

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, public desire for the containment of mentally ill persons through their identification and subsequent distancing from society, was sustained for the most part by collaboration between the mental health and judicial systems through appeals to “public safety,” whether on ethical, legal, social, or medical grounds. With the invention of the “psychopath,” common goals between psychiatry and criminal justice became even more pronounced, one might say, through discourses promulgated by Cleckley and others. Psychiatry criminalized mental illness and medicalized criminal justice, so much so that the two systems shared goals (containment/excision rather than treatment) and methods (detection of “hidden” “threats”) to such an extent that “mental illness” and “deviance” became, if not fully synonymous, then at least implicative of one another. For instance, Hare based his *PCL* on Cleckley’s work with social “deviants” and the *PCL-R* functions, by and large, as a diagnostic tool used on criminal populations. Therefore, “psychopathy” as a clinical construct has also always functioned not as a diagnosis or condition in need of psychiatric attention, but rather as a criminal label; in other words, a tautology that *explains why* a person remains under legal restraint through the “fact” of its application: one remains under legal restraint because one is a psychopath and because one is a psychopath one should remain under legal restraint.

The horror film represents the “traditional” Clecklian-Hare psychopath for public consumption but also broadens the reach of the medico-legal dimensions of the diagnosis by gathering together features

Table A.1 Phillips' categories of binary distinctions violated in the slasher film genre

Victims vs	Disabled Slasher
Normal	Abnormal
Urban	Rural
Clean,	Dirty
Attractive	Ugly
Young	Old
Sexual	Asexual
Thin	Obese
Eat food	Cannibalize

of psychopathy, psychosis, and psychiatric disability under the slang umbrella of “psychopath.” Residuals of the eugenicists’ “feeble-minded offender,” early psychiatry’s “sexual psychopath,” and the public’s unpredictable, violent “psychotic” that Wahl denounces, all fuse together into the “psychopath” *as well as* operate independently of one another as images of lurking criminality. Many recognizable horror films from the late seventies to the early nineties (when the genre was at its peak) feature physically and psychiatrically disabled protagonists: *The Hills Have Eyes* (mutated cannibals); *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Leatherface, mute and developmentally disabled); and *Friday the Thirteenth* (Jason, mute and developmentally disabled). These films complicate the horror genre’s insistence on binary divisions by drawing under their purview any possible mental illness and adding them to the medico-judicial register. However, Phillips (2005) presents a short list of divisions he says “are commonly violated in the slasher genre [and which are] consistently present between the two groups of characters depicted in most slasher horror storylines that depict the disabled as killers” (p. 72) (see Table A.1).

Phillips (2005) views these divisions as microcosms of cultural formation processes (p. 72), and in fact, similar arguments have been made in previous chapters. However, while binaries remain ever-present in horror films, and the threat of their eradication necessitates the appearance of the panic figure, previous discussions also show two things: first, the reason the panic figure exists is to protect binaries that the mentally ill protagonist threatens to expose *as illusory*, and second, the *specific* oppositions Phillips identifies do not always appear together. For example, he omits *Halloween* from his essay, a film that violates many of his boundary divisions. The victims in *Halloween* live in a quiet suburban area, with the asylum housing Myers placed in a sort of hinterland further from the

rural suburbs. While the victims in *Halloween* are young and attractive, Myers is not disfigured; at one point the audience even gets to see his face and it is the face of a young, attractive man (Carpenter 1978), which violates Phillips' 'Young/Old' binary. Also, Myers is neither obese nor a cannibal. As the foundational "slasher" film, *Halloween*, rather than reinforcing binaries through violation, demonstrates a fundamental complexity: that dichotomies exist within dichotomies within dichotomies, dichotomies consume dichotomies, and spaces exist where dichotomies only *seem* to function. And it is these complexities, disguised within one binary opposition, which the panic figure emerges to protect. In fact, the panic figure's existence depends on and comes out of society's hidden reservoir of intermeshed discourses. The panic figure's ambiguousness represents the beginning of the failure of illusory binaries, and his or her liminal social status is only possible because of the rigorously denied and protected fact that binaries cannot truly be paired, except by force.

