



Copyright © 2023 *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*
All rights reserved.
ISSN: 1070-8286

Representations of Executions: An Examination of
Ritual and Accuracy in Popular Films

Emilie Dyer

Americana World Community Center

D. Mark Austin

University of Louisville

Abstract

To understand the modern ritualized execution process, many members of the public presumably rely on social constructions in the media. These media messages are a crucial element of capital punishment because they may guide the beliefs and opinions of the public (Heath & Gilbert, 1996). We use Ethnographic Content Analysis (Althiede, 1987), to compare representations of government sanctioned executions and their rituals, in a sample of popular films that focus on the death penalty and execution, with the actual practices used in the United States. Seven concepts related to the execution process were examined. These include: (1) techniques of neutralization; (2) expressions of emotion or repression of emotions by corrections officers; (3) admission of guilt or verbal/non-verbal cues of tacit consent on behalf of the inmate; (4) verbal/non-verbal cues from the execution team that pacify the inmate; (5) execution ritual acts that caused an inmate to breakdown or otherwise become resigned to death, and (6) signs of executioner stress displayed by corrections officers. Finally, (7) the accuracy of the execution ritual portrayed in the films is examined. With some relatively minor deviations, we found that ritualistic execution practices were fairly accurately represented in this small sample of films.

Keywords: capital punishment, film, ritual, corrections

Introduction

Despite the controversy inherent in much of the dialogue about capital punishment, the average American citizen knows very little about the actual process of execution as it often occurs in the obscurity of prisons, located far from populated areas under the cover of night (Bessler, 1997). For the most part, the public's exposure is limited to mass media representations. These may include editorials, news reports, feature films, and popular books. As such, it is important to examine the process of execution and its relation to the media that construct a social reality of execution for the public. For this project, we examine the accuracy of representations concerning the rituals and practices in a select group of popular films. The portrayal of this ritual in popular culture, through film, is considered in order to further develop an analysis of the accuracy and representativeness of socially constructed images of execution. That is, to what degree do these films accurately portray the execution process in the United States?

The Execution Ritual and Participants

Earlier attempts to make the death penalty humane were deemed insufficient by the Supreme Court in the landmark case of *Furman v. Georgia* 1972 (408 U.S. 238), based on the Eight Amendment of the Constitution because it did not guarantee that the sentence was not "cruel and unusual." *Gregg v. Georgia* 1976 (428 U.S. 153) overturned the 1972 decision. New statutes were developed to guide the use of the death penalty and allowed for the consideration of issues such as mitigating and aggravating circumstances, state of mind, and prior record. The first post-*Furman* execution was in 1977 (Johnson, 1998).

Rationalization of Execution

These decisions and new statutes helped to ensure that modern executions in the U.S. are well planned events that feature a high degree of rationality. Explanations of rationalization, developed by Max Weber (1905), describe how society adopts the certain characteristics that create a hyper-rationalized social world. Executions in the United States have moved from public affairs of ritual to acts carried out in more private venues with a prescribed antiseptic approach (Bandes, 2018; Banner, 2002). In general, each part of the execution process is timed exactly from the last meal down to the amount of time it takes for the inmate to be killed. Elements of control persist throughout the execution process, from the machines that carry out the sentence to the simplified tasks of the strap down team. Each step of the execution process disregards and degrades the humanity of the condemned (Johnson, 1998). Examining the formalized execution process will allow for an assessment of the accuracy of select popular films that portray this process.

The Execution Team

Execution team members play an important role in making sure that the tasks follow prescribed rules and procedures, even though the process for execution may vary slightly depending on the method. Being selected as a member of the execution team is an honor within the corrections field. Officers who are chosen for this work typically receive more job autonomy than their counterparts in the general population and the position requires a level of extreme discretion due to the stigma that is synonymous with death work (Johnson, 1998; Osofsky & Osofsky 2002; Osofsky, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2005). The most highly valued qualities of corrections officers on an execution team are professionalism, dignity, and discretion (Cabana, 1996; Johnson, 1998; Osofsky, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2005), allowing them to participate in the ritual of execution without displaying emotion or other signs of judgment that might affect the convicted inmate or witnesses to the execution.

The execution team rehearses their duties prior to the execution, with one member standing in for the convicted inmate. These rehearsals prepare the team for the actual execution and facilitate a deeper trust amongst members as they work to carry out their duties with precision. Although the equipment used to complete the execution is not functioning during a rehearsal, acting as a stand-in for the convicted inmate requires that one trusts fellow team members, which is a necessary component for the execution team (Cabana, 1996; Johnson, 1998). This procedure also functions to dull the emotions of the officers to reduce the stress surrounding the situation. Each team member is usually paired with another member to provide an extra layer of support and unity within the group (Johnson, 1998; Osofsky & Osofsky, 2002; Lifton & Michell, 2000). Members of an execution team can be viewed as performing emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983).

Emotional Labor and Alienation

According to Hochschild (1983) emotional labor “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (p. 7). Although emotions may be viewed as individual constructs, Kusenbach and Loseke (2013) remind us to examine the larger social context of emotions and their construction. Execution team members must constantly manage their emotions and suppress feelings, including guilt, sympathy, and attachment, as they perform their duties. Officers try to remind themselves of the heinous crimes committed by death row inmates so that they can suppress feelings of sympathy and distance themselves emotionally from the inmate they are about to put to death (Johnson, 1998). Ritualizing the process can assist in managing these emotions and disperse the responsibility of the execution. Despite all of the protocols of professionalism and the selection process, serving on an execution team can lead to stress and internal conflict (Chiappetta, 2021). Rituals can provide comfort and predictability to this process (Turner, 1986).

The Execution Ritual

A brief examination of ritualism can help in understanding the why these rituals are important and how they are portrayed in films. A ritual is a set of specific procedures, actions, conversations, and/or symbolic materials that create an expression of a subject (Smith, 1996). Rituals allow individuals to attach a higher meaning to the actions they perform as individual perceptions are unified to create a collective idea used by participants to interpret the world (Durkheim, 1912). During the ritual, members reach a heightened sense of emotional energy, described by Durkheim as moral cohesion (Alexander & Smith, 2005; Durkheim, 1912). The story a ritual lays out, for those participating, acts to strengthen their convictions about a subject and/or define their opinions about the ritualized object and/or actions (Austin, 2009). This ritual softens the subjective experiences of those involved so that they might recount the same collective sentiments about the ritual and the subject of the ritual (Smith, 1996). Ritualistic features such as a mutual focus of attention, barriers that exclude outsiders, and the shared mood lead to solidarity of the group and standards of morality (Brown, 2011). It helps to ensure that participants “will be more likely to enact those rituals again” (Turner, 1986, p. 40). Portions of the ritual, such as the last meal, can insure those involved in the execution process that humanity is still present (Jones, 2014).

