of a sudden. And a mother with Daniel and another on the way. Money got to be a problem with Bill's drinking. I think I resented that most. Sometimes I'd really get into a jam. The bartenders all got to a point where they all knew me and would call me to come get Bill and to pay his bar bill. I'd take money out of Bill's pockets and stash it. You know, he'd be drunk and I'd empty his pockets. I had to because he'd run up his bar bills and it would be way over what I had in my household account. Bill would write checks and, when he was drunk, he wouldn't enter them into the book. We never knew how much was in there. And you'd write one check after another and they'd all bounce. So I'd have to keep a reserve of cash. I had a beautiful antique sugar bowl that I kept on the breakfront. I'd keep my cash in that sugar bowl. A bartender would call, I'd grab some cash and then I'd call Mother and ask her to please come over to babysit while I went for Bill. I'd always have to listen to her damn lecture about my awful marriage. Now you'd figure the bars are strictly male territory and I'd roll into one to get Bill. Something, huh? One, I'm a woman walking in. Two, I'm a pregnant one at that. Three, I'm a wife who's come to rescue her husband because the bartender called me. But see, I can't let on that the bartender's called. I'd have
to come in like I'd been searching all over for my drunken husband and this is where I'd finally found him. It'd put the bartender in a bad spot otherwise. And I would pay cash. They would slide the tab across the bar and I would put money on it. A tip, too. Now, Bill weighed about 200 pounds but he's only five-foot ten. Just try to get a man that size cut to a car. Dead drunk, he'd be. I mean I was a spunky little thing at that age. I'd get back home and pour him into bed and then have to listen to Mother's lecture one more time. Nope, it wasn't easy. I think that's why I went into labor six weeks early.

When I went into labor with Jimmy, I remember waking up in the middle of the night. Bill had me real tense all the time so I was taking tranquilizers. Back then, they didn't know so much about drugs and pregnancy. Remember thalidomide babies? Well, I was cn seconals pretty heavy while I was pregnant with Jimmy. Anyway, I woke up when the first pain hit. It wasn't too bad. I punched Bill anyway to wake him up. Didn't wake him. Had to punch him three times and the third one was a pretty good shot. By that time I was screaming, 'I'm in labor!' First darn thing out of his inebriated head was, 'Do you want more covers?' I said, 'What the hell does that have to do with anything? Should I tell your scrn to wait?' See I already knew it was going to be a boy. Don't ask me how or why, I just knew. I
picked Jimmy's name out six years before he was born. But I was in labor seventeen hours and had only dilated two fingers - what they call two centimeters. It was either all the tension that was interfering with my labor or some kind of damage inside me. I'd been warned not to have children. They finally had to induce labor.

Now imagine all this ten or fifteen years ago. A lot's changed since then. Try to picture me as the pristine girl I was raised to be. Nothing was explained to me by the doctor. They didn't tell me what it would feel like when my water broke. Well, the sensation just before your water breaks feels like you have to go the bathroom like nothing else. So here I am in the labor room pleading with them very politely to please let me get up and go to the ladies room and that I'd be right back. They said, 'Merey, that's alright. You just go ahead and let it go.' Now if they'd only told me my water was breaking, it probably would have eased my mind a bit. But I wouldn't think of going in my bed in front of everybody. So I tightened up and held on. They finally broke my water for me. I was mortified.

Afterward, I wanted people to say all those sentimental things to me. About how good I'd been. I mean I'd gone through hell. The doctor said I would have been in labor another twenty-four hours if they hadn't induced it. Seventeen hours is plenty long. But Bill's first comment was, 'Look at that ugly mutt!' He was talking about the baby. I could have killed him. It made me feel bad though.
Mom and Dad bulldozed their way into the hospital. You know at that time only the father was allowed in immediately after delivery. I had just been brought up from the recovery room and was still very groggy. And there Mom and Dad were. And Dad was crying. First time I ever saw my Dad cry. Why was he crying? Oh, I don't know. Loss of my chance for leaving Bill. Loss of innocence. Loss of whatever. I don't know.

Bill kept on drinking over the next few years. I felt like I was trapped. See, Bill and I had a pre-marital arrangement. I told him that I just wasn't the homebody type. I said I'd stay home with the kids for awhile. You know, a good little Catholic girl. I originally wanted six children. I'd always dreamed of having my own little dynasty. And being proud to be the first one in the family to bring in grandchildren. They were largely ignored by my parents so that hurt. Anyway, I told Bill that eventually I was going to work. I had a mind and not just a body. I couldn't stand that phrase, 'Oh, you're just a housewife.' I mean that was enough to set me on edge and make me want to strangle somebody. I told you once that I was a women's libber before women's lib ever came into being. Long before it became a popular cause, you know? Because I just couldn't go for staying at home.

Jimmy was nine months old when I took a part-time job. I started working again. It soon blossomed into a full-time job. I became manager of a cosmetic department in a store.
I found a babysitter, a very good one at that. I shopped for many, many months before I found someone who I thought was good enough. And she took both Daniel and Jimmy in her home. I'd drop them off there before work. It worked out pretty good. Bill worked too but he would help cut with the household duties. This is before it became fashionable for the husband to do the cooking or the wash or to go to the market for his wife. Like playing househusband. There were a lot of times when I had to work weekends. Bill would help out some but not an awful lot. Things would begin to pile up - like laundry. Boy, I exhausted myself. But, you know, I enjoy working.

Oh, hey, I was also the fixer in our household. I'm a jack-of-all-trades. I'd do what are called the male duties: fixing the car, mechanical stuff. Bill wasn't any good at those type of things at all. Like, one of the girls here was clowning around the other day. I was braiding her hair. She said, 'You can braid hair?' Said it with a sense of sarcastic wonder, you know? She said, 'Goddamit, isn't there anything you can't do? You take a typewriter apart and fix that. Did the same with our radio. God knows, if the air conditioner fell apart, you'd probably fix that too!' And I looked at her like why is she resenting all this? What exactly is the problem? I wonder now if Bill didn't resent my mechanical abilities too. But I'm the type that does something if it needs to be done. If there is a ditch to be dug, I'll get a shovel and dig it. Simple as
Anyway, like I said, Bill kept on drinking. On the nights when he wouldn't go to bars, he'd be home around seven o'clock. The kids would have been fed by that time and I'd try to keep something warm for him. He might or might not eat. Now I'm giving you a typical evening here. Then he would sit. We had these large cherrywood cabinets with a built-in stereo system. There was a place to store records underneath. Bill would lay out on the carpet across from the dining room table. He'd prop himself up so he could drink from his bottle. He'd play this one Frank Sinatra record over and over. Just over and over. He'd keep playing Sinatra's "Softly As I Leave You." If you're familiar with the words, you know it's a real heartbreaker. If you ask me, the song was telling me that Bill was thinking of his dead wife again. So I heard this over and over. About the sixtieth or eightieth or one hundredth time, I got real mad. I took the damn Sinatra record and snapped it. Bill just looked at me. He wouldn't argue. I don't remember if we replaced the record or not. I think we might have.

You know the only time that Bill would argue was when he'd be beyond his drunk. Like when we moved to Detroit after his bankruptcy. We just packed up and moved to Detroit. It was in 1969 and the bankruptcy was the year
before. I was about twenty-three years old. I lost everything in the bankruptcy. I really did. It nearly destroyed me but I wouldn't let it. I was a strong person. I think if my parents hadn't opposed my marriage, my life would have crumbled then. But it set me up to fight them, to prove them wrong. It's like the laws of cause and effect.

We had to go to court for the bankruptcy. I went into court and sat on the witness stand. I had my first taste of how vicious lawyers can be. Our landlord had loaned us several appliances for our house. I was on the witness stand and I was trying to explain to the lawyer that these appliances were not ours. But he keeps railing me. I was pretty upset. I guess he thought I was putting him on. I wasn't though. I had already vomitted in the ladies room before I testified so you can see I was upset to begin with. The whole thing was lovely. I left the kids at Mother's. Heard her lecture again about my marriage. Brother! It wasn't my fault. I had no way of knowing how much Bill owed to who. And the lawyer coming at me like I was setting him up with some type of fraud. It scared me like you would not believe. I was trembling. I looked at the judge and he could tell by my face that I had to go to the ladies room. I vomitted again - sick as a dog. Well, the judge finally let us keep $1600.00 as a personal exemption from bankruptcy liquidation. That basically covered - are you ready for this? - it covered all our clothing. That's it. Just our
clothes. I had snuck my sewing machine over to Mother's so they missed that on the inventory. I got my good end tables and the drop-leaf table out and we put some cheap pieces back in. Yeah, maybe it was fraud to do that but what the hell. Those were all my things they were taking. I saved a long time for that stuff. It hurt when they took it. We ended up leaving because we still had enough cash for plane tickets. I told Bill that I wanted to get out of there before the sheriff came and all our stuff was put out on the street.

So we moved to Detroit. Where else? It was Bill's hometown. Bill was a change of life baby so his parents were considerably older than you'd expect — well into their seventies. They lived in one of these retirement apartment buildings in Detroit. They agreed to take Daniel. Bill and I had to scout around and find a place. We found an old hotel, run-down but okay. We had to beg to let them take us because we had a baby. Jimmy was just over a year at the time. We arranged to get a temporary crib. I washed all our clothes in the bathtub. I used the windowsill to dry them. It was cold in Detroit in March. I stole food from the grocery store. It always bothered me. I don't know why. The man in the store was so nice. He was so sweet. But I stole groceries to feed the family.

Bill stayed pretty sober for awhile after the bankruptcy. Believe it or not. He went out on job interviews too. I got his parents to watch the kids and I
used the telephone to scout out possibilities for myself. I got a job with the Claire Clarke Company. I borrowed my father-in-law's car to go into Detroit. I was twenty-three. Pretty bold, I'd say. See, I'd planned out how I was going to get a job. I knew my most familiar field was cosmetics. Naturally, I'd follow this up then. The product line of Beautiglo suited me more but Claire Clarke had a plant and office nearby. So I went in to the city and timed it just right. I waited for the secretary to leave. The guy I wanted to see was like the manager for the Detroit office. I had a resume all set up. It was fudged, of course. Had to be. It said I was a college graduate. I knew I couldn't get a good job without a degree. I went to a thrift shop and put together an outfit. You know, prepared for it. So I bullshit my way in. I tap on his door and say hello. He looks up from his desk. I said something to the effect, 'You know you really want to hire me.' I mean I was bold as hell. I then proceeded to give him my recommendations and resume. Knock his socks off, you know? He gives me his business card. I go out to the car and look at the card and find this guy was an executive vice-president! I could have choked right then and there. Now if I had known that before there was no way I could have bluffed my way in. Too nervous. Anyway, the guy said he was going to get in touch with me but I just figured he was being nice. I figured no way he'd call. But he calls and I got the job. I had to go out to California for six weeks of training. Bill took over
taking care of the kids. He started drinking again after that.

I had to hock a gold charm bracelet that was Bill's first wife's to buy a train ticket. Claire Clarke is such a bitch of a company that they didn't pay for your return trip. They paid to get out there but not to get back. I had to hock the bracelet to get back to Detroit. It was $75.00 for the train and $111.00 to fly back in tourist class. I could just make the $75.00. I made it back though. Bill found a job with Texas Beefburger as an assistant regional advertisement manager. He eventually worked his way up to regional manager. Things went pretty well for awhile.