In horror films, for example, the "psychopath" represents disability (contra "ability") multiplied into a hyperdisability surpassing "normal" bodies into supradisability, marking their victims as either body-oriented (teenage sexuality) or mind-oriented (those who do not believe the panic figure). The psychopath appears as a paradoxical figure of almost supernatural power when normative social standards of "dis"/"ability" demands he or she occupy a subordinate place within the social hierarchy. The cause of such representational paradoxes emerges from panics over the failure of a very different sort of binary opposition: the desire to remove the hypervisible body of the "feble-minded offender" versus the desire to negate the hyperelusiveness of the mind of the "psychopath." Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2009) locates "The goal of observation" in a shared cultural need "to make the unknown intelligible" through "observation and display" (p. 48). And, as discussed in earlier chapters regarding mentally ill as well as physically disabled persons, the social desire "to make the unknown intelligible" by conspicuous proximity (to define normalcy) and by conspicuous absence (containment and excision) produces insupportable contradictions. Such problematic social needs are played out through disabled persons' bodies as signifiers of corresponding mental illnesses that in turn signify criminality, that is to say, by imagining all possible "abnormalities" in *one location*.

Display, however, means not only being constantly present, but also being constantly and *conspicuously* present to others at all times.

As Garland-Thomson (2009) notes, “We must encounter something foreign *regularly* to make it native” (p. 48). Negative repetitions of mentally ill persons as remorseless and homicidal psychotics randomly preying on innocents, reinforced to familiarity, overshadow more accurate and sympathetic portrayals in popular culture and thus encourage stigmatization (Wahl 1995, pp. 106–107). However, Stephen Harper (2009) accuses critics engaged with issues surrounding mental illness and stigma of applying a universalist method to a wide variety of genres and types of cultural productions, and advises them to adopt a more nuanced approach (p. 40). He faults Wahl in particular for promoting “conservative notions about the cultural value of popular texts” as well as “assum[ing] that realism is among the aims of any media text” (Harper 2009, pp. 40, 52). Harper brings up a valid point. Wahl’s text may potentially serve as a “conservative rhetoric of moral panic over popular culture” instead of working against moral panic over violence and mental illness (Harper 2009, p. 41). Yet, while Harper correctly articulates suspicion of any project aiming for a totalizing principle or critique, he misses Wahl’s most salient point: the discrepancy in the *amount* of negative representations. As Harper points out, to argue for the abolishment of a single representation borders on censorship and constitutes a naïve and idealistic approach to aesthetic production. However, a lack of, or an imbalance in, the diversity of representations does undoubtedly play a large role in the formation of popular opinion towards marginalized groups. By combining Wahl and Harper, with an eye towards a more nuanced awareness of differences between reality and claims to realism, both cultural productions and their *cultural function* can be adequately addressed. I do not think that blanket censorship of representations in cultural productions constitutes an answer to this complex problem. As stated early on, I believe that careful consideration of representations during the creative process as well as a mix of positive and negative portrayals (with the balance in favor of positive representations) might initiate public gestures towards changes in attitudes about mentally ill persons in the medical, legal, governmental, and public spheres.

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INDEX

A

- Adolescent Family Life Act (ALFA),
107
- African-American psychopaths, 151
- African-American serial killers, 152
Wayne Williams, 153
- America's Most Wanted*, 9, 128
- Americans with Disabilities Act, 93
- Anti-psychiatry, 8, 74, 77, 78
- The Art of Horror*, 1
- Asylum, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 24, 45, 46, 53,
61, 71–73, 76–78, 80, 81, 86–90,
92, 104, 106, 119–122, 147, 166

B

- Baldwin, James, 153
- Barker, Clive, 1
on popular culture, 1, 3
- Baxstrom v. Herold*, 71
- Behavioral Science Unit, 107. *See also*
Douglas, John E.
- Bentley, Eric, 18
- Berkowitz, Sam (aka Son of Sam), 102

- Binary divisions, 166
- Birnbaum, Karl, 31
- Bloch, Robert, 55
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 4
- Bracero Program, 41

C

- Carter, Jimmy, 77
- Carter, Rosalyn, 78
- Child of God*, 8, 64–68, 70, 140
- Civil commitment, 78, 80, 106, 113,
117
- Cleckley, Hervey, 4, 28
influence across time of, 4, 28, 32,
38
popularization of “mask of sanity”
by, 31, 74
psychopath profile of, 31, 43, 105
- Cohen, Stanley, 7, 15
- Crime, 5–8, 11–17, 19–21, 23, 25,
27, 32, 35, 37–40, 42, 47, 54,
55, 60–62, 65, 67, 72, 79, 85,
87, 94, 104–108, 110, 112–114,

117, 123, 124, 128–131, 133, 135, 143, 144, 146, 149, 153
Crime Classification Manual, 139
 Criminal profiling, 115, 139, 143. *See also* mindhunter