Each corrections officer on the execution team is charged with a specific but simple task that contributes to the work and ritual of the entire team. For example, one member may be responsible for strapping down the inmate’s left leg while another is responsible for the right leg (Johnson, 1996; Osofsky & Osofsky, 2002). Breaking down the work into less complex actions allows each member to take a smaller role in the execution, thus diffusing responsibility and leaving less room for error.

The inmate also plays a role in the execution ritual. Once the death warrant is issued the execution team prepares themselves and the inmate for the execution. The inmate is put on deathwatch while officers watch for signs of suicidal tendencies and gauge the emotional stability of the prisoner. This enables inmates to face

execution without being incapacitated by their own distress. During the deathwatch the inmate is removed from death row and resides in a special cell away from the other prisoners (Johnson, 1998).

After the death warrant is issued, an inmate is led through a series of dehumanizing activities culminating in death. A last meal is served and the inmate must box remaining possessions and bequeath them to loved ones. Last visits with loved ones are heavily monitored and security measures often prohibit physical contact (Prejean, 1993). The inmate's head and leg are shaved if he is to be electrocuted and he is then led to a shower room for his final shower. Returning to his cell, he dons a clean prison uniform that he will wear to his death. The prisoner is finally ready to take his last walk to the execution room from which he will not return (Johnson, 1998).

Each calculated step towards the moment of execution serves to dissociate the inmate from his life, while stripping him of his relationship with the world outside (Johnson, 1998). The prisoner inhabits a psychological state that embodies a living death. Acceptance of his fate plays a significant role in the ritual as he meets his death with a broken spirit that submits to his destruction. This behavior signifies to those participating, and witnessing, that execution is justified. Surrender by the inmate can be interpreted as admission that this punishment is a suitable resolution to their crimes (Johnson, 1998; Conquergood, 2002). However, one could interpret resistance in some final statements where the prisoner maintains innocence or condemns the execution (Heflick, 2005). Final statements can include a range of topics/themes, ranging from contrition and anger to comments related to religious themes, such as belief in God (Wallis, 2022).

Execution methods have become more bureaucratized and technologically advanced as society searches for a means of putting people to death that is supposedly free of pain and inhumanity (Lifton & Mitchell, 2000) and/or is more palatable. Society is assured of this outcome through the eyewitness accounts of those present during executions. When the emotional and physical signs of pain are removed from the presentation of execution, it is presumably easier to claim that the execution is humane. Exhibits of pain and discomfort during the execution can create more discomfort to witnesses and corrections staff. Executions that are not "efficient" can lead to public embarrassment and questioning of corrections practices.

The ritual execution serves society at large as well. It presents a subdued convict and a team of corrections officers willing to execute and acts out a performance for the public. The convict is symbolic of societal evils and the actions of the state are a sanctified sterilization of society. The execution ritual is the physical evidence of that sterilization and a proper performance signifies the humanity and righteousness of the punitive action. Although executions have retreated into the secrecy of the prison (Gurian, 2020), they still include a small audience of the victim's family members, journalists, state witnesses, and chaplains (Bessler, 1997; Smith, 1996). Those involved in the execution, including the inmate, have focused on backstage preparation for the front stage performance (Goffman, 1959) of public justice, even though this front stage audience is very limited. The select audience is, largely, the only ones that may use their first-hand experience to recount and interpret the execution for a larger public audience, with the exception of professional personnel that are involved. The limited audience witnessing these events presumably suggests that most members of the public rely on media representations of this process.

Media and Execution

Media coverage of executions suggests that execution is the appropriate ending to a litany of criminal and violent actions (Miller & Hunt, 2008). The opinions of the public sway with the corresponding images the media presents (Heath & Gilbert, 1996) and these opinions are then presumably used to shape public policies. For example, Dowler (2003) found that fear of crime is related to a person's level of exposure to crime media (e.g., television shows and film), while Killingbeck (2001) found that news coverage of school shootings reinforced fear of crime and the construction of public policies. Moore and Pierce (2007) assert that movies have impacted public discussions of race. More directly related to the issue at hand, Chiappetta (2021), examined the role that science fiction can play in discourse concerning the death penalty

Most people develop their attitudes about capital punishment without considering factual information about the subject and don't have an inclination to find out more about the topic (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994). Media have played a significant role in our perceptions of reality through its many messages and images. The more a subject is covered in the media, the more importance people attribute to that subject (Funkhouser, 1973; Iyenger, Peters & Kinder, 1982). The media are especially influential in circumstances where people know very little about a topic or have very little firsthand experience with the subject, for instance capital punishment (Haney, 2005).

Pressures for inmates to claim responsibility for criminal acts are embedded in the plot line of many capital punishment films. Ideas of culpability juxtaposed with images of the crimes create a skewed image of convicts and executions. Sarat (2001) claims that these films strive to create an experience of capital punishment for the viewer that will make the audience believe that they understand the realities of capital punishment. People learn from these channels of information, regardless of whether they are accurate images, and in this way media may influence the opinions of the public (Haney, 2005; Chiappetta, 2021).

O'Sullivan (2003) asserts that an analysis of the effects of media representations of execution is inconclusive, but he does concede that these films set a trend in public opinion. Although their effect cannot be fully determined, capital punishment movies of the 1990s coincided with a period of decline in the number of executions carried out in the United States (O'Sullivan, 2003). Theatrical films including capital punishment can capture some of the psychological stress of inmates facing the death penalty and reveal the complications of carrying out execution sentences (O'Sullivan, 2003). A controlled experiment demonstrated that viewing a film of executions lowers support for capital punishment (Howells, Flanagan, & Hagan, 1995), while additional research also suggests that portrayals can impact viewers (Till, 2012).

It is important to keep in mind that fictive depictions of capital punishment may labor under the agenda of producers, who can choose what issues to raise and what messages to represent (Wardle & Gans-Boriskin, 2004). Witnessing an execution is a very rare experience. Therefore, media, including popular movies, provides a window into that experience, whether accurate or not, for members of the general public.

The Current Study

This study uses the media representations of state sanctioned executions as presented in popular films to explore how messages about the ritual of execution are constructed. We address the importance ritual plays in validating capital punishment and the accuracy of media representations of this ritual. It is important to illuminate the messages relayed in these film representations about how executions are carried out because they are an important source of information that the public can use to define their opinions about the death penalty.

Methodology

Although there has been some focus on death row inmates in film (e.g., Sarat, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2003), the academic literature has not, to any great extent, addressed the accuracy of both the portrayal of corrections officers in the execution process or the execution ritual in films. This research attempts to address execution ritual in film, by examining popular movies that include the ritual.