Our sex life didn't change much. I froze up though. I became very frigid. Over time, it's a little difficult to get aroused and then not do anything about it - just lay there night after night. That will tear your nerves completely apart. So I just withdrew completely because I knew that nothing would happen anyway. You knew he went from impotence from his drinking to premature ejaculation. His drinking had really messed him up. I still feel that it was a mental thing. Psychological. I think that he thought he was cheating on his dead wife when he was with me. What can you do?
I remember the time I cracked a vase over his head. He came in one night very drunk. He was drunker than he'd been in a long time. He tried to strangle me. He was screaming, 'You think you're God, don't you? You know everything, don't you? He was screaming it at me. See, the neighbors made it difficult for him. I wasn't Suzy Homemaker. All the rest of the ladies were content to sit home and be little happy housekeepers. Here I was, out there doing things the other husbands were doing: cutting the grass, trimming the hedge, or painting the fence. I was both mommy and daddy. I like to learn how to fix everything and Bill never tried. But it must have gotten to him, what with the comments from the neighbors and all. Like for Christmas, they gave me a five-piece tool set and Bill an electric frying pan.

Bill wouldn't try anything. The simplest effort was too much. If the car wouldn't start in the morning, he'd call the gas station. He wouldn't even bother to look under the hood. I would though. I mean how could the neighbors not notice all of this? I'm out there with my damn coveralls on and pulling out the spark plugs from the car. And most of the time I would drive Bill around rather than him driving himself. I didn't trust him with the car. Something, huh?

Anyway, back to the vase. When he started yelling at me, I picked up my beautiful cream-colored vase with apricot roses and I cracked it over his head. It wasn't high priced
or anything but it was my favorite vase. And the flowers were arranged so pretty in it. They just picked up all the colors in the room. I never replaced the vase either.

Bill? Oh, he was okay. Nothing serious.

The money situation was still pretty tight in Detroit and staying that way. I lost my job at one point because I missed an important meeting down in Denver. I had sprained my ankle at the last minute and wasn't able to prepare for the meeting. Bill was becoming more and more unreliable about picking up the kids when I'd be away on business. The tension and the money got bad. Bill would take the damn bills out of the mailbox that I had put in to pay what we owed. He'd take them out so he could write another check over them and go boozing it up at lunch. Oh, I had a terrific marriage. When I lost my job, that was tough. If Bill had been more supportive, I'd have fought for my job. But it was a time when part of my attitude was just fuck-it-all. I was tired of fighting too many worlds at the same time. And that's what it always amounted to.

Around 1970, I guess I was around 26 years old, I had my first affair. I got to the point where I told Bill that we had to do something in our marriage. Either go to a marriage counselor or Catholic Services or something. He said no. I told him I wanted a divorce then. No divorce - Catholic, you understand. I said that I didn't care about the church. I wanted out. I had had enough. He wouldn't agree to anything. I was so naive to believe that, for the
sanctity of the home, the woman doesn't get the divorce. She doesn't pursue it. The husband has to divorce the wife or not contest the wife's action. Well, he wouldn't do any of that so I was stuck. So we had an arrangement. I would go out when I felt like going out. I think it was one night a week. He would say nothing if I decided to have an affair. An open marriage type situation.

Lucky me, right? First crack off the hat I get pregnant. March 6, 1971 - I remember it well. There were these two salesmen and the big boss that I was working for. It was at the furniture shows at an indoor stadium type of thing. Pretty big layout. I was working it in order to get some money since Bill had lost his job over Christmas. Bill was staying at home. Anyway, our booth was set up at the show and I was working it. It was the last night of the show. I don't know what possessed me. I guess I was bored. I guess I was tired. I guess I was disgusted. I mean you go so many years in a marriage like I had and you begin to doubt yourself. I felt not very much like a woman. But two of the guys ask me to dinner. What the hell, right? So I called Bill from the booth at the show and told him that I would be late - that I was going to stay downtown for supper. He cried over the telephone. It made me feel like two inches tall. He'd agreed to our marital relationship but didn't think I'd go through with it. Actually, at that point I hadn't planned on doing anything.
We ate dinner. Now my dad had taught me how to play gin rummy and I was a very good player. The guys wanted to play some cards after dinner. I figured I could take my little piddly wages and boost them up some. So, being very naive, I was lured into their motel room and we sat down and played cards. I lost every red cent. One of the guys said that if I were to go to bed with him, I could have all of his money he'd won. So I did. You know, I didn't even know what head was then. Something, huh? I'm getting gross now. But I asked the guy what in hell he thought he was doing. I felt dirty and used afterwards. I got pregnant from that night. I guess women get very prolific or ripe or something. Whatever it was, I got pregnant. And I had an abortion in May of that year. The guy had to sign papers to let me. I never forget that.

Bill would still not give me a divorce. He was nothing but a damn kid. Still is. He'll never change. He's like a three year old child. I begged and begged for a divorce. I had gained some weight. Bill lost his job at Texas Beefburger. He was drunk at a big regional meeting. That should have been the death bell right there. We moved into a smaller apartment. Bill got a job soon after working in the ad department of a local newspaper. He came home one day and said a lady at work told him about a new restaurant opening up. Now, our county was dry at the time but this
new place was going to have a bar in the back so people could drink. This lady told Bill I might be able to get a job there. You could start out as a waitress and work your way up to hostess or barmaid. It would be good money according to this lady. I talked to her and said I'd never done anything like that. She said it didn't matter. She said for me to look sharp and talk to the owner. He was Latin-American and the place was going to be a Spanish-style place. So I went in and got a job. The owner wanted me to start right then and there. I had this blue and white skirt on that I'd bought some time before. It was really very nice. And I had this blue silk blouse on but it had been torn several times. I'd patched it up but you could tell it was patched if I took my coat off. I couldn't take my jacket off. He wanted me to be his cashier and stand behind the counter and look casual. Told me to take my coat off. I did but I had to keep my back to the wall because the back of my blouse was ripped. I kept hucking up to the wall. It was funny but I thought that the first paycheck I would get that I would rip the damn blouse to shreds. I never did though. I saved it.

So I went to work at this Spanish restaurant and bar. The owner's name was Jorge and I think he was Castillian. He was originally from Europe but his parents moved to South America when he was a child. The cooks were all Latin American and Jorge wanted to Americanize it some so he hired American girls as waitresses. I worked my way up to a
waitress in the dining room. I was the only waitress allowed to work in the main room. Jorge had only waiters there. The waitresses worked the back rooms. I changed my outfit. I customized my uniform. I had a black vest and a frilly white blouse. I looked like a bucaneeer. Very distinctive, you know? Had jewelry and everything else. And I started to lose some weight. I hadn't gotten down as far as I wanted to yet. I was trying though. Jorge offered to give me a ride home one night. We got very passionate in the car. I was very surprised at my response. I just didn't want to stop. We didn't make it all the way in the car - just kissing and touching. I had thought that I was dead inside. I found out then that the sex problems Bill and I had was more his fault than mine. I found out then that I was a very sensual person.

I still hadn't arrived at the complete me at that time. You know, the complete woman in me. I found myself becoming what I thought was totally in love with Jorge. I got to the point where I didn't want any other man to touch me. I didn't want to be with anyone else. I asked Bill again for a divorce. He wouldn't give me one. And I became pregnant with Jorge's child and I wanted that child very much. A love child. I felt alive again.

How did Bill feel about all this? Well, he never really voiced anything about the pregnancy but I knew it was in the back of his mind. Here I had had one abortion and later on he did ask me if I was going to have another. I
did consider it but I couldn't do it. My health was good then. It wasn't like the other time when the doctors were talking about renal failure or kidney shutdown. I had no logical, acceptable, justifiable reason to have an abortion. And I didn't want one. I wanted that child. It was a total expression of love. How can I explain it? I went my whole life with nothing and now here I was madly in love and wanting to carry a love child. I felt loved, etc. It was beautiful. There's nothing to describe it.

Jorge wanted me to have an abortion. I wouldn't and we fought. I moved out of my apartment with Bill and to a boarding house down the road. I had a car accident two weeks after I figure my baby was conceived. This woman came in from behind doing sixty-five in a forty-five zone. Traffic was slow so she was really flying. I was crushed up against the steering wheel. It temporarily paralyzed my right arm. I was in bad shape for awhile. I was in a lot of pain. I had to have this sling for my right arm. Matter of fact, on account of my bum right arm at that time, I had to register my left-handed signature at my bank so I could continue to use my account. I eventually lost my job at the restaurant because I was getting pregnant-looking. I tried to find another job but no one would hire a pregnant woman. I couldn't even get state aid. Jorge helped me out with some money in the beginning but that stopped after awhile. I couldn't keep up with the two kids because I couldn't work and couldn't get enough support.
Bill was giving me about $100.00 a month to feed myself. He had the kids because he had stopped drinking. I told him if he started again that I would come and get the kids and start divorce proceedings. I was having a rough time with the pregnancy. I was bleeding regularly. I only got the kids on the weekends so I'd save almost all my food for them when they came. I had no hospitalization and could not get a doctor or hospital to accept me. Detroit is a different world, you understand. It's a hard world, a cold world.

Through Jorge, I met this girl Sally who worked at his bar. Sally used to pop over with food on occasion. She must of guessed what my situation was because when things got real bad, she moved me in with her. She knew some people at the hospital north of Detroit. She told them about my situation and said it was absolutely ridiculous, close to criminal and everything else. You know, that nobody would accept me, pregnant and all. Well I was five months pregnant when I was checked for the first time. I was suffering dehydration and malnutrition. The doctors said that if I hadn't been that far along, they would have suggested that they do a D and C and abort the pregnancy. They thought I would never carry the child through the full term. You know me. I politely told this Korean doctor, 'You may think you know a lot of things but, you bastard, watch me carry this child full term.'
Sally started feeding me better. I went from not looking at all pregnant in the fifth month to out to here in the sixth month. Jorge stood by me but he didn't give me that much in real support. I became a housekeeper for friends of Sally's. Bill started diving into the bottle again so I took the two kids. A cute scene, huh? I'm sick with my pregnancy, have very little money, two kids to provide for and playing housekeeper to make ends meet. I was virtually living off the charity of Sally.

I went into false labor two weeks ahead of time. Jorge ran me up to the hospital. Paulie was in a breech position and that's one of the reasons that they wouldn't induce labor. You know that he was six weeks late? I still have to joke about that. I say I can't seem to get my timing right. He was in a breech position and labor would not start. Then something like lightening happened. Paulie turned in the womb. I was in labor seven hours. The baby had yet to drop down. They sent me up to get x-rays and then told me I was going to have twins. Twins! It was bad enough having a love child but not two! I was in a dead panic by then. Paulie had still not been born. I get back from the hospital and Sally tells me that Bill called. He said he wanted to come over and talk to me alone. I told Sally to take the kids somewhere and to come back. I wanted her to hide in the closet in case Bill was drunk. Well, he was okay as it turned out. He just started crying. He was begging and pleading for the kids to come back. He says he
was lost without the kids. He said without the kids, not without me. He was lost without the kids. That told me right there what our marriage was all about. I should tell you something I learned years later. Bill was a closet queer. I have a feeling that this is why his first wife drank herself to death. But when I was carrying Paulie, I didn't know this.