D

Deinstitutionalization, 2, 3, 5–8, 20, 53, 54, 71, 72, 77–80, 89, 90, 92, 101, 104
 community care, 2, 53, 77, 92, 104
 Developmental disability, 8, 13
 Disclosure, mental illness and, 94. *See also* stigma
 Douglas, John E., 7, 115, 123
 Douglas, Mary, 66, 123, 124, 139
Down the Road, 9, 156, 157
 Dreiser, Theodore, 8, 16–18, 20–22
 Durkheim, Emil, 21
 repressive/restorative legal responses to crime, 21, 31, 42

E

Ebert, Roger, 153
 Eugenics, 12

F

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 107
The Federal Role in Investigation of Serial Violent Crime, 113
 Feeble-minded offender, 8, 14–16, 18–20, 23, 24, 28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 40, 44, 54, 106, 109, 127, 140, 157, 166, 167
 Hans Beckert as, 8, 24
 Isadore Berchansky as, 8
 Fish, Albert, 27
 Folk devil, 8, 15, 21, 22, 35, 37, 38, 40, 54, 66, 67, 87, 118

feeble-minded offender as, 38
 sexual psychopath as, 38
 Foster, Jodi, 111, 124, 146
 Foucault, Michel, 135
 Freud, Sigmund, 13

G

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie, 167
 Gein, Ed, 54, 63
 Goffman, Irving, 72
 Grob, Gerald R., 11, 46, 53, 77, 78, 92, 104

H

Halloween (film), 8, 80, 81, 166, 167
 Carol J. Clover, 80
 cinematic strategies, 82
 Vera Dika, 80
The Hand of the Potter, 8, 16, 18, 20, 21, 24, 35, 44, 54, 91, 140
 Hare, Robert D., 148
Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer (film), 130, 135
 Hippocratic Oath, 87, 91
 Horror genre, 79, 91, 166

I

Individualism, 71, 75, 104, 116, 119
 Insanity Defense, 111, 112, 117
 Insanity Defense Reform Act (IDRA), 112, 113
 International Congress on Mental Hygiene, 30

J

Jorgensen, Christine, 56
 Juvenile delinquency, 11, 79

K

Kennedy, John F., 2, 53
 Klein, Melanie, 81

L

Laing, R. D., 75
 Language, 20, 21, 77, 86, 91, 125, 140, 143
 and community, 86
 in federal hearings, 140
 in mass media, 75
 as melodrama, 91, 143
 in moral panic, 20
 and "public safety", 165
 and repetition, 15
 as stigma, 77
 and storytelling/folklore, 61
 Law enforcement, 8, 9, 27, 30, 33, 62, 104, 106–109, 111, 113–116, 120, 121, 124, 127, 128, 131, 134, 141, 143, 144, 148
 competing with psychiatry, 33
The Leopard Man, 8, 40–42, 44, 54, 80
Lessard v. Schmidt, 78
 Lucas, Henry Lee, 134

M

Mailer, Norman, 63
The Mask of Sanity, 28–34, 40, 74, 106, 107, 111, 124
 "Mask of sanity", 36, 40, 60, 61, 80, 82, 89, 101, 117, 118, 130, 131, 153
 as mental illness, 32, 101, 107, 111, 141. *See also* "Psychopathy; Performance of"
 performance of; masks as, 82
 Media, 1, 4, 5, 16, 19, 27, 35, 61, 75, 90, 101–104, 117, 134, 152, 153, 168

moral panic, 28, 34, 168
 representations of mental illness in, 101
 Melodrama, 18–20, 36–39, 88, 91, 124, 129, 130, 142, 149
 cultural mode, 7, 19, 20, 39, 74, 124
 good/evil binary in, 25
 narrative mode, 7, 20, 124
 Meloy, J. Reid, 140
 Mental Health Act, 46
 Mental hygiene movement, 7
 Mental illness, 2–5, 7, 8, 12, 16–19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 32, 35, 39, 40, 44, 47, 54–56, 58, 59, 62, 63, 72–79, 86, 88, 90–94, 101, 103–105, 107, 111–113, 119, 120, 122, 124, 125, 139, 140, 143, 146, 149, 152, 155, 157, 162, 165, 166, 168
 and contagion, fears of, 157
 and homelessness, 104
 as public health problem, 101
 and visibility, 94, 102
 Mental Retardation and Community Health Centers Act, 53
 Mindhunter, 8, 9, 104, 116–119, 121–123, 125, 139, 141, 143–146, 148, 151, 154. *See also* criminal profiling
 Mindhunter (book), 139. *See also* Douglas, John E.
 myth of the, 119
 Mindhunter (book), 139. *See also* Douglas, John E.
 Model Penal Code, 62
 Moral panic, 6, 7, 19, 20, 22, 23, 28, 35–37, 39, 54, 61
 the "inventory", 34, 35
 Myers, Michael, 82