The research employs "ethnographic content analysis" (ECA), which uses electronic, print, or audio-visual documents as cultural artifacts that can relay information about society (Altheide, 1987) to examine executions portrayed in films. The method is derived from content analysis (Patton, 2002) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Content Analysis uses the study of various objects such as text or print as a subject of study to make determinations about the social world (Patton, 2002). Grounded theory generates theory in the process of analysis while the research is conducted (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). ECA contains both narrative and numeric data that delineate categories of analysis. Deeper patterns of human behavior are able to emerge that may

not be detected using only quantitative content analysis through the exploration of narrative within content (Altheide, 1987). Some categories of analysis are developed beforehand and are used to guide the study; however, others emerge as the subject is explored allowing concepts to surface throughout the examination of data.

The Sample

The movies chosen for this study were all in the list of the top ten of films on Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) when searching utilizing the three keywords of death penalty, death row, and execution. Of the ten films only four were relevant for this study (e.g., included an execution scene within the larger context of an execution). Additionally, the four chosen films were all post-Furman decision (1976) films. Two of the top ten films were before the decision and four did not include an execution sequence of scenes appropriate for this analysis. Once the legislation surrounding the death penalty was altered to include parameters of “cruel and unusual punishment” the focus of entertainment also shifted to reflect new methods of execution and the psychological distress of death row and executions (O'Sullivan, 2003).

All four of the included films were also well-received at the at the box office and nominated for a various awards. This process resulted in the choice of four films, including *Capote* (2005); *Monster's Ball* (2001); *The Green Mile* (1999); and *Dead Man Walking* (1995). Only one of the four, *Monster's Ball*, was based on an original screenplay. The others were based, at least to some extent, on books adapted to a screenplay. By using the movie website boxofficemojo.com, each movie's domestic box office gross was determined. Each of the films grossed among the top 100 movies for the year they were released. *Capote* was nominated for five academy awards and was awarded one Oscar. *Monster's Ball* won one of the two Academy Awards for which it was nominated. *The Green Mile* was nominated for four Academy Awards. *Dead Man Walking* was awarded an Oscar and received three other Academy Award nominations.

The films display six executions all together. *The Green Mile* includes three execution sequences, all of which utilize an electric chair. The electric chair is also the method used in *Monster's Ball*. *Dead Man Walking* exhibits an execution via lethal injection and *Capote* shows an execution by hanging.

The Coding Scheme

Theory and literature about the execution ritual (Johnson, 1998; Cabana, 1996; Solotaroff, 2001; Conquergood 2002; Hochschild, 1983) were used to develop the coding scheme for this project. The seven concepts that emerged from the literature, theory, and films include (1) techniques of neutralization; (2) expressions of emotion or repression of emotions by corrections officers; (3) admission of guilt or verbal/non-verbal cues of tacit consent on behalf of the inmate; and (4) verbal/non-verbal cues from the execution team that pacify the inmate. Three more categories of analysis include (5) execution ritual acts that caused an inmate to breakdown or otherwise become resigned to death; (6) signs of executioner stress displayed by corrections officers (Johnson, 1998; Payne & Pray, 1990) and (7) the accuracy of the execution ritual portrayed in the films.

Using The Timeline of Inmate's Final Days (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2002) (Appendix 1) provides information for the final concept. The portions of the movie that portrayed the execution ritual were transcribed and the sequences that captured dialogue or actions representative of each category were cataloged. The amount of time that had elapsed in the plot of the story was also noted to investigate the chronological accuracy of the stories.

The techniques of neutralization category was developed by drawing from the classic work of Sykes and Matza (1957), which asserts that people use methods of neutralization to temporarily suspend social and moral inhibitions that prevent them from carrying out actions that would be unacceptable in most cases. Some of these methods include denying responsibility for these actions, denying any injury is caused to the victim, condemning

those who oppose their actions, appealing to higher loyalties, disbursing blame amongst a group, dehumanizing the victim, and misrepresentation of consequences. This research focuses on statements made by corrections officers portrayed in the films that embody these methods of neutralization.

The second concept, verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotion or active repression of emotion, explores the complexity of the emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) required of corrections officers to carry out executions. Visual and verbal expressions of this type are examined in the analysis of the films. Expressions of emotion from corrections officers and directed towards inmates may indicate the distress of their position or a lack of professionalism that is uncharacteristic of an execution team. Both aspects of emotional expression will be explored and are juxtaposed with firsthand accounts of corrections officers and witnesses of actual executions in order to determine their accuracy in film (Cabana, 1996; Prejean, 1993; Solotaroff, 2001).

The inmate's behavior during execution can also be interpreted through film by examining verbal or non-verbal admissions of guilt and is the third concept. Other behaviors, such as forgiving corrections officers that are involved in the execution or apologizing to families of the victims during the final statement before execution, indicate a resignation to the ritual of execution. This category explores the inmate's role in the execution ritual and explores the process through which an inmate's tacit consent can be manufactured through the execution ritual.

A fourth concept examines verbal or non-verbal cues exhibited by corrections officers that serve to pacify the inmate prior to execution in the films. These actions can be construed as a means to subdue the inmate and ensure that he participates appropriately in the execution ritual. This category investigates the relationship between inmates and officers, but also serves to analyze the manufacture of tacit consent more deeply.

Any part of the ritual that causes an inmate to breakdown and become resigned to death, the next concept, are important because they present the means by which an inmate begins to participate in this ritual. Each physical manifestation of their exit from the world works to corrode their sense of self, which makes it possible for the prisoner to succumb to the sentence of death. Any verbal or non-verbal actions on the part of the inmate that suggest resignation to death are monitored in the films.

The symptoms of executioner stress are also analyzed to get a well-rounded view of the long- and short-term effects of participating in ritual for corrections officers. This problem involves such a small group of people, within society, that its display in film is an equally significant facet of the execution ritual and provides insight into the emotional labor required to complete the job and the role of ritual in facilitating the process. Additionally, "Policies limiting press and public access to the entire execution process have no doubt contributed somewhat to the lack of systematic investigation" into the impact on officers and others (Gil, Johnson, & Johnson, 2006, p. 28).

Assessment of the accuracy of the ritual uses components of the Timeline of Inmate's Final Days (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2002) as they relate to execution ritual (see Appendix 1). Each movie is surveyed for its inclusion of these key components. This Timeline serves to check the accuracy of the ritual portrayed in the film.

The times at which these events occur are specific to the Missouri execution protocol and are of no importance to this study, however the order in which these events occur can be generalized to execution procedures from prisons across the United States. Therefore, the ways in which films represent all aspect of execution are analyzed in the study. The researchers chose to make a quantitative count of which aspects of the execution are displayed and whether they adhere chronologically to the elements described in the Timeline of Inmate's Final Days.

A second set of criteria was developed to create a checklist of the necessary procedures carried out during execution based on the method shown in the films. Appendix 2 provides an overview of the steps of execution by lethal injection, the electric chair, and hanging as they have been described in the literature. These steps and the Timeline of Inmate's Final Days table have been adapted into four tables that reflect the accuracy of the films in the findings section.

