

- **serial murder** A type of criminal homicide that involves the killing of several victims in three or more separate events.
- **visionary serial killers** Serial killers motivated by auditory or visual hallucinations.
- **comfort serial killers** Serial killers motivated by financial or material gain.

- **hedonistic serial killers** Serial killers who derive pleasure from killing.
- **power seekers** Serial killers who relish having power over another human being.

In his research using state-level data, Parker tested several hypotheses derived from competing theoretical perspectives about the effect of alcohol on homicide.³⁵ Based on the victim-offender relationship, five types of homicides were identified: "robbery, other felony, family intimate, family other, and primary nonintimate."³⁶ Poverty had a stronger effect on both robbery and other felony homicides in states with "above average rates of alcohol consumption";³⁷ alcohol consumption had direct effects on two of the three types of primary homicide.

Serial murder is a criminal homicide that "involves the killing of several victims in three or more separate events."³⁸ Criminologists **James Alan Fox** and **Jack Levin** have written extensively on both serial killing and mass murder.

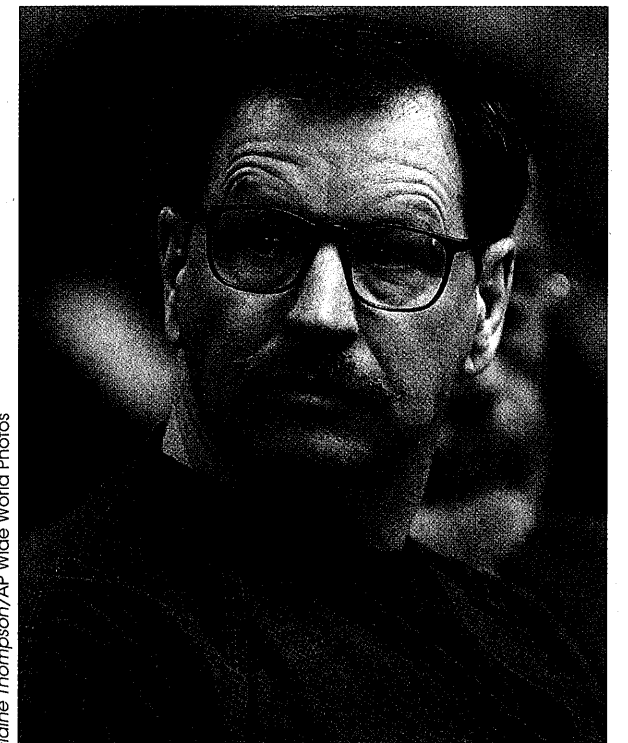
Contrary to some commonly held beliefs, the vast majority of serial killers are not legally insane or medically psychotic. "They are more cruel than crazy," according to Fox and Levin. "Their crimes may be sickening but their minds are not necessarily sick."³⁹ Many serial killers are diagnosed as sociopaths, a term for those with antisocial personalities. Because they lack a conscience, sociopaths do not consider the needs or basic humanity of others in their decision making or their view of the world. They do not see themselves as being bound by conventional rules or by the expectations of others. Sociopaths view other people as "tools to be manipulated for the purpose of maximizing their personal pleasure."⁴⁰ However, many sociopaths are neither serial killers nor involved in violent crime, even though "they may lie, cheat, or steal."⁴¹

Although not an exclusive characteristic of serial killers, sexual sadism is a strong pattern. In many of the typologies developed by researchers, this characteristic forms the basis for a type of serial killer. Typologies of serial killers are organized around different, but generally related, themes. Some criminologists identify four different types of serial killers: **Visionary serial killers** hear voices and have visions that are the basis for a compulsion to murder; **comfort serial killers** are motivated by financial or material gain; **hedonistic serial killers** murder because they find it enjoyable and derive psychological pleasure from killing; and **power seekers** operate from some position of authority over others, and their killings usually involve a period where the killer plays a kind of cat-and-mouse game with the victim.⁴² Fox and Levin offer a three-part typology. They classify serial murderers as thrill-motivated, mission-oriented, or expedience-directed killers. *Thrill-motivated killers*, the most common type of serial killer, may be of two types: the sexual sadist and the dominance killer. *Mission-oriented killers* are not as common and generally have either a reformist or visionary orientation. Reformists want to rid the world of evil, and visionaries hear voices commanding them to do certain activities. Visionary killers are quite rare and tend to

be genuinely psychotic. *Expedience-directed serial killers* are driven by either profit or protection. Profit-driven killers may kill for financial or material gain, and protection-oriented killers commit murder to mask other crimes, such as robbery.⁴³

Female Serial Killers

Although the vast majority of serial killers are male, there have been female serial killers, and the patterns of their activities are sometimes distinct from those of male serialists.⁴⁴ Female serial killers typically select their victims from among people they know, unlike male serial killers, who tend to target strangers.⁴⁵ A type of serial killer found primarily among women is the *disciple killer*, who murders as the result of the influence of a charismatic personality. The women who killed at the behest of Charles Manson were of this type. Male serial killers often commit their crimes some distance from their homes, generally without regard to type of neighborhood. However, geographic stability characterizes almost all of the known female serial killers.⁴⁶



Elaine Thompson/AP Wide World Photos

Gary L. Ridgway, age 54, the self-confessed Green River strangler. Ridgway, reputed to be the nation's worst captured serial killer, admitted to killing 48 women over a 20-year period in the Pacific Northwest. He is now serving life in prison without possibility of parole. Why did it take so long to stop Ridgway?