N

National Center for the Analysis of
Violent Crime (NCAVC), 105,
117
National Committee for Mental
Hygiene, 11
National Crime Information Center
(NCIC), 108
National Institute for Mental Health,
46, 92
Neurobiological determinism, 32

P

Panic figure, 6, 7, 16, 20–22, 28,
34, 36, 37, 42, 44, 59–61, 74,
81, 85, 87–91, 104, 105, 107,
115–118, 120, 122, 125, 128,
129, 141, 144–146, 148, 151,
155, 156, 166, 167
Ann Rule as, 7, 105
Clarice Starling as, 122
Dan Henniman as, 157
Frank Lacroix as, 154
Hervey Cleckley as, 28
John Douglas as, 7, 115
Kay Scarpetta as (Dr.), 141
Lila Crane as, 6
Loomis as (Dr.), 81, 87
liminal status of, 20
Rhea Berchansky as, 20
Robert Hare as, 148
social function of, 20, 129
Will Graham as, 122, 155
William Somerset as, 145
Parens patriae, 12, 15, 78
Possession (novel), 107, 108
Postmortem, 9, 141, 143, 145
President's Committee on Mental
Health, 2, 53, 77
Primal scene, 83, 85
Psychiatrist as hero, 8, 38, 39, 87

Psycho (film), 114
Psycho (novel), 8, 55
Psycho II (film), 90
Psychoanalysis, 14, 58
Psychopath, 23, 24, 28–31, 34–37,
39, 40, 43, 44, 63–65, 71, 81,
87, 89, 102, 106, 109, 116–119,
123, 130, 134, 140, 141,
148–152, 154, 155, 165–167
as incurable, 106
Bob Goodall as, 153
“death” of, 40, 45
Hannibal Lecter as, 9
Michael Myers as, 85
as violent, 5, 29, 31, 35, 54, 63,
111, 166
Psychopathy, 5, 23, 29–32, 36, 44, 45,
63, 73, 74, 83, 106, 116, 141,
144, 148–153, 156, 162, 165,
166
performance of, 148, 156; Danny
Glover, 153
Psychopathy Checklist, 148
Psychopathy Checklist Revised, 148,
151–154, 165

R

Red Dragon (film), 117, 121
Red Dragon (novel), 117, 121
Reptilian stare. *See* psychopathy, per-
formance of
Ronald Reagan, 111, 124
Rouse v. Cameron, 72
Rule, Ann, 7, 8, 105, 107, 113

S

Scheff, Thomas J., 75
Senate Hearings on Serial Murder,
106, 107, 113

Serial murder, 8, 9, 62, 63, 102, 106, 107, 109, 124, 125, 152, 153, 156

Seven, 9, 145, 146, 151

Sex crimes, 5, 8, 9, 14, 27, 33, 38, 39, 45, 47, 64, 85, 127

Sexual psychopath, 5, 7–9, 22, 27, 28, 33, 38, 40, 44–47, 54, 61, 69, 74, 90, 102, 104, 105, 107, 109, 111, 113, 117, 118, 127, 157, 160, 161, 166

Lester Ballard as, 65

Norman Bates as, 7

William Reach as, 157

Sexuality, 7, 13–15, 19, 22, 24, 55–57, 70, 83, 85, 158, 161, 167

“Slasher”, 54, 79, 167

Slasher film, 80

Stigma, 5, 8, 9, 16, 18, 37, 47, 75–78, 90, 92–94, 101, 103, 104, 111, 112, 146, 151, 157, 162, 168

in mass media, 75

mental illness, 8, 59, 73, 75, 94, 101, 111, 146, 151, 162, 168

Otto F. Wahl on, 92, 94, 168

and slang, 76. *See also* language use

Switchback, 151–154, 156

Szasz, Thomas, 73

T

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, 80

Title XX, 107. *See also* Adolescent Family Life Act (ALFA)

True crime TV, 129

V

Violent Crime Apprehension Program (VICAP), 105

W

Wahl, Otto F., 4

on horror films, 166

on stigma, 92, 94, 168

Walsh, Adam, 125, 127

Walsh, John, 8, 9, 105, 109, 125

Wright, Sarah, 7, 19

Z

Zodiac Killer, 102, 103