The more accurately a film portrays execution, the more likely it is that the film captures a reality of execution that is rarely experienced by people in the general public. More importantly each of these categories is established to examine the socially constructed ideas about execution that the public may use to determine their opinions about the death penalty. These opinions are a central piece of the ongoing dialogue that shapes social policies concerning the death penalty, although this project does not directly address the impact of these films on public opinion.

Results

This study used seven categories of analysis to explore the accuracy of media representation of the execution ritual in film. The categories allow the researcher to juxtapose the images of execution ritual against the reality of execution as it is described in other sources. Using this analysis, the research provides insight into what messages are presented in media representations of execution. All four of the films examined in the research incorporated four or more elements of the execution ritual outlined in the seven categories of analysis. A brief summary of the films will illuminate certain aspects of the research and is included prior to the investigation of the seven categories outlined in the methodology.

Summary of the Films

The film, *Capote*, is based on the biography of novelist Truman Capote and his experiences while writing his book *In Cold Blood*. The main character, Truman Capote, befriends and visits two murderers on death row who have killed a family of four in Kansas in 1959. Capote uses the information that the inmates divulge during these visits to write his book over the span of the next three years while the two prisoners work through the appeals process. Once the book is written, Capote makes a final journey to visit the prisoners and he witnesses their executions by hanging.

Monster's Ball focuses on a corrections officer, Hank, on the strap-down team in a prison where he and his son, Sonny, work. Hank's retired father was also a corrections officer. Hank's son is a new member of the strap-down team. The story opens with the strap-down team preparing for the execution of an inmate to take place in the next two days. Sonny is unable to complete the final walk with the inmate and vomits in front of the inmate. After the execution, Hank is irate about Sonny's performance and engages him in a very violent physical and verbal confrontation. He also informs him that he "Fucked up that man's last walk." This points out the importance placed on maintaining the ritualized order of an execution. Shortly after the confrontation, Sonny commits suicide. Under darkly coincidental circumstances, Hank finds the recently executed inmate's wife hysterical on the side of the road in the rain. He has never met her and does not know of her relationship to the executed inmate. Hank gives her and her injured son a ride to the hospital where the woman's son dies from a hit and run accident. Over the next few months Hank and the woman begin a relationship that alleviates their grieving.

The Green Mile was adapted from a Stephen King novel and it includes some elements of supernatural phenomena that are purely fictional. It is about a group of corrections officers that run death row and are part of a strap-down team during the depression era. The team finds that the newest inmate, John Coffey, has supernatural abilities that allow him to heal the sick and give life to the recently deceased. The main character and head of the execution team, Paul, finds out that John Coffey is innocent through a psychic flashback that John allows him to see, when the actual culprit also finds himself on death row. A vindictive corrections officer, Percy, continuously torments the inmates with cruel jokes and malicious actions. Percy's sadistic nature motivates him to intentionally mismanage an execution, which leads to a brutal and horrific death for one of the inmates on the row. Later, John Coffey releases a dark supernatural substance into Percy that causes him to kill the inmate that committed the

crimes John Coffey was accused of, which resulted in Percy's admission into a mental institution. The movie ends with the strap-down team reluctantly leading John Coffey to the electric chair where he is put to death.

The final film, *Dead Man Walking*, is based on the experiences of Sister Helen Prejean and her work with death row inmates. She is the author of a book with the same title (1993). Prejean agrees to meet with a death row inmate, Matthew Poncelet, and agrees to be his spiritual adviser. Prejean works to accommodate Poncelet during his final days and works to help him find spiritual redemption and reconciliation before he is put to death. Poncelet eventually takes responsibility for the rape and murder of two teenagers and asks for spiritual redemption for his sins prior to his execution. The seven concepts related to the execution process were represented to varying degrees in the films.

Techniques of Neutralization

There were ten instances of techniques of neutralization demonstrated in the films. Four of the scenarios involving techniques of neutralization were based on an appeal to higher loyalty in which one's actions are justified because of the greater good or the righteousness of the ultimate outcome. Each of these sequences is an incident of appealing to a higher loyalty to neutralize the effects of the act of execution. For example, when the Warden in *Capote* discusses the inmate's refusal of food with Truman Capote, he says, "It's not his right to kill himself...It's the right of the people of this state and that's who I work for, the people." In this scene the warden is placing the responsibility of execution on the state and the judicial system. In *Monster's Ball*, the strap-down team gathers in prayer and reads from the Bible on the eve of execution. The verse includes a justification for execution in that it implicates those "who are fallen" and also validates those who are "risen and stand upright."

There were three instances of denial of responsibility which proposes that a person acts out because they are found in circumstances beyond their control and makes their actions a product of the rationalized working environment they inhabit. A denial of responsibility is played out once in *Monster's Ball* and twice in *Dead Man Walking*. One example, from *Dead Man Walking* occurs when the nurse who will be prepping the inmate assists Sister Helen Prejean when she faints. When Prejean asks if she will be participating in the execution the nurse replies, "It's just part of the job, you know?" When talking to his son the night before the execution that they will be carrying out, the main character in *Monster's Ball* tells him, "You can't think about what he (the prisoner) did or anything else about him. It's our job. We have to do our job right."

Denial of the victim was illustrated in two different sequences. This technique asserts that one's actions are appropriate because the person was deserving of the treatment they receive. In *Dead Man Walking* the corrections officer reveals to Sister Helen Prejean that he is part of the strap-down team to which she responds that it must be a difficult job. The corrections officer replies, "...these prisoners get what's coming to them." Before reading the file on a new inmate, the leader of the strap-down team in *The Green Mile* mentions to the team that he believes the new inmate on their row might be feeble minded. A second corrections officer replies "Imbecile or not he deserves to fry for what he done."

The one instance of condemning the condemners is illustrated in *Dead Man Walking*. This is a technique that involves accusing those that condemn one's actions as judging their own acts harshly, impartially, or unfairly. A corrections officer scrutinizes Sister Helen Prejean because of her involvement with the inmate facing execution by asking her questions such as "Do you know what this man has done...How he killed them kids?" His criticisms are a clear indication that he condemns her aid of the prisoner, which is also a method of neutralization that allows him to validate his own involvement in execution.

Expression or Repression of Emotion by Corrections Officers

Emotional displays, including emotional labor and management or emotional reactions unchecked by self-control, were displayed in several different scenes in *Monster's Ball* and *The Green Mile*. *Capote* and *Dead Man Walking* were not representative of this category. This is most likely due to the fact that these movies put more emphasis on the inmates, and corrections officers are peripheral minor characters in these films.