Finally, I went into real labor. I had taken the kids over to see Bill. It was six o'clock in the evening. Sally and I were planning on going shopping. The shopping center was open to ten o'clock. I didn't tell her until we were in the car that I was in labor. She said that we should go to the hospital. I said no, no. I was already embarrassed that first time in the hospital with the false labor. I wanted to make damn sure that this was the real thing. Now the shopping center was a long one and by the time we had worked our way from one end to the other, the pains were two minutes apart. Me holding on to the counters in the stores and Sally with her watch timing me. She was about to have heart failure. At that point, I let her drive me to the hospital, about a half-hour away. By the time we got there, my contractions were only a minute apart. They stayed that way for five or six hours. They didn't want to give me anything for the pain because that would slow down the labor. They told me to hang on a little bit longer. Finally, the nurse comes in and sees the baby's head crowning. By the time they had wheeled me into the delivery
room, about three screams later, that little bugger was out. It took him six weeks longer to get there but when he decided to come, he just came. They told me it was only one baby and that it was a boy. I felt momentarily disappointed. I was expecting twins and I wanted a girl so bad. Jorge came to the hospital to see his son and then took off. He was in New York last time I had track of him.

I was in the hospital five days. I had a tubal ligation done at the doctor's insistence. He told me that it'd kill me if I ever got pregnant again. You know, that took a part away from me. I remember once in his office, the doctor jicked with me, "Well I took out the baby carriage but the playpen's still intact." He had a sense of humor. I don't know though. I had always wanted a large family. The tubal ended that.

I was home from the hospital a week and I was right back in again. That was the first attack of my gall bladder. It's a constant thing now. At the time, the doctor told me to lay out and take it easy for about three months. He kept me in the hospital about ten days. That's the first time in my life I'd ever done drugs. I didn't rest up like the doctor wanted me to. Two weeks after I got out of the hospital I was working. I did half a hit of speed. I still had milk for the baby, too. The shots and medication in the hospital hadn't dried me up. I looked
like Daisy Mae. I had swollen to a 46D on a 120 pound frame. I had thirty-four inch hips and a twenty-six waist. It's a wonder I didn't tip over. That's how I got the job. I'd never worked as a barmaid before. Sally had switched restaurants in her job. They told Sally at her new job that they needed a new barmaid during the day. Sally worked at night. So I'd work during the day and Sally would watch the kids and she'd work nights when I'd watch the kids. She had two kids of her own. It was a regular three ring circus, working out the schedules and all.

I felt more secure behind the bar than in front of it. Sometimes there'd be seventy-five men at the bar at one time. I had to wear a hot pants outfit. I had to wear the little shrink-tops too. I had to keep going though. Had to make a living. With the gall bladder acting up, I couldn't eat anything solid. Everytime I ate something solid. I'd get spasms. The doctor gave me this medicine like synthetic morphine for the pain. It's extremely addictive but I didn't know. I was taking it for the pain. I was getting migraine headaches and I was taking another medication for that. I was also taking Demitol two at a time for the spasms. With the Demitol, I could eat a little bit. But I could drink - I don't understand this - I could drink all I wanted and I'd be fine. Liquor did not bother me and it helped ease the pain. And I was taking speed to keep me going. Then at night, I'd smoke pot to relax. It all became a routine. It went on for six months. I got real
While I was working at this place, I met a guy by the name of Thomas. I would have been madly in love with him when I was a kid. He was forty-one and I was twenty-nine at the time. He looked a little like James Coburn with dark hair and a moustache. A delicious-looking man. He was extremely attractive to me. I hadn't had but cre real love affair. That was with Jorge. With Thomas, it was purely a sexual affair. I felt like I really cared for him though. Because he educated me.

Like I said earlier, I didn't know a whole heck of a lot about sex. And I was twenty-nine at the time. Real dumb. And with a body like I had then? Holy cow! Thomas couldn't believe that I was that naive at that age. He said that he couldn't understand that with all that I had physically, I didn't know what to do with it. So he set about educating me. I discovered another side of myself. I really enjoyed sex. It was an enlightenment. I was insatiable. I was getting about two hours of sleep a day at that time. And I'd still be taking care of the kids and working. God, no wonder I was thin. And I was never happier.

Around that time, I had a falling-out with Sally. Some other woman was getting it on with her man and Sally claimed I knew about it and didn't tell her. So Sally moves out of the apartment and leaves me there. The landlord is mad because Sally left without leaving a forwarding address. He
had a thing for Sally. The rent's all paid but this landlord wants Sally. Well, I started moving out. They locked both doors to the apartment. The landlord did it. I kicked in a little basement window so I could get in and get my stuff out of the apartment. These two guys jump me in the alley while I'm doing this and I get torn up pretty good. And I get arrested for disturbing the peace while the two guys are beating me up. I had one of the guys arrested for assault and battery. Anyway, I moved into this two-room dormer with rc kitchen.

The new place was in the Italian section of Detroit. In Detroit, your ethnic groups are in certain neighborhoods. You might go over a block and find the Spanish neighborhood. Go over two blocks and it's the Polish neighborhood. Thomas put the word cut on the street: you don't touch this woman. Meaning me. I could have walked up and down the street naked and I would have been fine. I was protected. So I kind of felt that Thomas was a combination of big brother, lover, and everything else rolled into one.

I was still into the drugs too. You have to realize what the drug stuff does to you. I guess I must have messed up my mind pretty good with the junk. I had a hell of a lot of things happening to me. I had to work. I wasn't going to have social services come and take Paulie away from me. Then I went to the doctor's to have some tests taken. I had to swallow some kind of contraption and they put me through a barium test. The first time around, all they found was a
small tumor on my lung. Eventually, they said I had two: one on my lung and one in my kidney. Cancerous tumors. I went home and had to tell Thomas. He greeted me at the door with, 'Hey, kitten.' He made me a Cuba Libre, a drink of rum and coke with a lime. That was my drink back then. I sat down and so did Thomas. His eyes shifted down to the crease in his pants and he kept straightening the crease as I talked. I told him I had some tumors—cancers. I told him I was going to have to quit work and the doctors were talking about chemotherapy. And I also told him that I needed some help. You would have thought I'd just told him he had a cigarette ash on his pants for all the concern he showed. That hurt. And that finished it right there. I could no longer be a playmate.

I started undergoing treatments for the cancers. Bill had to take the kids. The treatments do things to your body. Your skin changes. You turn literally greyish. Dead-looking skin. My hair started to fall out. I never did get my eyebrows back. Ah, they used to be too bushy anyway. At least I don't have to brush them anymore. But I used to have a thick head of hair. I used to have my hair thinned it was so thick. The chemotherapy made me plain sick. I mean vomiting and everything. I was so sick I used to crawl around my apartment. I don't remember how many treatments I took. I was still taking all those other drugs on top of them though. The speed especially. It kept me going. It's kind of funny now. Now all the medical
research says that marijuana helps with the side effects of chemotherapy. Shit, I was using it illegally before I even knew it was helping me. I was drinking too. Of course a lot of the drinking would come back up. The pot eased me a bit and the speed kept me going. And there was nobody to help. Just me and nobody else. Finally I couldn't take it anymore. They started suggesting cobalt treatments. I went to the hospital and looked at how it worked. I think I had one or two treatments with the cobalt. I told them to shove it after that. I called Mother in Atlanta the day before Thanksgiving. I left Detroit Thanksgiving Day. I just packed some clothes and got my money from the bank. Left the kids with Bill. I drove myself from Detroit to Atlanta, sick as a damn dog. The brakes gave out. You could hear the brake shoes grinding. Metal rubbing against metal. I was very lucky. I made it to Atlanta the day after Thanksgiving. I had to stop several times and rest some. But, you know, I had no place else to go.

When I arrived, I fought with Mother as usual. She and I can be long-distance friends but not otherwise. I spent Christmas Eve in my beat up old Pontiac out in front of Mother's apartment building. I spent New Year's Eve there too. Fights with Mother, you know.
I don't remember what happened Christmas Eve but I do remember New Year's Eve. My older brother Jack had convinced me to go to this psychic healer about my cancer. I didn't believe in that stuff but I thought my qoing would shut Jack up. I went down to see Dr. Fallow. He was a chiropractor and a psychic healer. He chose his patients. He could tell when you walked in whether or not he can help you. Dr. Fallow took me as a patient. I don't understand it all but the x-rays taken after I became his patient were clear. The cancer was in complete remission. There wasn't even any scar tissue. Now if you don't think that made a believer out of me, I don't know what would. I definitely became a believer in psychic stuff.

I was really into celebrating after that. The guy that ended up being my co-defendant at my trial, Cory, he had a New Year's party. He was a friend of Mother and Jack's. The whole family went to Cory's party: Jack, Mother, and some cousins. Mom went home early. We were all staying at her apartment. We roll in about three a.m. We decide at three in the morning that we're going to have something to eat in Mother's kitchen. I'm sure we got kind of loud but, heck, it was New Year's Eve. Mother didn't have to go to work the next day. I was drunk as hell. A merry little bunch we were. We put every seasoning we could find on that pizza we were making. I was making the dough - a yeast dough. I remember a cousin passed out on the floor and I rolled the dough into an obscene shape and stuck it on his
pants. Well we eventually got around to eating it. Now Mother doesn't say anything while we're all out making noise, right? We all started to conk out soon and since I was sharing Mother's bedroom, I went into her bathroom. Just as I'm fixing to go in, she snaps on the light and tears into me god bless royally. It was my fault, of course. Nobody else was out making noise. This was according to her. How dare I make noise and how dare I do this and that. She tore into me up one side and down the other. I was just good and drunk enough to grab a blanket and park my fanny in the car. It's a wonder I didn't freeze out there.

The next day, New Year's, I moved in with a guy I knew who had one leg. He had a tiny little apartment. He and I became good friends when I first came down in November. He fixed the brake shoes on my car when I arrived. Lymon didn't wear a prosthesis. He didn't wear anything like that. Lymon said people were either going to accept him as he is or not. He was not going to fake it with a prosthesis and have people think he was just walking with a limp. So I had to admire his honesty. I treated him like he was normal.

Lymon's a remarkable man. He and I were the same age. He was working as a draftsman and at the gas station too. Picture this: he's walking around on one crutch at a gas station fixing cars at night. See, his leg was cut off above the knee. He had a lot of guts. I could see that he
was a fighter and he could see that I was a fighter. We were like kindred spirits. I could see he'd been through a lot.

To show you how he tested people, let me tell you this. Lymon had two cars. One was a beautiful '72 Thunderbird convertible with mag wheels. It was British racing green with a taupe leather interior. He also had a '55 Ford that he had done nothing with except keep the engine running. It was in the Ford that I first saw him. I pulled into the station when I arrived and he agreed to work on my brakes on the side. Well I asked him if he could do it. I didn't mean on account of his only having one leg but I guess he felt sort of challenged at that point. You know, I guess he took it wrong. Anyway, he'd work on my car at Mother's apartment complex. Once you got to know him for what he was, then he'd show you his Thunderbird.