Monster's Ball, which has a strong focus on corrections officers, included several of these scenes. For example, the first instance involved Sonny, the main character's son, and fellow execution team member reaching through the bars to pat the inmate on the shoulder as he begins to have a panic attack. This happened in the death house a few hours prior to execution. The main character, Hank, lightly reprimands Sonny and tells him to back away from the inmate repeatedly. Once Sunny complies, Hank opens the cell and asks the inmate to remove his hands from the cell bars and gently guides the inmate away from the bars before leaving the cell and locking it. It is clear in this instance, Hank finds this level of intimacy between Sonny and the inmate to be professionally inappropriate.

Another example occurs during the first execution rehearsal in *The Green Mile*, when the orderly that is a stand-in for the soon to be executed inmate begins making vulgar jokes about death. Many of the corrections officers laugh at the orderly's antics, but the execution team leader, Paul, scolds the team for encouraging this behavior. He explains, "We'll be doing this for real tomorrow night. I don't want anybody remembering some stupid joke like that and getting going again." The character is asking that the team remember they will need to suppress their emotional reactions, in this case humor, because it will disrupt the ritual.

Admission of Guilt or Verbal/Non-Verbal Cues of Tacit Consent by Inmate

Many of the admissions of guilt and cues of tacit consent by the inmate are exhibited in the final comments made prior to execution. All of the movies reviewed included this category. In *Capote*, for example, a prisoner says of himself and his accomplice, "There must be something wrong with us to do what we did," before recounting the crimes he committed that led to his death sentence. A few hours prior to his execution the same prisoner tells Truman Capote, "I understand why you didn't want to come. I wouldn't be here either if I didn't have to." This statement presumes the inmate feels resigned to participate in his own death. He is obliged to fulfill this engagement even though it is not in his interest.

Another example occurs when the inmate in *Monster's Ball* meets with his wife and son for a final visit his son asks, "I'm not gonna see you again after this?" To which the inmate says, "No...because I'm a bad man." The son asks, "Who says?" to which the inmate tells him, "I do...you ain't me. You're the best part of what I am...this man you see sitting in front of you today, you ain't." This dialogue expresses how deeply the inmate has internalized the sentence of death and combined this judicial decision with his identity. Poncelet's final statement in *Dead Man Walking*, admits guilt and seeks redemption: "Mr. Delecroix I don't want to leave this world with any hate in my heart. I ask your forgiveness for what I done. It was a terrible thing I done taking your son away from you. Mr. and Mrs. Percy I hope my death gives you some relief..."

Verbal/Non-verbal Cues from the Execution Team that Pacify the Inmate

All the films demonstrated verbal or non-verbal cues from corrections officers that were meant to pacify the inmate except for *Capote*. In *Monster's Ball*, during a final meeting of the strap-down team, one member mentions that the inmate likes to draw and that this calms him down. The team leader then asks a second member to ensure that the inmate has the necessary supplies to draw with when he is moved to the Death House. Before the inmate is escorted to the Death House, he has packed all of his possessions and asks the guard to be careful

with his things to which the guard replies earnestly, “Don't worry about it man.” In these scenes the corrections officers have taken every measure to sooth the anxieties of the inmate prior to execution.

For a final example, in *Dead Man Walking* when Prejean asks the chaplain presiding over Poncelet's execution whether she may play a hymn for Poncelet the chaplain replies, “Experience tells us that music stirs up emotion. Emotion that can produce an unexpected reaction in the inmate.” The chaplain's refusal illustrates how those involved in the execution ritual must regulate the inmate's frame of mind throughout the process.

Execution Ritual Acts That Cause Breakdown/Resignation to Death by Inmate

The Green Mile was the only film analyzed that did not include segments in which the ritual acts caused a breakdown in the inmate or resignation to death by the inmate. These episodes generally occurred on the day of the execution and are a direct result of the execution ritual. For example, the prisoner executed in *Monster's Ball* starts to show evidence that he is actualizing his death when he breaks down in his cell in the Death House and has a panic attack that the corrections officer must regulate. The corrections officer complimented him on the portrait he drew and as the officer collected the portrait the inmate repeatedly said, “You're welcome, you're welcome” then started breathing heavily and grabbed the cuff of the corrections officer's uniform to support him as his body grew weak.

In an example from *Dead Man Walking*, when Poncelet sees Sister Prejean, who is there to meet him as he walks to the execution chamber, Poncelet collapses to the floor and exclaims, “Sister Helen I'm going to die.” The entire movie has been building to this moment and the viewer can see that each process has been progressively dehumanizing. Poncelet's statement reveals that any final notions of escape or refusal have eroded.

Signs of Executioner Stress Displayed by Corrections Officers

Monster's Ball, *The Green Mile*, and *Dead Man Walking* all exhibited instances of executioner stress. In *Monster's Ball* the movie opens with the main character, Hank, lying in his bed awake at 1:41 am. He does not sleep and it is only a couple days prior to the execution. When he gets out of bed he immediately goes to the bathroom and vomits. Weeks after the execution is over, he has a similar reaction when he looks in the mirror and sees a picture of the inmate that was executed in a picture frame on the wall behind him. The insomnia and the regurgitation are both tied to participation in execution throughout the movie.

In another example, Paul, the strap-down team member in *The Green Mile*, is presented as an older man, retired in a nursing home where he explains to a close friend that he has been unable to sleep. He begins to cry while a group of seniors are watching television in the home because the program reminds him of an inmate that he executed in the past. He explains to his friend that his unstable emotions and sleeplessness are attributed to his work as a corrections officer on the execution team many years ago. The story is told in flashbacks and Paul is presented again as a younger man at home with his wife where he explains to her that he is unable to sleep because he has just gotten orders for a new inmate that will be executed soon.

The night before the final execution of the movie takes place, Paul is at home with his wife and he explains to her that his participation in this execution is creating serious doubts for him about his morality. He shares with her, “I've done some things in my life I'm not proud of, but this is the first time I've felt real danger of hell.” This admission illuminates the character's obvious distress over participating in the execution ritual.

In the closing scenes of the movie Paul is shown back at the nursing home where he is confessing to his friend, “It was the last execution I ever took part in. I just couldn't do it anymore.” Paul explains that even after a great deal of time has elapsed, he is still affected by his duties as a member of the execution team.

Accuracy of the Ritual Portrayed in the Films

The accuracy of the ritual displayed in each film is demonstrated by a quantitative count of the steps included in the execution ritual as described by the Timeline of Inmate's Final Days and the Execution Procedure and is portrayed in Table 1. From these sources tables have been adapted to reflect the accuracy of the execution ritual carried out in each film.

Table 1 Execution Ritual Accuracy

Inmate's Final Days	<u>Capote</u>	<u>Monster's Ball</u>	<u>The Green Mile</u>			<u>Dead Man Walking</u>
			1	2	3	
Death Warrant Delivered to Inmate						
Strap-down Team begins rehearsals		X	X	X		
Inmate is placed on "Deathwatch"	X					X
Inmate is transported from death row to the "Death House"		X				X
Inmate is awakened and showered						
Inmate visits his family in "Death House" lobby		X	X			X
Inmate's family is escorted to a separate facility		X				X
Inmate visit with others	X					X
Inmate consumes final meal		X				X
Inmate changes into loose fitting clothing		X				X
Witnesses enter the execution observation room	X	X				X
Inmate is escorted by strap-down team to execution chamber	X	X	X	X	X	X

Inmate is offered the chance to make final comments	X	X	X	X	X	X
Warden nods approval to executioner to commence execution	X		X	X	X	

All of the films provided some level of accuracy in terms of the ritual; however, the completeness of the ritual might have interfered with the films’ ability to exhibit some parts of the execution ritual. For example, the timeline of *Monster's Ball* begins only two days prior to execution; therefore, it does not include a delivery of the death warrant. This does not make the movie any less accurate. It simply means that the movie did not have the complete account of the ritual. *Dead Man Walking* provided the most accurate and complete accounts of execution ritual according to this criteria. It displayed 10 of the 14 steps described in the Inmate's Final Days appendix. *Monster's Ball* could be deemed equally accurate but less complete with 9 of the 14 criteria demonstrated in the film. *Dead Man Walking* did not include the rehearsals by the strap-down team. *Monster's Ball* did not include images of the inmate placed on “Death Watch,” or "visiting with others" which includes spiritual adviser(s), mental health professional(s), lawyer(s), and/or others. Capote only disclosed 6 of the 14 criteria. *The Green Mile* included three different executions by electric chair. The first execution included 5 of the 14 criteria, the second execution included 4 of the 14 criteria, and the third execution only included 3 of the 14 criteria. As displayed in Table 1, no movie showed the death warrant being delivered to an inmate or the inmate being awakened and showered on the day of the execution.

Dead Man Walking was the only movie that used lethal injection as the method of execution, as demonstrated in Table 2. All aspects of the lethal injection method were represented; however, only one needle was inserted into the vein on the inmate's body as opposed to the two that are generally used as a secondary precaution. In that respect the ritual was portrayed slightly inaccurately.

Table 2 Execution Ritual Accuracy: Lethal Injection

Lethal Injection	Dead Man Walking
• Inmate Strapped to Gurney	X
• Two needles inserted into a vein on inmate's body	X (one)
• Two officers pull two levers to start lethal injection machine	X
• 1 st drug released causes inmate to become unconscious	X
• 2 nd drug released relaxes the muscles and causes respiratory arrest	X
• 3 rd drug released causes cardiac arrest and death	X

Monster's Ball, as shown in Table 3, exhibits every aspect of execution except saturating a sponge with solution and the doctor checking for a pulse before continuing to administer electricity. Instead, an initial administration of electricity was conducted followed by a brief break and then a second round of electricity was administered. Only the second execution in *The Green Mile* does not include the step in which the sponge is saturated. The circumstances of the movie's plot line made this exclusion intentional, as opposed to neglecting its existence altogether. The second and third executions in *The Green Mile* did not include a doctor checking for a pulse or the switch being thrown a second time. The first execution shown in *The Green Mile* exhibited every aspect of this method of execution.

Table 3 Execution Ritual Accuracy: Electrocutation

Electrocutation	Monster’s Ball	The Green Mile		
		1	2	3
• Inmate's head/ leg is shaved	X	X	X	
• Inmate is strapped into the electric chair	X	X	X	X
• A sponger is saturated with solution and strapped to inmate's head underneath an electrode		X		X
• Executioner throws a switch to release electricity into the inmate's body	X	X	X	X
• A doctor checks the inmate's pulse		X		
• Executioner throws the switch again if inmate is still alive	X	X		

Capote exhibited every aspect of the execution ritual using the method of hanging (see Table 4). This was the only film in this analysis that used hanging as the method of execution.

Table 4 Execution Ritual Accuracy: Hanging

Hanging	Capote
• Inmate's hands and legs are bound	X
• Inmate is Blindfolded	X
• A noose is placed around inmate's neck	X
• The executioner releases the lever on the platform	X
• The inmate falls through the trapdoor and the neck is broken or the inmate is asphyxiated by the noose	X

The films did have some inaccuracies that should be addressed as the ways in which the movie misguides the viewer about the ritual of execution. These may affect the entirety of the message that is received by the audience concerning the process of capital punishment. In *Capote*, Truman Capote bribes the warden so that he may have unlimited visitations with the inmates that he is writing his book about. This is clearly against protocol and highly atypical.

The Green Mile also has some unrealistic aspects of the ritual displayed. For example, the execution team leader, Paul, and the warden both allow a guard to participate in executions even though neither of them trust him nor do they have confidence in his abilities. When Paul expresses his concerns about this officer he says, “The man is mean, careless, and stupid, and that is a bad combination in a place like this.” This also shows an orderly standing in as the prisoner during execution rehearsals as opposed to one of the corrections officers fulfilling this role. Finally, when the un-trusted corrections officer, Percy, conducts his first execution he cruelly taunts the inmate right before covering his face in the electric chair. When the execution goes horribly wrong, because Percy does not saturate the sponge beneath the electrode attached to the inmate’s head improperly, the other officers force Percy to extinguish the fire and watch as the body burns in the electric chair.

Dead Man Walking included only one important incidence of inaccuracy, while *Monster’s Ball* had none. When Poncelet is led out of his cell in the death house and begins his walk to the execution chamber, a corrections officer yells out “Dead Man Walking!” and then the inmate is escorted by corrections officers as they make their way to the chamber. This pronouncement is highly uncharacteristic and might create unnecessary chaos that might emotionally de-stabilize the inmate in an actual execution setting.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has explored social constructions of the execution ritual that have been formed in popular movies. The findings indicate that these particular films portraying the ritual of execution are fairly accurate representations, with some exceptions (Cabana, 1996; Johnson, 1998; Solotaroff, 2001; Trombley, 1992). Correspondence with firsthand accounts of execution is promising because films contribute to the general information that the public has about execution and the death penalty in general.

The findings indicate that the entertainment industry, as represented by these films, focuses heavily on the psychological circumstances of both inmates and corrections officers. This scrutiny brings to life the gravity of capital punishment in terms of its impact on those involved. It magnifies the significance of just what is being asked of the people that participate in the execution ritual. An understanding of the inmates and officers that complete the execution ritual is intensified through media representation. This research also demonstrates how a ritual is used to validate state sanctioned executions and allow participants to submit to the act of taking a person's life. The process creates what could be labeled a "Nuremberg Defense," in which no one is responsible for the actions of the state because each individual's responsibilities play a small role that makes up the greater act of execution (Rubenstein, 1975).