We'd talk together while he worked. There were some nice balmy November days when I first arrived. I'd come out and bring him something to eat, like a beer and a sandwich. The first time he took me out, he picked me up in his '55 Ford. We went to a movie. I liked him. I wasn't judging him by what he had.

Then Lymon decided he was going to invite me out to dinner. He brought the Thunderbird that night. I went with him into this restaurant and we got lots and lots of looks. He tries to head for a back table which I won't hear of. So we sit up in this balcony in a beer joint type of place with
peanut shells all over the floor. When the waitress was too slow with our beers, he went up with his crutch to the bar and brought us back two great big steins of beer. I don't know how he managed it. While he was gone, some lothario started buzzing around me trying to put on the make. Now in the corner of my eye, I see Lymon coming with those beers. I wait until Lymon's fairly close and I say to the guy real loud 'I'm already with my man, thank you.' That meant a lot to Lymon. He needed to hear that. We both needed something. There were vacuums for both of us. I still care for him. He was my very special friend. But he fell in love with me and that was the death of him.

Oh, I moved in with Lymon for awhile, like I said. We were lovers. I lived with him up until May. He started talking about buying a condominium and living together. The word marriage was never mentioned but that's what he implied. I didn't want any further attachments at that point. Don't forget, I'd already been through Jorge and Thomas and I got hurt real bad. I didn't want to hurt Lymon because I cared for him but I was not going to make it a permanent situation. I wish to God now that I had. Right after my relationship with Lymon, I got into a lot of the things that put me in here. I will get hostile.
My father passed away when I was still in Detroit. I was about twenty-six years old at that time. We heard that Dad had been deteriorating. He had some form of sclerosis. He literally went from a man of about 175 pounds to a man of about 75 pounds. He looked like he'd been in a concentration camp. He withered. Jack called me in Detroit and told me that Daddy's failing. That was a very overpowering feeling. I got off the phone and told Bill that I was going to Atlanta to see Daddy. Even though Dad and me had been battling for so many years, we were so much alike. We were especially close. I could never do anything right for him though. It's a hard relationship to explain. I don't even know if I could find the words for it.

I was the only one that was dry-eyed up until the time we got to the grave site. I held in all my emotions in a typical Dad fashion. My Aunt Jane who I hadn't seen in years began to recite the 23rd psalm. My voice began to quiver and I couldn't even remember the psalm. As we walked away, those bastards didn't even wait. They started shoveling the dirt in the grave. You could hear it. They could have waited. Five more minutes, just five more. I broke down. The total reality that Dad was in the ground hit me. I came apart. For a few hours, I came apart.

Death has a smell. The only other person that I'd seen in a coffin or grave was a woman I knew who had been in a nursing home. When the flesh is rotting, it gives off an odor. And it smells like death. There's no other way to
describe it. Maybe if I had been to other funerals when I was a kid, my father's funeral wouldn't have affected me so much. When I saw my father dead, that nursing home smell came back to me. The only thing that kept going around in my head was that there were many things I wanted to say to him. To prove to him. And I never got a chance to. It's a sour smell."

Shortly after Barbra's relationship with Lynch began to wear thin, Barbra is said to have shot and killed a businessman in his motel room. A man by the name of Cory, who happened also to be a family friend and the same fellow to which Barbra makes mention as the host of the New Year's Eve party, was a co-defendant at the trial. Barbra Russell is one of the ten women in the study sample convicted of first degree murder.

The life story that Barbra tells is rife with role conflict and encroachment. A clear captive of confusion and frustration in her youth, she eventually learns to expect everyday life to be demanding. There are passages in her life when Barbra seems to seek out stressful situations and conditions. Many are the times when she contributes to her own pain. Slowly but stedily, events grow beyond her ability to control and manage them. Disappointment with the course of everyday living and the aggressive intrusion of others are themes familiar to Barbra's common sense
understanding of her life world.

The patterns of disappointment and encroachment have roots in Barbra's childhood. She seems quite fond of her older brother and admires his independence. Her relationship with him is somewhat soiled when he begins to make sexual advances. She states that she was only four or five years old when it began and it persisted until her elder brother joined the navy some ten years later. In contrast to the love Barbra expresses for her elder brother, she speaks of her younger sibling with disdain. It is important to note that she makes no reference to him in recounting her years beyond childhood. Perhaps the birth of her younger brother and the rebuff Barbra encountered at the time are events Barbra would rather not remember. But these events are not easily erased from our streams of consciousness, much as we may sometimes try. Her younger brother's birth was an unsettling experience for Barbra and one that may well have interfered with any lasting relationship with her younger brother.

The triadic relationship among Barbra and her mother and father does not appear to be triangular. The three of them do not seem to position themselves where mutual interaction between all three takes place - a sort of give and take flow between three people. Rather, their relationship seems to be better characterized as a linear one. Barbra's parents are positioned opposite one another and Barbra is forever in the middle. Not only is she pushed
and pulled by both parents but she seems to say that she may have interfered with a healthy relationship between her parents. It was and still is a confusing arrangement to Barbra. She claims that her mother was jealous of her relationship with her father while at the same time her mother seemed to encourage an intimacy between the two. Barbra takes the chore of ironing her father's underwear as a sign of this encouragement. Her father could be equally enigmatic to Barbra. Years later, when Barbra is at her parents' home convalescing after a serious illness, her father banishes her from within hearing distance of his lovemaking with Barbra's mother. At least that is Barbra's understanding of events.

Barbra could not fulfill the promise of a relationship with her father. She admired her father's strength and independence much as she did her brother's. Barbra may mock the stoicism of her father and brother, but it seems likely she modeled her own independent strivings after theirs. Nevertheless, her relationship with her father was a chronically frustrating one for Barbra. She seldom sensed that she brought him pride in her actions. At once, Barbra paints her father as an admirable but a dispassionately uncaring man. She could not ingrati ate the man she so desperately sought to please. When Barbra was a teenager, her father accused her of whorish behavior without just cause. A devout Catholic, he once physically forced her to attend mass despite her complaints of cramps. He broke her
toe in the process and denied her what she thought was appropriate medical treatment. Her father tried hard to choose Barbra's friends and Barbra found this to be an intrusion. At twenty-six years of age, five years before her crime, Barbra is devastated by the deterioration and eventual death of her father. The ambivalent feelings Barbra reserved for her father throughout her life may have heightened her sense of loss.

Barbra draws her mother in rather subservient shades. Her mother is not a dominant figure by most measures of Barbra's characterization of her. Her mother is sometimes spiteful in Barbra's eyes. It would seem that her mother rarely passed an opportunity to lecture Barbra as to the more righteous life path. In a sense, Barbra's mother served to remind Barbra of her failures. Barbra could not truly escape her mother even in adulthood. Against her better judgement, Barbra returned to Atlanta following her cobalt treatments for cancer and stayed with her mother. Saddled with an alcoholic husband, in ill-health, and virtually penniless, Barbra returns to a figure who, in all likelihood, would exaggerate rather than ease her present conditions. Her mother fulfills this prophesy and Barbra and she quarrel - much as they were accustomed to do in years past.

Sexual maladjustment has a phenomenological application in Barbra's life. Her understanding of sexuality was informed by repression, ignorance, and aggression. Barbra
candidly speaks of her upbringing in a sexually repressive home environment where natural curiosity about one's body was punished. Barbra was not taught much about menstruation and the onset of mena was a traumatic experience for her. That she experienced menstrual cramps for much of her adult life might be an expression of this trauma. Men, including her elder brother, paw at her and she finds this to be rather peculiar behavior. Barbra's physical growth outstripped her emotional growth. She was full-figured at a relatively early age. Barbra was also the victim of two separate rapes. The first rape took place when she was nine and the second when she was sixteen. Such aggressive violation of a child is difficult to digest. It was likely to be vastly more difficult for a child of Barbra's age to accommodate the two attacks to a healthy view of the world. Worse, Barbra's parents met both rapes with indifference. Worse still, Barbra casts her mother in a contributory role in both instances of sexual assault. Combined with other childhood events, it seems plausible that these events informed her sexual identity beyond adolescence. Barbra was well into her twenties before she had a sexually satisfying experience. Through her admission, the effects of this sexual deprivation upon her self image were not positive ones.

The love relationships that involved Barbra over the years appeared to be of two types. It would seem that Barbra played either a passive or a dominant role in her
relationships with men. Both her husband Bill and Lymon were men she seemed to dominate. They both played passive, perhaps even helpless roles in the relationships. In contrast, both Jorge and Thomas played comparatively dominant roles in the relationships each had with Barbra. Both were in control of the course of the affairs. These two types of love relationships weighed heavily upon Barbra's mental health. Her styles of role-playing in love relationships, either dominant or passive, did not afford much room for a mixture of the two: being dominant at some times and passive at others. A combination of dominant and passive styles of role-playing in love relationships may be healthier for the couple involved and for the lcrqeinity of the relationship. But just as Barbra could have minimized some stress in her relationships, Bill and Lymon could have minimized the stress by occasionally playing a more dominant role. Likewise, Jorge and Thomas could have been less domineering. Relationships might be better served by the push and pull of both participants.

Barbra endured great physical trauma in her many years. Her father broke her toe. Her brother slashed her with a knife. A pickaxe fell on her foot. A chronic kidney disorder follows her through her life. Her labors and deliveries were especially difficult ones and her tubal ligation required considerable adjustment on her part. The ligation ended her vision of a large family. She privately indulges in excesses of alcohol and drugs to manage the
severity of tension in her life. Barbra eventually develops cancer, a disease that wrought havoc with her body. As suddenly as it appeared, it went into remission but the chemotherapy was mentally and physically exhausting. Not surprisingly, Barbra develops migraine headaches, a condition thought to be strongly related to high or chronic stress.

The struggle to achieve financial success was an unsuccessful one for Barbra. Barbra had a taste for and desired fine things. She was continually thwarted in her efforts to attain them. Barbra's alcoholic husband proved to be a drain on the family finances and presented some difficulty in childcare arrangements. Barbra apparently had potential in the cosmetic industry, a career choice of some poignancy for a woman who did not consider herself attractive. Her career progress was frequently interrupted and often by forces seemingly beyond Barbra's control. In the end, her drive for success and achievement was not personally profitable or rewarding. Such blockage enlarged Barbra's frustration with the world around her.

Ultimately, Barbra may have adapted to chronic frustration through an expectation that all life demands would produce anxiety and disappointment. Her original overly optimistic expectations of what could be were not met in real life, although even the most hard-hearted of individuals will admit that the events of Barbra's personal life were exceedingly demanding. Her childhood was
especially stress-filled and her marriage was rarely a source of comfort—in truth, it was quite the opposite. But Barbra's adaptation to life stress through a seeking out of disappointment cannot be viewed as a successful mode of managing everyday life. Eventually, she adds fuel to the slow-burning embers of her private pain. In a sense, her criminal violence is an expression of that internal fire blown outward. I once asked Barbra how she'd describe herself.

I'm like two people in one. I split myself into two people and I don't know when I did it. It's hard to describe yourself. I was dumb in a lot of ways. That hurt me a lot. Do you believe that people can mature at two levels? Like intellectually and emotionally? I'd say I matured intellectually faster than I did emotionally. It's almost as though I'd been emotionally starved for a period of time. I was naive. I believed. I trusted. I should have had my defenses up in some ways. I should have seen what was coming. But I always kept an eye out saying things were going to work out for the best. Of course things didn't work out... not with the set of circumstances I had.

If there is one role that Barbra came to play well in everyday life, it is that of an unsuccessful actor. We chatted at one time about how to go about making things better for people. She spoke of people thrust into roles.

Roles become prisons of their own making if you are not aware. Who am I and why do I do what I do? Those are important questions. Understand jealousy, understand envy, understand all the emotions you feel. Parents don't teach that. They don't tell about it in school. A kid has to learn about these things in a hit and miss way. Why is that? This is an advanced
civilization. What happened to the other education? The inner world?

These are very good questions.
Chapter Ten

The Only Ones: The Linkage of Life Currents and Criminal Violence

From the outset, this study aimed to answer several questions. First, what discernable patterns and pace of events and conditions predominate in the lives of women who kill? Second, what types of common sense understandings develop in response to life currents? Last, how might these understandings contribute to criminal violence? The study's theoretical stance borrowed from the phenomenology of everyday life and from current social stress research. Phenomenological applications encourage behavioral scientists to "get close" to people in the world to better understand why people do what they do. Much of the recent stress research indicates that there may be a connection between life stress and behavior. Interviews with 76 women incarcerated for criminal homicide provide the empirical information in the study. Through the reconstructed autobiographies of these women, we might learn more about the linkages among stressful life currents, the subjective ordering of everyday life, and criminal violence.
A few substantive sections appear in this, the final chapter. The section to immediately follow reviews the contours of the lives of the study women, from childhood through adulthood. Next, a sociological calendar of events and conditions appears, offering a graphic illustration of prominent life themes important to the everyday points of view of the study women. The sociological calendar also helps explicate another idea presented in the chapter. Past life events may inform present and future behavior. As to how this idea pertains to the present concern, the quality of mind that accrues from a life laced with aggression and loss could be the link between past experience and criminal violence. Attention to the quality of mind common among the study women prior to their homicides is the focus of yet another section in this chapter. So many women in the study reported feeling alone, isolated, and apart from people in their lives. The affective sensation of aloneness was overwhelming. Clear thinking about appropriate or effective action suffered. The study women and others like them in the world who know an overpowering aloneness see themselves as "Only Ones." The identification of self as an Only One and the intrusion of the self concept in styles of role playing can have disastrous personal and social consequences. Criminal homicide is but one consequence. There may be others. Finally in this chapter, courses of action directed toward the betterment of our lives together are outlined.
A review of life themes

The text and case studies in these pages carry us through the lives of women who have killed, from their early childhoods, through adolescence, and into the loves, trials, joys, and pains of adulthood. In this work, everyday life is the unit of study. The events, conditions, and pace of day-to-day living and the common sense approach that develops in response to the elements of everyday life are principal considerations. Here, it may be helpful to review all these things as they pertain to the lives of the 75 women in this study.

Most of the sample women spent their childhoods in rather austere socioeconomic environments. Rural North Carolina, with its labor intensive farming and sharecropping, supplied the childhood scenery for most of the sample women, both white and nonwhite. Families tended to be relatively large: most had several siblings, with brothers rather than sisters predominating. Many of the women grew up in Baptist homes where childrearing was based upon a rigid code of conduct and discipline. As children, the women and their families moved frequently. Transience in childhood was a source of some consternation, since social relationships were disrupted. Moreover, the stress of adapting to a new social environment was renewed with each move.
An overwhelming majority of the study women were physically disciplined with some regularity by parental figures. Mothers were more often than fathers the disciplinarians. The delegation of parental responsibility may have been due to the frequent absence of the father figure whose family presence often was sporadic. Although the women tended to accept the early physical discipline as administered for their own benefit, most agreed that it was too often excessive.

Intra-sibling violence was also common among the women during childhood. The women cast their brothers as both the instigators of and victors in physical conflict. Sisters were portrayed as less incitatory and abusive. Another form of childhood domestic violence involved parents fighting with one another. A significant number of women had witnessed father figures battling with mother figures. In the eyes of the study women, mothers seldom won the bouts, was yet another behavior encountered by the women as children. Approximately one-third of the women reported being sexually victimized as children. Most of the aggressors were men known to the women, and frequently were family members.

Life episodes characterized by loss were also prominent in the women's childhoods. Social loss, such as illness or injury, interrupted the routine of everyday living, slowing activity. Without question, one of the most meaningful loss events in childhood is the death of someone to whom you are
close. For the women who experienced such a loss in their early years, the occasion was somewhat confusing. Over half of the women had suffered the loss of a loved one during childhood. Their recollections of that loss are woven of bewilderment, grief, and anger. The childhood adjustment to the sudden and lasting absence of a person important to a social network was a difficult one for many.

Dropping out of school, another very meaningful childhood loss event, was a course taken by roughly four-fifths of the study women. Although initially seen as a great relief from the trying academic and social demands of the school environment, the premature departure would later be viewed as a regrettable life mistake. Limited education tended to intensify the pressures of adult life and to hinder efforts to secure suitable employment.

As the autobiographies of the women suggest, the pace of childhood life was feverish. The sheer volume of social loss and aggression threatened to overwhelm. The everyday world began to spin on an alien axis and the women, as children, increasingly saw themselves as precariously perched on a globe teetering with imbalance. They might scramble to right it or hold tight for the ride but both courses were resoundingly unsuccessful. For so many of the study women, genuine childhood fears slowly dissolved into generalized anxieties about the pace and course of everyday living. Much of what they had experienced and learned of the world as children, they carried with them into
adulthood. Unfortunately, such childhood lessons left them ill-equipped for the journey.

With their adolescent worlds moving pell-mell about them, the social scenery shifting, and significant and secondary others encroaching upon their roles, the women's sense of belonging was tenous at best. This may explain why many involved themselves in love relationships at so young an age. The love of a man might entender the harsh working of childhood and turn back the creeping aleness in everyday life. By the age of 18, almost half the women were married and many more were enmeshed in nonmarital relationships. But these relationships consistently failed to meet expectations.

Mates in general tended to be physically combative, jealous, psychologically domineering, and provocative. A substantial number were sexually abusive as well. Divorce, or a less formal dissolution of the relationship, was the common response to an abusive mate; however it often came only after the women had endured physical and psychological assaults. New marriages and relationships supplianted the old but met with the same fate. Women victimized in love relationships held fast to the belief that a different combination could bring satisfaction despite past failures. New mates, however, were not much different than the old. Importantly, most women believed the source of trouble in relationships was not in them but in their mates. The women perceived this adult victimization in much the same light as
they recalled earlier sibling aggression and the frequent attacks by their fathers on their mothers. That men aggress toward women is a perception reinforced by an increasingly familiar refrain.

The women's relative inability to understand why a mate would behave the way he does or to squarely address their own participation, contributory or not, in unsatisfactory relationships only heightened the stress of loving and living with men. Not surprisingly, many of the victims of the criminal homicides committed by the study women were men, particularly husbands and lovers. Directly or symbolically, male victims were targets of aggression borne of frustration with them and other men. The fervor and determination with which Cookie Glover disposed of her husband reflects the depth that such frustration can reach. In the end, few women found in adult love the sense of belonging denied in childhood and for which they desperately searched.

Other sources of life stress must be considered. Motherhood, a role known to roughly four-fifths of the study women, produced great joy and considerable demands in the lives of the women. Most had their first child early in their lives: the pregnancy usually coincided with dropping out of school, leaving home, and beginning a love relationship or marriage, each of which compounded the stress. Further, having a child as a teenager served to cut off the women from important social networks such as school
and family. Many women counted this life period as one of rapid changes.

Motherhood continued to present challenges. The study women tended to move frequently as adults, usually when a marriage or relationship dissolved. Caring for the children, even just meeting the basic necessities of food and shelter, proved to be arduous since mates were not reliable wage earners. Juggling the demands of a job and family was, quite simply, exhausting although most women saw this balancing act as a calling or a duty. Many women were troubled that they too often resorted to physical discipline to foster appropriate behavior in their children. Since many of these same women recall being hit as a child, hitting their own children evoked unpleasant memories of their own pain in youth. The resultant role conflict apparently produced unsettling psychological remnants. Discipline, a recognized duty of parenthood, was a stressful element of everyday life. And the aggregation of stressors in mothering were made more acute by the arrival and departure of aggressive men in the lives of the study women.

About a sixth of the women reported the death of a child. The period of bereavement was long and painful for these women. The sense of loss seemed to be exacerbated by a companion sense of guilt. Many of the women assumed that they were partly at fault even though the deaths were seemingly beyond their control. This affective state was also common among the 34 women who endured miscarriages. In
contrast, hysterectomies and abortions tended to be met with less remorse. These events, unlike the infant deaths and miscarriages, were often described as matters of choice and the stress appeared to be minimized as a consequence. When loss of fertility or abortion were reported to be stressful, it appeared to coincide with the lack of a supportive mate or the presence of a resistant one.

In the midst of the strains of motherhood, most of the mothers in the study found great satisfaction playing the role. Having children was hailed more often than any other event as the single most important event in their lives. True, parenting was considered to be hard work, mentally and physically; but the affective benefits clearly outweighed these costs. Perhaps due to the uniquely dependent relationship of mother and child, the mothers in the study found a love and a contentment through that union that had escaped them in other life stages and arenas.

Working, another life arena, was largely confined to unskilled or semi-skilled vocations for the 71 sample women who had been employed at some point in their lives. The confinement to these trades was phenomenologically linked to lack of adequate education. Most women said they could do no better without a high school diploma. Wages were low. The number of women, 41, who received some local, state, or federal assistance therefore is not surprising. As stated earlier, mates tended not to be adequate providers and so most of the women worked outside the home to provide for
their families. It was a decision prompted by necessity rather than choice.

Still, the working women generally found benefits in the workplace in addition to the monetary ones. Meeting new people, diverse activity, and a respite from the tedious environment of the home were frequently mentioned rewards. Yet the working women did not view their work peers as sources of friendships beyond the work environment. Few would socialize with them after hours. Most enjoyed the change of pace working afforded but were eager to collect their paychecks and return home to their families. The environs of work and family were generally well separated.

Housework too extracted its share of hours from the day. Providing an appropriate home atmosphere required effort and time. Balancing family and job responsibilities was an exhausting and rather lonely enterprise. Housework seemed to be less of a burden for those women who routinely enlisted the help of children and mates. The successful management of homelife, however, could be enormously gratifying. Many women enjoyed cooking and cleaning despite the considerable effort those duties sometimes required. Perhaps in the home the women found some measure of control over daily events. The ascribed or achieved authority within the household stands in contradistinction to small measure of authority allotted these women in other life arenas.
The women generally did not find fault with gender-based divisions of labor, either in the home or at the workplace. The majority of women were leary of sacrificing femininity for gender equality. Most enjoyed the special status of the more traditional woman. In many ways, the study women cast men and women in separate roles. However, they strongly objected to inequitable gender-based pay practices. Most believed men and women should receive equal pay for comparable work. Gender equality was a common value - at least as it pertained to the workplace. Many saw the need for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Other life themes were common among the study women. Thirty-nine women reported a friend or family member dying during the women's adult years. Over one quarter of the sample reported losing a home as adults to eviction, fire, flood, or other natural catastrophe. A significant number of women had some form of contact with crime and criminal processing prior to their homicides. More had been victimized by crime than had been accused of or arrested for a crime. Many had family members who had been arrested and still more, 42 women, had adult friends who had been arrested for crimes. Generally, the women were not satisfied with the criminal justice system either in the role of victim or offender. In each role, the criminal justice system appeared to conspire against them. The common sense understanding that developed from these perceptions was that of a system which more often harms than
helps.