A recent poll by the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC 2020) indicates that 55% of participants supported the death penalty as a form of punishment for murder. There are considerable differences based on demographic factors, such as gender, race and class, as well as the intersectionality of these variables when examining support for the death penalty (Trahan & Nodeland, 2019). Some research suggests that support for the death penalty is influenced by a specific event, among other predictors (Anderson, Lytle, & Schwadel, 2017). This might suggest to us that external factors, such as the influence of popular films, might play a role in attitudes concerning public policy issues, such as support or opposition to the death penalty, particularly among some groups.

These films were widely distributed and positively received by the public and popular culture. This indicates the dialogue they might have encouraged in society may have an effect on public opinion. Even though the ritual represented in media may not be an exact duplication of the ritual that plays out in prisons, it creates an image that allows people to interpret the situation as a real (Thomas, 1938). The social responses of the public are potential consequences of these media images.

These films illustrate, for the public, the psychological torture of the death penalty for inmates and corrections officers alike. The desire for more "humane" execution methods indicates that people develop a sense of empathy for convicts facing a death sentence as they would prefer the least amount of suffering despite finding their actions worthy of this drastic punishment (Radelet & Borg, 2000). It is unclear if the general public has a sympathetic understanding of the consequences for corrections officers.

If the public is unaware of the subject, then there may be no way for the average citizen to distinguish the representation of media from the actuality of execution or any other topic that is peripheral. Studying whether these portrayals are genuine accounts of the reality they represent creates a level of accountability that is otherwise absent from the discussion of media effects on public opinion and public policy.

The study was limited in that the scales used to determine the accuracy of execution ritual have not been used in any other research. Therefore, the reliability and validity of this measure cannot be confirmed through other sources. This scale is also unweighted meaning that the various aspects of the ritual that were accounted for were all given equal significance within the measure. A weighted scale may present a more accurate or in-depth examination of the execution ritual, especially if certain parts of the ritual of execution have more significant effects on those involved. With these limitations in mind, the research presented here suggests that these films are fairly accurate in their portrayal of the execution ritual.

However, the fictional liberties taken by the producers and writers of the execution films may have impacted the reflection of social reality for the audience. In movies such as *The Green Mile*, the plot included elements of supernatural occurrences that might have influenced the way the audience perceived the execution ritual and the other situations presented in the film. The historical time periods that both *The Green Mile* and *Capote* are illustrating might also impact the ways in which the audience relates to the material and its authenticity. For instance, the argument could easily be made that these images of execution represent a different time in American society and that they are no longer relevant to the current ritual of execution despite the fact that both films show a realistic and accurate portrayal of execution.

Also, it should be pointed out that films focusing on capital punishment, after the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976, were directed predominately by white men with a focus on individuals, rather than structural institutions which might have felt like a threat to the status quo orientation of some audience members, according to Altschuler (2021). Two more recent films, *Just Mercy* and *Clemency*, brought in filmmakers and actors of color and seem to do a better job of representing the unfairness of capital punishment on a systemic level (Altschuler, 2021). Whether or not this trend will develop is open to speculation.

Media becomes a powerful source of information on subjects of obscurity in our culture, particularly on issues hidden from public view, such as modern-day executions. Research advancing the discussion of media's construction of cultural reality through the exploration of the topics that are covered in media regularly, as opposed to those that receive little or no attention, could benefit academic literature. Media impacts public perceptions, which can play a role in shaping public policy, which suggest the role that this type of research can serve. In a deeply divided nation where partisan divide is reflected in support for the death penalty (Rancourt, 2020) and how we perceive the news (Van der Linden, Panagopoulos, & Roozenbeek, 2020), we may find that movies can bridge some of the gap to provide common experiences, references, and discussion points, making it clear that the accuracy of popular films, when representing real-world events and circumstances, is a potentially important topic of investigation.

Appendix 1

Timeline of Inmate's Final Days

ONE MONTH PRIOR TO EXECUTION:	DEATH WARRANT DELIVERED TO INMATE STRAPDOWN TEAM BEGINS REHEARSALS*
ONE WEEK PRIOR TO EXECUTION:	INMATE PLACED ON "DEATH WATCH"
NIGHT PRIOR TO EXECUTION: DAY OF EXECUTION:	INMATE TRANSPORTED FROM DEATH ROW TO THE "DEATH HOUSE" 7:00 AM-INMATE IS AWAKENED AND SHOWERED 8:00 AM-3:00 PM-INMATE VISITS HIS FAMILY IN "DEATH HOUSE" LOBBY 3:00 PM-INMATE'S FAMILY IS ESCORTED TO SEPARATE FACILITY 3:00 PM-4:30 PM-INMATE VISITS HIS SPIRITUAL ADVISOR(S), MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL(S), LAWYER(S), AND/OR OTHERS 4:30 PM-5:30 PM-INMATE CONSUMES FINAL MEAL 5:30 PM-5:45 PM-INMATE CHANGES INTO LOOSEFITTING CLOTHES WITNESSES ENTER EXECUTION OBSERVATION ROOM 5:45 PM-INMATE IS ESCORTED BY STRAPDOWN TEAM TO EXECUTION CHAMBER 5:50 PM-EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS INSERT TWO INTRAVENOUS NEEDLES** 5:55 PM-INMATE IS OFFERED CHANCE TO MAKE FINAL COMMENTS 6:00 PM-WARDEN CAIN NODS APPROVAL TO EXECUTIONER TO COMMENCE EXECUTION

These steps were added to the Osofsky & Osofsky (2002) Table1 to capture elements of execution that are also critical to execution ritual.*

The step in which the emergency medical technicians insert two intravenous needles has been replaced by a second set of criteria shown in Appendix 2. **

Appendix 2

Execution Procedure by Method

Lethal Injection

- Inmate Strapped to Gurney
- Two needles inserted into a vein in inmate's body
- Two officers pull two levers to start lethal injection machine
- 1st drug released causes inmate to become unconscious
- 2nd drug released relaxes the muscles and causes respiratory arrest
- 3rd drug released causes cardiac arrest and death

Electrocution

- Inmate's head/leg are shaved
- Inmate is strapped into the electric chair
- A sponge is saturated with solution and strapped to inmates head under an electrode
- Executioner throws a switch to release electricity into the inmate's body
- A doctor checks the inmate's pulse
- If alive, the executioner throws the switch again

Hanging

- Inmate's hands and legs are bound
- Inmate is blindfolded
- A noose is placed around the inmate's neck
- The executioner releases the lever on the platform
- The inmate falls through the trapdoor neck is broken or the inmate is asphyxiated by the noose