The state of an individual's physical and mental health offers some clue as to the stressful nature of everyday living. Importantly, over two-thirds of the study women reported suffering from one or several stress-related conditions prior to their criminal homicides. The relatively large number of afflicted women may reflect the degree of stress in their everyday lives. From childhood through adulthood, the quick pace and large number of disruptive events and conditions exacted a mental and physical price. With few sanctuaries from life stress, command of day-to-day existence waned and the control over future courses was minimal.

Two general categories of life events and conditions, loss and aggression, were used in the study to discern any within-group differences in the sample. Given that the sample is a nonrandom one and one drawn only from women incarcerated at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women for criminal homicide at a given point in time, any findings or this matter should be approached with guarded caution. Too, the indicators used in the indices of the two general categories, loss and aggression, are open to arbitration. It may be best to address the findings in the spirit of scientific discovery. These hypotheses are subject to empirical verification through continued research.
A social loss event or condition was characterized by some immediate withdrawal or absence from everyday life. Loss indices were constructed for two life periods, childhood and adulthood, and broken down by race and type of criminal homicide for both periods. The available evidence suggests that the less malicious and intentional the criminal homicide, the greater the social loss experienced in everyday life, through childhood and adulthood, and for whites and nonwhites.

An aggressive event or condition was characterized by a sequence of behavior aimed at the injury of some object. In both loss and aggressive events, the point of view taken in this study is that of the sample woman. She then becomes the object of injury in most but not all instances of aggressive life events. Aggression indices were also constructed for both childhood and adulthood. The findings of this study suggest that the more malicious and intentional the criminal homicide, the greater the aggression encountered in everyday life, through childhood and adulthood, and for whites and nonwhites.

A sociological calendar of life stress

Before exploring the meaning of these themes - before coming full circle and outlining the theoretical stance developed through this research - a visual depiction of the themes might allow for greater clarity in our understanding of the continuity of stress. Such a visual depiction can be termed a "sociological calendar." In his study of medical
Figure 10.1: A Sociological Calendar of Life Stress in Reconstructed Accounts of Subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDHOOD</th>
<th>ADOLESCENCE/YOUNG ADULTHOOD</th>
<th>ADULTHOOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOSS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>Low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent moves</td>
<td>Frequent moves</td>
<td>Frequent moves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness/injury</td>
<td>Onset of stress-related illness</td>
<td>Recurrence of stress-related illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menses</td>
<td>Miscarriage</td>
<td>Loss of fertility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a close one</td>
<td>Death of a close one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Birth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work/welfare</td>
<td>Parenting/childcare difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGGRESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td>Work/welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repressed upbringing</td>
<td>Restrictive mate</td>
<td>Restrictive mate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence between parents</td>
<td>Abusive mate</td>
<td>Abusive mate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence between siblings</td>
<td>Physical discipline of children</td>
<td>Physical discipline of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical discipline by parents</td>
<td>Sexual attack</td>
<td>Forced sex in relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual attack</td>
<td>Crime victimization</td>
<td>Incarceration of friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest in family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students in psychiatric residence, Light (1980) makes good use of a "calendar" to illustrate "the interwoven dimensions and phases of socialization into psychiatry and see the discontinuities through time and their resolution (1980:114)." Here, we can adopt the intent if not the exact form of Light's tool to illustrate the continuity of everyday stress in the lives of the study women. Pearlin et al. (1981) write that little is known about the interconnections of stress components over time and how they combine to form a process. Further, these researchers express a need to develop information and strategies devoted to understand how events and conditions converge over time to create stress. In other words, the stress of an event may extend beyond the moment and combine with other stressors to intensify the stress and we need to know how this might occur. By borrowing Light's technology, we can tailor Pearlin and his colleagues' imperatives to the overall goal of this study: to understand why women kill.

Figure 10.1, a calendar of life stress, illustrates several of the major currents in the lives of the study women. The events and conditions are grouped under two categories, loss and aggression, a typification used throughout the text. The calendar proceeds from childhood through adolescence and young adulthood, up to and including adulthood. Importantly, there is much overlap between these life phases but they represent terms commonly used by the study women when reviewing their life histories. The events
and conditions are arranged to reveal common threads woven throughout the everyday lives of the women. Criteria for including an event or condition in the calendar are two-fold. An event or condition in the calendar was common to at least one quarter of the sample women or the occurrence was seen as significantly powerful in the lives of the affected women to merit its inclusions. For the majority of calendar items, the two criteria went hand in hand.

A tool such as this allows us to do two things at once. First, one can trace a single pattern through the three life phases. One can readily see, for example, that a low income living environment applies to all three phases. As another example, one can see that a repressed upbringing was often followed in young adult and adulthood by a restrictive mate. Patterns are especially revealing in the aggression category. Most of the events and conditions in childhood had compliments in the other two life phases and each theme connotes a gradual patterning of violence, much of it directed at the subject. Second, the calendar permits an enlightening view as to how many stressful events were occurring at once. By scanning each column in the calendar, one can fathom the enormous adjustments demanded of these women in a relatively short time span. Remember, too, that this is only a partial listing of major occurrences in the lives of the women. It does not depict other, perhaps less significant though still stress-producing, items.
Of course not every woman in the study experienced all of these events or at the designated time. The calendar is meant only to facilitate our understanding of common currents through a visual medium. For most of the women, the living out of life was an unending progression of stressful events, each seemingly following another quicksilver, and without sufficient time to successfully adapt. Barbara Russell’s story is an instructive example of hard-living from birth through adulthood. Her everyday life gains an astonishing speed and direction and it becomes increasingly clear that she is not always at the throttle or wheel. In time, her life comes to a terrifying halt and, in an explosive burst of violence, she kills. Even now, after a number of years in which to reflect on the events of her life, she is not quite certain how she came to be where she is.

Little doubt exists as to the highly stressful nature of everyday living among the study women. The volume of taxing events, their rapid succession, and the inability to adjust to them may have contributed to their acts of violence. And it would appear that the greater exposure to aggressive events, the more apt were the women to kill maliciously and intentionally. The greater the exposure to loss events, the more likely were the women to be convicted of the more passive forms of criminal homicide, involving less malice and intent. But what is it precisely that links everyday life stress and criminal homicide? Before directly
addressing the question, it may be best to lay some minimal groundwork.

**Events and conditions as informants of behavior**

In any work with autobiographical material, there are sure to be questions as to the authenticity of the life event retrieved from memory and relayed through conversation or the written word. How can we be certain that specific events took place? What degree of embellishment is at play that may distort the "true" record? And what gains are made through distortions? While on the surface these questions appear to be important ones, they are bequiling to social scientists who explore human behavior through reconstructed pasts. To be sure, suspicion is healthy in social science as it is in other sciences. But to dwell upon suspicion is to ignore a question of utmost importance to understanding human behavior: what can a reconstructed account of past events, with all its subjective trimmings, tell us about a person or group of people and the ways in which they behave?

One controversy provides a topical example. In anthropological circles and within the lay community, there is much ado about the validity of Margaret Mead's classic contribution to the discipline, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). Critics of late have taken to challenge Mead's description of Somoan culture and adolescence. Freeman (1983) in particular believes Mead was mislead by Somoan youth about their proclivity for sexual engagements with one another — free love and no guilt. Mead was a foil, believes
Freeman, for in truth, he writes, Somoan youth are filled with sexual aggression, tension, resentment, and jealousy. Freeman substantiates his claim through references to reportedly high rape rates among Somoans and his own experience with the culture. Controversy surrounds this confrontation between two anthropological views of a single culture. Most questions, however, are concerned with declaring one account more accurate than the other. Certainly this is a worthy concern since misrepresentation can cloud our understanding of others and ourselves. But in the fuss, larger questions are lost. Why would Somoan youth misrepresent themselves or their culture to either Mead or Freeman? Irrespective of who is more accurate, what do the reconstructed events of Somoan life tell us about Somoans? If they are neither sexually precocious or repressed, what can we learn from them when they represent themselves as one or the other? Answers to these questions might bring us closer to an understanding of human action.

Behavioral scientists of a phenomenological persuasion are apt to approach biographies as accounts of events in people's pasts (Gubrium and Buckholdt, 1977). Biographies and autobiographies are rich not so much for the preservation of historical record but for what they reveal of the manner in which realities are constructed. Gubrium and Buckholdt (1977) emphasize that the sense people make of their social surroundings and the actions that spring from those interpretations should preoccupy us, not the
definition of an "objective" reality. In a convincing essay on the reconstruction of the past, Wyatt (1963) argues that the unaffected roster of births, deaths, and migrations tells us little by itself. But "when transmitted by memory," he writes, "these abstractions tell us more of the slow, spontaneous reorganization of that memory over time than about the real experiences from which it was distilled. It would not do to regard such fragments as history, but they are indeed indispensable markers for the construction of history". (1963: 318). In studies of human behavior, Wyatt concludes, the search for an authentic past is elusive and we must acknowledge that the past exists for an individual only insofar as that individual remembers it.

Doing research using first person accounts of life histories requires a certain allegiance to Wyatt's dictum and a belief in its utility. Suppose that a student of social science abides by an assumption that a reconstructed past is inferior to an "authentic" history in determining the antecedents of a particular behavioral form. Many are the students who share this assumption. Yet they risk one or both of two errors when conducting research with the autobiographical materials of human actors. One, they may tend to discount the authenticity of a recalled event when the event is indeed authentic. We might call this the "Incredulity Error." It often derives from an overly suspicious attitude on the part of an interviewer or a preconceived bias on his/her part.
In his book, *The Making of a Psychiatrist* (1972), David Viscott recalls a relevant story from his psychiatric residency. Viscott remembers administering aid to a woman in a psychiatric hospital. The woman complained of severe pain. Viscott and a group of residents stood over her discussing possible causes of the discomfort. Being psychiatrists, they were accustomed to psychic roots of perceived physical pain and so did not believe her discomfort to have an organic base. Only later, after much consultation and finally x-rays, did they discover the woman's pain was indeed "real." She had broken a bone.

The second possible error made by researchers and therapists is the dismissal of an imagined event as insignificant simply because it lacks authenticity. A case from this study provides illustration. One woman related that one of her labors was particularly difficult and extremely painful. She reported that, in fact, she had shattered her pelvis during the delivery. Her medical record showed this not to be the case. And the chances of such an injury occurring during childbirth are extremely small if at all possible. Nonetheless, no one could disabuse the woman of her notion that she had shattered her pelvis. She continues to believe she had. The point should not be whether or not she sustained the injury or to devise ways to correct her perception. Rather, the point is that the woman experienced great pain during that delivery and she remembers it as painful and injurious. The woman
Figure 10.2: Approaches to Reconstructed Biographies of Real and Imagined Events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach to subject recall</th>
<th>Real or authentic event</th>
<th>Imagined or inauthentic event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recalled event dismissed as insignificant</td>
<td>Incredulity error</td>
<td>Insensitivity error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recalled event considered to be significant</td>
<td>Phenomenological understanding</td>
<td>Phenomenological understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
behaves as if she had shattered her pelvis. To dismiss this and similar events and memories as superfluous simply because it lacked authenticity is to lose the impact of such a reconstruction on behavior. This type of error we might call the "Insensitivity Error."

A researcher or therapist who considers the whole of a reconstructed past, built of real and imagined events, of authentic and partially authentic happenings, is one who adopts a phenomenological approach in understanding the everyday life of an actor. In Figure 10.2, the phenomenological approach to understanding behavior occupies the top two cells. The two errors of a researcher reside in the bottom two. Some would argue that a researcher risks being duped by a subject as they describe as the fate of Margaret Mead in Somoa. But the phenomenologist of everyday life considers the whole of the reconstructed biography. In doing so, he/she draws from the life as it is retold the continuing themes that run throughout and examines the parts the themes play in the common sense understandings of the people under study.

If a phenomenological understanding of autobiographical material is adopted, what are its benefits? The approach is premised by an assumption that past events and conditions can inform behavior. How do they inform behavior? The interpretive process we have called the common sense understanding of everyday life provides us with a partial answer. In this study, the process may be the link between
life currents and criminal violence.

A common sense understanding of everyday life is a mental orientation toward the world. The orientation serves two purposes at once. First, it defines the social world external to the self. This would include typifications of everyday living and the manners in which those typifications operate through time. One can sort out animate from inanimate objects, for example, or black people from whites, men from women, relatives from strangers, and so on. One usually assigns characteristics to various types and predicts that they will behave in certain ways from one moment to the next. We do this largely based upon our experience with the types. Second, the orientation helps define the self's position relative to the world as it has been typified. We compare ourselves with our views of others and mentally chart the relativity of our perceived positions through time. Given these two components, a common sense understanding of everyday life develops from the interface of an interpreting self and the social world. Social reality lies in the multitude of understandings.

The sheer number of people within the world and the march of time requires the self to be adaptive. Jean Piaget (1969), the noted developmental psychologist, recognized the requisite of adaptation to intellectual development and social interaction. Piaget believed there are two modes of adaptation: assimilation and accommodation. Both of these modes imply a structure of cognitive thought. We might
consider the structure as a component of the self. Assimilation, according to Piaget, involves the tailoring of environmental stimuli to fit the existent mental structure. Accommodation involves changing the mental structure to meet the demands of the environment. Healthy cognitive growth and successful day-to-day living, Piaget believed, require both modes of adaptation.

The mental structure to which Piaget alludes can be thought of as a common sense understanding of everyday life. Assimilation and accommodation are the processes by which it evolves. The evolution of common sense understandings attends change and the passing of time, two basic qualities of everyday life. In many ways, the mental structure described by Piaget and what we have termed common sense understanding orders and interprets what has taken place and serves as an orientating attitude in future situations. Past events and conditions therefore inform behavior to the extent that they have been mentally catalogued by an individual. When an event is assimilated, the common sense understanding remains essentially unaltered. The event is mentally matched, easily or forcibly, with the existing common sense understanding. When accommodation occurs, the existing common sense understanding is transformed by the new event. The event invades the senses. The mental structure shifts to accommodate the personal information generated by the event. A slightly or radically altered common sense understanding of everyday life then unfolds.
The ways in which events and conditions are mentally catalogued constitutes the common sense understanding of everyday life. Cataloguing involves assimilation and accommodation. These two modes of adaptation assist the self in making sense of life events and currents and, through their operation, form an orienting attitude toward new life situations.

Several behavioral scientists have investigated the contribution of past events and conditions to behavior. In a study of 89 children over thirty years, for example, Kagan and Moss (1962) offer strong evidence that aspects of adult personality begin to take form in childhood. Their work intimates that some elements of common sense understandings of everyday life survive the passing of time and continue to inform behavior in adulthood. Elder (1974) investigated the impact of the Great Depression experience upon the lives of children who had endured the scarcity, frugality, and poverty of the 1930's. Using biographical information on 167 children of the 1930's through their adult lives in the succeeding three decades, Elder suggests that the depression experience influenced the adult values and social relationships of the children who had lived through it. Economic hardship, for example, may have contributed to an emphasis upon the family and having children in adulthood. Impoverished childhoods transfixed common sense understandings that families were what really mattered. Erikson (1976) studied the effects of a cataclysmic flood
upon the individual and collective lives of a small mining town in West Virginia. He reports that the disaster and the events preceding it severely disrupted the social organization of the community and left its members acutely traumatized. Everyday life as the townspeople had known it was swept away, literally and figuratively. Erikson supposes that the lives of these men and women will be forever altered as a consequence. These studies and others illustrate how the events and conditions of the past outlast the moment, their remnants catalogued in the common sense understandings of the people who survive them.

Autobiographical material can help us expose common sense understandings. Exposure of orienting attitudes in everyday life can help us appreciate why people behave in the ways they do. By listening to people recite their own life histories, we may gain a focus on their views of the world around them, trace their development, and consider the fates implicated by those visions. Important to behavioral sciences is not so much that an event has occurred but that an event has met with human experience. People in the world supply meaning on its occasion. Through phenomenological explorations, behavioral science can make explicit the common sense understandings circulating in everyday life.

The life themes recounted earlier in this chapter point to one common sense understanding common to the 76 women of the study. That understanding developed from certain types of life experiences and, importantly, the meanings those
experiences hold for the women. The common sense understanding shared by the women we shall term "The Only One." It may be a link between life currents and criminal violence.

The Only Ones

The subjectively filtered life themes common to the sample women lead to an overwhelming depiction of life as threatening and belittling. Through the years and across the broad spectrum of roles, reproach is a mainstay. Other people, in the autobiographies of these women, are aggressors and deserters. Some encroach upon their roles and violate them psychologically and physically. Still others depart through death or design, leaving the women with a lingering sense of loss.

These are affections we all experience. Yet the amount of aggression and loss and the style in which it is addressed may separate these women from us. The very pacing of life events appears to be fierce and it extracts a measure from the mental and physical well-beings of the women. The demanding pace gains momentum in childhood and does not abate as the years pass. Social support networks are fragile at best. Alone and under attack, the women retreat into themselves feeling isolated and resentful. These sentiments, born of the stress associated with loss and aggression, increasingly inform their understandings of

everyday life. As the stress builds, the understanding that life is both lonely and perilous deepens. Ultimately, the inner tension is released in a single explosive act.

For an Only One, the strongest element of the image of self is an impression that one is a victim, sometimes helplessly so or for little apparent reason. At heart, the Only One believes herself to be a "good" person. She cannot comprehend why she is so often the object of malice and villainy. People and events appear to conspire against her. Relatedly, the orienting attitude among the Only Ones is a belief that this is her lot in most roles she plays now and in the future. The interpretation of everyday life becomes an expectation. Past and present experience intimates that the future will not be much different. Supportive people are rare. Many seem to want to harm her. And others for whom she truly cares leave or are given to long absences. Everyday life for her is as if she were in a large but empty ballroom and, when it fills with people, all fingers point at her. To be an Only One is at once to feel an overpowering aloneness and a simmering resentment of others.

One woman in the study, a gifted painter, captures the intensity of the everyday existence of an Only One. Her paintings line the walls of the administration building at the prison. One is particularly evocative. A lone woman, clad in a long white crinoline gown, sits upon a rock looking out over a harsh sea. The oils on the canvas are dark save for the demure shades of the human figure. In
response to an inquisitive comment about the painting, the artist replied:

The painting comes from a photograph I once saw in a very old book. The photograph appealed to me because the woman in it seemed so isolated and, even though she's surrounded by the natural landscape, she's completely alone. Well, that's the way I feel sometimes. You really get lonely sometimes and you feel like you're just by yourself. It's like everybody's going through so many different changes and everybody has their own problems. But it's hard to find somebody who can identify with your problems. So you're still by yourself. And that's true anywhere in the world because nobody can share everything with different people. Everybody always has something that sort of sets them apart.

The mode of adaptation to life stress used by the Only Ones is more often assimilation than accommodation. Stress researchers have identified a number of life changes, including death of a loved one, moving, marriage, birth, unemployment, and divorce, that require adaptation of some kind. Each of these can be and often is stress-producing since each places significant demands upon the individual. That 76 female criminal homicide offenders report considerable exposure to such events is documented in this work. Between the lines of their autobiographies, one can read a certain pattern of adaptation. Once the common sense understanding of the Only One has evolved, responses to stressors are fashioned from that orienting attitude. Each new event is assimilated into the mental structure. The mental structure tends not to be altered but reinforced. The everyday life view of an Only One appears to solidify as time progresses and stressors multiply. Particulars give
way to generalities. In the minds of some women, the reality of a battering husband translates in time to a belief that men abuse women. For others, the death of a loved one hinders future close relationships because the bereaved fears another loss of equal magnitude. The common sense understanding of an Only One becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The occasion of yet more stressors engages more assimilative responses and the Only One is driven further from others and closer to an umbrae with the world about them. They are caught in an understanding from which they cannot extract themselves.

Occasionally, the women are hopeful about the future. But from their perspective, each year brings renewed assaults: encroachment, violation, loss, and pain. It is the continuity of life stress and the consistency with which it was reported by the study women that are so striking. The prevalence of reports of stress-related illnesses demonstrates that the strain was generally great. The homicides committed by the women can be seen as behavioral expressions of that strain. After years of sustained exposure to stressful life events and conditions, their common sense understandings told them they could take no more. The compounded remorse and anger was unleashed with a lethal fury in the flash of a moment. And as the findings of the study would suggest, the fury was most intense among those with the greatest experience with aggression in their everyday lives.
Figure 10.3: Two Hypotheses of the Life Stress and Criminal Violence Process.

A. Accretive hypothesis

Stressful life events of loss and aggression → Development and maturation of the Only Ones stance

B. Filter hypothesis

Presence of the Only Ones stance → Stressful life events of loss and aggression → Exacerbation of the Only Ones stance → Risk of criminal homicide
The linkages among life stress, the Only Ones common sense stance, and criminal violence can be drawn through two hypotheses.\footnote{2} In Figure 10.3, the accretive hypothesis holds that repeated stressful life events of loss and aggression, encountered and assigned meaning by the self, encourage the development and maturation of the Only Ones common sense stance. The process described by this hypothesis may best apply to the childhoods and young adulthoods of the study women. During these life periods, the stance is not yet firmly rooted in the personal dispositions of the women. A relentless exposure to and adverse encounter with such stressors, however, allows the stance to mature.

The filter hypothesis involves the same processes identified in the accretive hypothesis but it assumes some prior presence of the Only Ones stance. The processes here described may apply to young adulthood and adulthood. With the stance present, additional stressors of loss and aggression reinforce it. The intrusion of the stance in everyday life is increasingly exacerbated by life events of loss and aggression. In a sense, an Only One may be prone to identify many seemingly innocuous life encounters as forms of further dislocation and attack. The stance begins

\footnote{2} The formulation of these hypotheses owes to six hypothetical relationships between life stress and illness identified by Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1981:20). The accretive and filter hypotheses represent a combination of ideas contained within the victimization, additive burden, and event proneness hypotheses delineated by these authors.
to serve as the overriding orienting attitude in everyday life. An Only One assimilates more and more life experiences to convince her that the world is indeed a lonely and threatening environment. And as the filter hypothesis suggests, the exacerbation of the stance enlarges the risk of criminally homicidal acts.

Some final comments

Phenomenological applications and the construction of theoretical stances can illuminate the motivation behind criminal homicide and other forms of deviance. Exploring human behavior through the common sense understandings of everyday life described by others may bring us closer to ourselves as well since we all are inexorably bound to one another in what we call society. Unfortunately, we are not always tolerant of or open to the recitations of criminals. Many of us believe that convicted felons too often use the pathos of their lives to justify criminal deeds. Indignation surfaces from a collective conscience jarred by criminal events. This is especially so with criminal homicide since it strikes at the very principle of coexistence.

Popular author Jerzy Kozinski once befriended convicted murderer and author-come-late Jack Henry Abbott. Kozinski's friendship was predicated upon his compassion for a man who vividly portrayed himself as brutalized by life's forces. That compassion gave way to anger as the relationship developed. In an emotional letter to Abbott, Kozinski wrote
that he could not abide Abbott's undying devotion to pain experienced long ago. Kozinski could not forgive Abbott his violence and the sorrow he had brought others (see Kakutani, 1981).

We do not aim to excuse criminal violence but we do strive to understand its causes. While Abbott's unyielding anger may turn us away, we should understand that it is real for him and likely contributed to his deeds. The insidious quality of the Only Ones is that their common sense understanding permeates their role-playing in many life arenas. Abbott is as trapped by his common sense stance in the world as are the other Only Ones in this study. Once firmly in place, the stance is most difficult to dislodge. We should direct our attention to how it is planted and how it matures.

There are probably tens of thousands of Only Ones in American society alone. This particular common sense stance they assume probably is not confined by the boundaries of gender, race, age, religion, or status. Some groups may be at greater risk but the remaining are not immune. As there is drama in each human life, there is pain, suffering, and sorrow. Some are hurt through natural events. Others are frustrated because they do not have what they want or truly need. Still others are harmed, physically and psychically, intentionally and otherwise, by their fellows. Life proves a constant struggle for some. Love, death, childhood, parenthood, and work ask too much of them and, in the end,
they cannot meet life's challenge.

Clearly, the ubiquity of the Only Ones, with their characteristic stance is a threat to any social matrix. The 76 women of this study exemplify the degree to which the threat is masked. Previous to their acts of homicide, these women were not especially violent. Rarely had their prior behavior occasioned official criminal processing or public disapproval. The effects of life loss and aggression were accretive but, for years, escaped public notice because the women confined them to the private domains of personal mental and physical health. Beneath the detectable surfaces of interaction, common sense understandings, engrafted with anger, loneliness, and resentment, develop and harden. In time, the understandings are unveiled in homicidal acts. The Only Ones strike out at the world and the people around them with a ferocity and intensity we hadn't known was within them. And we are taken aback, slightly confused by and angry with their aggression and the pain they brought others through the killings. In our zeal to mete out retributive justice to the offenders, our attention riveted to the task, we lose sight of the countless others in the process of becoming Only Ones.

There are steps we can take to decrease the number of criminal homicides in American society. All of these plans of action are designed to interfere with the life processes identified in this work as associated with becoming an Only One. First, it is necessary to understand that life stress
is not always deleterious. A modicum of stress can be healthy, providing some required challenge in everyday life. The absence of challenge makes for a rather tedious existence. At the same time that we acknowledge the positive role of stress in everyday living, we should also recognize that an overabundance of stress can have negative consequences. Mental, physical, and behavioral problems can accrue from an excess of stress-producing events and conditions. The pace of life can be a determinant of one's overall well-being.

Second, we must identify and address those sociogenic conditions that appear to nurture the development of the Only Ones. We might short-circuit the process of becoming an Only One through the correction of negative social structural conditions associated with it. One theme emerging in this study, for example, concerned the lingering presence of violence and aggression throughout the lives of the women. Some of the violence may be attributable to idiosyncratic forces but much of it may be culturally patterned. The continued circulation of cultural and subcultural values that promote violence should give us pause.

There are other structural conditions implicated by this study. Poverty and inequality of gender roles proved to be stressful for the women. Relatedly, childcare provisions among working women seemed to be somewhat problematic. Perhaps the economic structure could better
accomodate the vast number of female heads of households through flexible work schedules or job-sharing. More publically and privately subsidized daycare facilities might also ease the stress for many working parents. Offering educational opportunities to those who left school prematurely might assure some of better job prospects. The gradual elimination of discriminatory labor practices would lessen the stress for many as well.

Many of these suggestions are not popular in an age of fiscal and political conservatism. However, if we are serious in our desire to lessen the stress that appears to contribute to disvalued behavior, we should understand that some cultural and structural eutherics are in order. Social policies in the public and private sectors can be engineered to minimize the effects of structural stressors upon our everyday lives. To ignore the sociogenic stressors empirically linked to ill-health and harmful behavior would be folly.

Third, we must attend to those psychogenic events and conditions identified in this and other studies as harmful to individuals and groups. The Only One is an inner state of consciousness formed from the interaction between a selective self and the environment. In turn, the state serves as a basis for behavior that can adversely affect the environment. Criminal homicide is one example of a negative consequence. Some environmental events we can do little to prevent. Death, for example, is inevitable. Since we are
mortal creatures, the deaths of those close to us will continue to be a shared human experience. Similarly, we have little say in other acts of nature such as miscarriage, natural disaster, illness, or congenital disease. While the control of seemingly random environmental events eludes us, we can better prepare the countless number of us who encounter these and other life changes.

The growth of community mental health clinics is an encouraging development. Most of us need help with adjustment from time to time. Local programs can make that help more accessible. Limited accessibility appeared to be an obstacle for many of the women in this study who believed such programs could have helped them. We might also develop a greater number of therapeutic and intervention strategies for children whose mental health is jeopardized. In this study, the problems of adult life could often be traced to the life currents of childhood. Parenting classes and lectures on the local level or through a mass medium could assist those parents who are not prepared, who have a weak support network on which to rely, or who approach childrearing with an overly restrictive and violent slant. Psychological services dealing with adjustment problems in other life arenas such as work and marriage might also be helpful. Many of these services will require an understanding that those who are in most need of help are often the most resistant to it. The mates who were prone to beating many of the women in the study, for example, seldom
thought they would benefit from therapy.

Aside from therapeutic services, we might also adopt a proactive orientation to better equip us for adjustment problems associated with life change. Behavioral science courses offered at the primary, secondary, and college or vocational levels might help us better understand why we behave in the ways we do. Popular magazines and television shows directly geared toward public education about behavior could enlighten us, too. We desperately need a widely-spread understanding of the elements of human action. Here, behavioral science, as imperfect as it is, can contribute. Too often, the sense we make of the social world is informed by the maladaptive orienting attitudes toward everyday life we've developed over the years. We grow less and less receptive to other interpretations and less tolerant of other people. Consequently, we may be enlarging the distance between us and endangering the welfare of the group.

What we need to do, above all, is to make a greater effort in developing what Jack Douglas has called the theoretic stance. Stepping back from the world, if only for brief moments, allows one to examine the forces behind common sense understandings. The temporary detachment from the whirl of everyday life holds great promise not only for specialists but for the laity as well. One can suspend action and examine the thought, action, and roles of the self, introspection, and of others, extrospection. Informed
by the advances in behavioral science, a theoretic stance provides insight into the human condition. Such insight can make the adjustment to the workings of everyday living more manageable and perhaps less consequential to our health and behavior.

There is a comfort that comes with knowledge about ourselves, others, and the relationships among us. Less room remains for the intrusion of maladaptive interpretations of everyday life - interpretations similar to those held by the women of the study and that seemed to play a large part in their criminal violence. The pursuit of theoretic stances toward the human experience just might enrich our lives together.
APPENDICES
Data for much of Humphrey and Palmer's research on stress and criminal homicide were gleaned from criminal record files on offenders in North Carolina. Most of this information concerns male offenders but these researchers have recently attempted to gather more data on female offenders. While they are not yet finished with this stage of their research, they offer some intriguing preliminary findings on stress comparisons between female criminal homicide offenders and non-violent female felons.

Using the identical stress indices they have used with male offenders, Humphrey and Palmer apparently find significant differences between a small group of female violent felons (N=34) and a group of nonviolent felons (N=30) in exposure to life stress. In all but two out of 12 stress indices, violent offenders manifest higher mean scores than do nonviolent offenders. These tentative findings suggest that female criminal homicide offenders generally experience greater life stress than their nonviolent peers. The findings give added support to the notion that the lives of women who kill are characterized by relatively high levels of stress.
Appendix Two

Table A2: Relation of Victim-Offender relationship to Type of Criminal Homicide Conviction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of criminal homicide conviction</th>
<th>Victim-offender relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder one</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder two</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary manslaughter</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary manslaughter</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=75)</td>
<td>(N=48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Three
Childhood Loss Index

Indicators

Death of first brother
Death of second brother
Death of third brother
Death of first sister
Death of second sister
Death of third sister
Mother's death
Father's death
Arrest of brother
Arrest of sister
Arrest of mother
Arrest of father
Brother's suicide threat
Sister's suicide threat
Mother's suicide threat
Father's suicide threat
Divorce of natural parents
Move
Separated from parents for one or more months
Serious illness
Serious injury
Stayed back a grade in school
Dropped out of school
Death of first friend
Death of second friend

For each of the four indices in this work, a respondent is given one point for a relevant indicator and no point if the indicator does not apply. There are a total of 25 indicators in the childhood loss index. Possible scores range from zero to 25, inclusive.
Appendix Four

Childhood Aggression Index

Indicators

Parental attack with object
Father's sexual assault
Other's sexual assault
Brother's physical attack
Sister's physical attack
Violence between parents
Threat of physical punishment
Physical punishment
Father's gun ownership
Mother's gun ownership
Sibling's gun ownership
Throwout of home threat
Throwout of home act
Paddling or beating at school

There are a total of 15 indicators in the index and scores range from zero to 15, inclusive.
Appendix Five

Adult Loss Index

Indicators:

Work absence
Mortgage foreclosure
Loan repossession
Cut in pay
Loss of home to catastrophe or disaster
Move
Divorce
Mate's infidelity
Abortion
Miscarriage
Death of a child
Loss of fertility
Loss of driver's license
Mate's arrest
Child's arrest
Physical illness
Physical injury
Loss of a pet
Death of a close one

There are a total of 19 indicators in the index. Index scores thus range from zero to 19, inclusive.
Appendix Six

Adult Aggression Index

Indicators

Verbal assault by mate
Physical assault by mate
Hospitalized after marital violence
Forced sex in love relationship
Crime victimization
Criminal accusation
Verbal assault by children
Physical assault by children
Sued by others
Physical assault by friend
Hospitalized after fight with friend
Physical assault by other
Hospitalized after fight with other
Serious accident

There are a total of 14 indicators in the index. Index scores range from zero to 14, inclusive.
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