References

- Altheide, D. L. (1987). Reflections: Ethnographic content analysis. *Qualitative sociology*, 10(1), 65-77.
- Altschuler, B. E. (2021). The Changing Face of Capital Punishment Films: Just Mercy and Clemency. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 49(1), 30-39.
- Alexander, J. C., & Smith, P. D. (2005). *The cambridge companion to Durkheim*. Cambridge, MA: The Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, A. L., Lytle, R., & Schwadel, P. (2017). Age, period, and cohort effects on death penalty attitudes in the United States, 1974–2014. *Criminology*, 55(4), 833-868.
- Austin, D. M. (2009). Ritual and boundary distinction in a recreational community: A case study of motorcycle rallies and riders. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 5(2), 70-93.
- Bandes, S. A. (2018). All bathwater, no baby: Expressive theories of punishment and the death penalty. *Michigan Law Review*, 116(6), 905-924.
- Banner, S. (2002). *The death penalty: An American history*. Harvard University Press.
- Bessler, J. (1997). *Death in the dark: Midnight executions in America*. Northeastern University Press.
- Brown, K. R. (2011). Interaction ritual chains and the mobilization of conscientious consumers. *Qualitative sociology*, 34(1), 121-141.
- Cabana, D. A. (1996). *Death at midnight*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Conquergood, D. (2002). Lethal theatre: Performance, punishment, and the death penalty. *Theatre Journal*, 54(3), 339-367.
- Chiappetta, C., & Johnson, R. (2021). "It's Not Gonna Leave Any Scars": Trauma and Coping Among Execution Team Members. *The Prison Journal*, 00328855211029623.
- Death Penalty Information Center (2020). Gallup poll: Public support for the death penalty lowest in a half-century. Retrieved August 23, 2021 <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/news/gallup-poll-public-support-for-the-death-penalty-lowest-in-a-half-century>.
- Dowler, K. (2003). Justice: The relationship between fear of crime, punitive. *The Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 10, 109-126.
- Durkheim, E. 1912/1995. *Elementary forms of religious Life*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Ellsworth, P. C. & Gross, S.R., (1994). Hardening of the attitudes: Americans' views on the death penalty. *Journal of Social Issues* 50(2): 19-52.
- Funkhouser, G. R. (1973). The issues of the sixties: An exploratory study in the dynamics of public opinion. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(1), 62-75.
- Furman v. Georgia*, 408 U.S. 238. (1972).
- Gil, A., Johnson, M. B., & Johnson, I. (2006). Secondary trauma associated with state executions: Testimony regarding execution procedures. *The Journal of Psychiatry & Law*, 34(1), 25-35.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.
- Gregg v. Georgia*, 428 U.S. 153. (1976).
- Gurian, E. A., & Tease, A. W. (2020). 'Shadow and substance': An examination of capital punishment through the lens of the Twilight Zone and Black Mirror. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 20(1): 43-58.
- Haney, C. (2005). *Death by design*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Heath, L., & Gilbert, K. (1996). Mass media and fear of crime. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 39(4), 379-386.
- Heflick, N. A. (2005). Sentenced to die: Last statements and dying on death row. *Omega-Journal of Death and Dying*, 51(4), 323-336.

- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Howells, G. N., Flanagan, K. A., & Hagan, V. (1995). Does viewing a televised execution affect attitudes toward capital punishment?. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 22(4), 411-424.
- Iyengar, S., Peters, M. D., & Kinder, D. R. (1982). Experimental demonstrations of the “not-so-minimal” consequences of television news programs. *American political science review*, 76(4), 848-858.
- Johnson, R. (1998). *Deathwork: A study of the modern execution process*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Jones, M. O. (2014). Dining on death row: Last meals and the crutch of ritual. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 127(503), 3-26.
- Killingbeck, D. (2001). The role of television news in the construction of school violence as a “moral panic.” *Journal of criminal justice and popular culture*, 8(3), 186-202.
- Kusenbach, M., & Loseke, D. R. (2013). Bringing the Social Back in: Some Suggestions for the Qualitative Study of Emotions. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 9(2).
- Lifton, R. J., & Michell, G. (2002). *Who owns death? Capital punishment, the American conscience, and the end of executions*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Miller, K. S., & Hunt, S. A. (2008). Exit stage left: a dramaturgical analysis of media accounts of executions in America. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 15(2), 189-217.
- Moore, W. L., & Pierce, J. (2007). Still Killing Mockingbirds: Narratives of Race and Innocence in Hollywood's Depiction of the White Messiah Lawyer. *Qualitative sociology review*, 3(2).
- Osofsky, M. J., Bandura, A., & Zimbardo, P. G. (2005). The role of moral disengagement in the execution process. *Law and human behavior*, 29(4), 371-393.
- Osofsky, M. J., & Osofsky, H. J. (2002). The psychological experience of security officers who work with executions. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 65(4), 358-370.
- O'sullivan, S. (2003). Representing ‘The killing state’: The death penalty in nineties Hollywood cinema. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42(5), 485-503.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks. Cal.: Sage Publications, 4.
- Payne, I. R., Pray, R. T., & Damis, L. F. (1990). Utah stress education program helps staff deal with executions. *Corrections Today*, 52(4), 160-168.
- Prejean, H., & Robbins, T. (1994). *Dead man walking: An eyewitness account of the death penalty in the United States*. Vintage.
- Radelet, M. L., & Borg, M. J. (2000). The changing nature of death penalty debates. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 43-61.
- Rancourt, M. A., Ouellet, C., & Dufresne, Y. (2020). Is the Death Penalty Debate Really Dead? Contrasting Capital Punishment Support in Canada and the United States. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 20(1), 536-562.
- Rubenstein, R. (1975). *The cunning of history: Mass death and the American Future*. New York Harper and Row.
- Sarat, A. (2018). *When the state kills: Capital punishment and the American condition*. Princeton University Press.
- Smith, P. (1996). Executing executions: Aesthetics, identity, and the problematic narratives of capital punishment ritual. *Theory and Society*, 235-261.
- Solotaroff, I. (2010). *The last face you'll ever see: The culture of death row*. Harper Collins.
- Sykes, G. M., & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American sociological review*, 22(6), 664-670.
- Thomas, W. I. (1938). *The child in America*. Рипол Классик.

- Till, B., & Vitouch, P. (2012). Capital punishment in films: The impact of death penalty portrayals on viewers' mood and attitude toward capital punishment. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 24(3), 387-399.
- Trahan, A., Dixon, A., & Nodland, B. (2019). Public opinion of capital punishment: an intersectional analysis of race, gender, and class effects. *Criminal justice review*, 44(4), 452-469.
- Trombley, S. (1992). *The execution protocol*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers Inc.
- Turner, J. H. (1986). *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. Chicago, IL: The Dorsey Press.
- Van der Linden, S., Panagopoulos, C., & Roozenbeek, J. (2020). You are fake news: political bias in perceptions of fake news. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(3), 460-470.
- Walliss, J. (2022). Last meals and final statements: Social science research on America's death row. *Sociology Compass*, 16(7), e12987.
- Wardle, C., & Gans-Boriskin, R. (2004). Who deserves to die? Discussions of the death penalty on primetime television. *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media*, 1(3), 68-88.
- Weber, M. (1905). (2002), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications.