

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RELATED  
TO THE CRIMINAL MIND OF SERIAL KILLERS

by

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**ABSTRACT**

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A Critical Analysis of Research Related to the Criminal Mind of Serial Killers  
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American Psychological Association (APA)  
(Name of Style Manual Used in this Study) Serial murder is the most common

form of multiple murder. Serial murder is characterized by the killing of three or more persons over a period of days, weeks or years with a cooling off period between murders (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1996, p.17). Research has shown an increase in the amount of serial murders that has occurred in the second half of the twentieth century with a trend that is destined to continue. Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics report that there are 20,000 murders per year and over the past 20 years murder and manslaughter has increased 300%. The field of psychology and law continues to search for a pattern of behavior that can help the mental health field in identifying characteristics of serial killers through interviews and evaluations. The purpose of this study was to examine research related to this

problem of developing prospective characteristics of serial killers and to share the findings with professionals in the field of forensic psychology. The research objectives of this study were to examine the history of serial killing in both Wisconsin and the United States, to compare the past trends to the present trends, and to identify and critically analyze the different characteristics identified in research related to topic of serial killers.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

The crime of murder has been known to be present in our society since the early 1600's. Historians who have done extensive research on the topic of murder have found evidence of murder occurring in Ancient Rome and moving on through the centuries. One of the first known examples in modern times of, what would later be termed a "serial killer", was Jack the Ripper, who killed and mutilated five prostitutes in the East End of London in 1888 (Wilson, 1990). The term "serial killer" came into general use in American society in the 1980's as law enforcement officials began to classify different types of murders.

Serial killing today seems to be something that we only see or hear about in the movie theater or in some true crime book. Serial killing is something of the past that happens in far away places like Jack the Ripper in London, England. As an American society we lull ourselves into a sense of false security believing that serial murder is very rare and easily detected by law enforcement officials.

Crime statistics and experts in the field of serial murder predict that 35 to 50 serial killers may be active across the United States at any given time because

“multiple homicides frequently occur in a manner that doesn’t clearly indicate they are part of a pattern” (APB News Online, 2000). As we look closer to home in Wisconsin, the Crime Rates from 1960-1997 paint a very horrifying picture, as the number of murders in 1997 was 205. This is a 410% increase over the 50 murders that occurred in 1960 (The Disaster Center, 1999). The State of Wisconsin has been 35 years old, who can have a high or low income. Average to high intelligence and usually married with children and have a career (Ressler, et al, 1988,pg.29). This suddenly describes a very large percentage of people in our society. It’s not so easy to identify a serial killer and we as a society have been lead to believe otherwise by the media.

The profile above is relatively broad and doesn’t begin to examine what motivates an individual to commit a series of murders. The research related to serial killing has attempted to classify the motives of an individual that commit a series of murders. Dr Ronald Holmes in his book “ The World of Serial Killers” has identified four types of serial killers. The first type is identified as a “visionary serial killer”. The visionary serial killer is commanded to kill by voices or visions. The second type of serial killer is identified as the “mission serial killer”. The mission serial killer is interested in ridding the community from undesirable individuals. The third type of serial killer is a “hedonistic serial killer”. Lust, thrill

and comfort drive the hedonistic serial killer. The last type of serial killer is the “power/control serial killer”. The power/control serial killer is motivated by the need for power and dominance (Holmes, 2000).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research has shown an increase in the amount of murders that have occurred in the second half of the twentieth century with a trend that is destined to continue. The field of psychology and law continues to search for a pattern of behavior that can help the mental health field in identifying characteristics of serial murderers through interviews and evaluation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study will be to provide a review and critical analysis of the research and literature related to the known patterns of behavior of serial murderers and to examine aspects of the criminal mind related to serial murderers and share the findings with professionals in the field of forensic psychology.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine research related to the history of serial murder in Wisconsin and the United States.



2. To compare the past trends of serial murder to the present trends of serial murder.
3. To review research related to the evaluation of the criminal mind of serial murderers.
4. To examine the different types of murder to include single victims versus multiple victims committed by adult males and adult females.
5. To identify patterns in behavioral characteristics of serial murderers to aide in further future research on the topic.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **A. Types of Murder**

1. **Serial murder:** a serial murder is defined as an event in which a person kills two or more victims in incidents that are geographically unrelated.

2. **Mass murder:** a mass murder is defined as an event in which a person kills four or more victims at one time and place.

3. **Spree killer:** a spree murder is a single event with two or more locations and no emotional cooling off period between murders.

**B. Cannibalism:** the consumption of human flesh.

**C. Cult:** a pejorative label used to describe certain religious groups.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

Murder has been a dark presence in society since the beginning of time. Researchers have diligently studied murder to identify its causes. The central theme of studying murder is motivation. The question that is often asked is what motivates an individual to become a murderer. Theories include biological predispositions, sociological influences and psychological factors.

In order to begin this critical review and analysis of literature related to the criminal mind of serial killers it is important to begin with an understanding of the different types of murder and a brief historical overview of how we as a society have come to this point in studying the criminal mind of serial killers.

There are a large variety of homicides and the legal system tends to put them all together into one type. As Farmer and Hooker have noted, the legal system “artificially lumps together desperate activities under the single heading of “homicide” (Farmer and Hooker, 1987, p.3). This tends to disregard the fact that different types of homicides and motivations exist. Further research has helped law enforcement to recognize the different types of homicide to include mass murder, spree killing, and serial killing. Mass murder is defined as a “single

eruption of violence that takes place in one location with a large number of random victims (at least four, according to an FBI criterion)” ( Schlecter and Everitt, 1997, p.179).

A spree killing is defined as a killing in which “someone murders a string of people in several different locations with no cooling off period between homicides” (Schlecter and Everitt, 1997, p.273).

Finally, a serial killing has been defined by one author as a series of killings committed over a considerable span of time with the presence of a cooling off period (Schlecter and Everitt, 1997). In 1972, Cormier used the term “multicide” to define several homicides that had been committed by one person, but spread over a period of time. The term multicide is closely synonymous with the term “serial murder”. (Cormier, 1972). The German’s described multiple murders in the 1800’s as “lustmord”, or murder for pleasure. (Wilson, 1990). Egger’s initial definition was developed in 1983, which was the first attempt to define serial murder in a more comprehensive manner.

“Serial murder occurs when one or more individuals in most known cases, males, commit a second murder or subsequent murder; is relationship less (victim and attacker are strangers); occurs at a different time and has no connection to the

initial (and subsequent) murder, and is frequently committed in different geographic locations. Further, the motive is generally not for material gain, but is usually a compulsive act specifically for gratification at of the murderer. A key element is that the series of murders do not share in the events surrounding one another. “Victims share common characteristics of what are perceived to be prestige less, powerless and/or lower socio-economic groups (that is vagrants, prostitutes, migrant workers, and homosexuals, missing children and single and elderly women)” (Egger, 1984, p.8-9).

Ressler, Burgess, D’ Agostino and Douglas also provided a very brief definition of serial murder in 1984. “Serial homicide involves the murder of separate victims with time breaks between victims, as minimal as two days to weeks or months. These time breaks are referred to as a “cooling off period” (Ressler et al, 1984, p.7).

Levin and Fox (1985) in their book “Mass Murder” define serial murder as a type of mass murder (Levin & Fox, 1985). This definition addresses the pathology of the murderer’s behavior:

“ This individual travels around, sometimes from state to state, searching for victims whom he can rape and sodomize, torture, dismember, stab and strangle. Even these truly sadistic killers are, however, more evil than crazy. Few

of them can be said to be driven by delusions or hallucinations, almost none of them talks to demons or hears strange voices in empty rooms. Though their crimes may be sickening, they are not sick in either a medical or legal sense. Instead, the serial killer is typically a sociopathic personality who lacks internal control, guilt or conscience to guide his own behavior but has an excessive need to control and dominate others. He definitely knows right from wrong, definitely realizes he has committed a sinful act, but simply doesn't care about his human prey" (Levin and Fox, 1985, p.229-230).

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) in their book "Serial Murder" define serial murder by its elements, which emphasize the traits of a serial murderer:

- repetitive homicide, continuing if not prevented
- primarily one on one
- relationship less (victim-perpetrator) usually one of strangers or slight acquaintance
- motivation is to kill, not conventional passion crime or victim precipitated
- intrinsic motive (not apparent or clear cut) and ordinarily not for passion, personal gain or profit ( Holmes and DeBurger, 1988, p.18-19).

For years the public has perceived murder as being motivated by two basic factors to include the outcome of an altercation, a quarrel, a fit or rage, a reaction

to an insult, jealousy and the like or for gain to include monetary, self protection or power (Holmes and DeBurger, 1988). For “the serial killer, the motivation is not one of only money or power. The serial killer is simply motivated to kill, as you or I need water, the serial killer **NEEDS** to kill” (Serial Killers, Online, 2000).

The prevalence of serial murder past, present and future can only be estimated. The literature provides no decisive answers to the question related to prevalence. The APB News Online quotes experts in advising that 35 to 50 serial killers may be active across the United States at any given time. The absence of a pattern makes it difficult to calculate multiple homicide frequencies.

The homicide trends in the United States documented by the Bureau of Justice statistics found that homicides are more likely to involve multiple offenders than multiple victims. The percent of homicides involving multiple victims increased gradually during the last two decades from just under 3% of all homicides to 4% (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

The homicide trends in Wisconsin documented by the Disaster Center reveal a startling increase in the amount of homicides over the past 37 years. In 1960 Wisconsin reported only 50 murders. In 1997 Wisconsin reported 205 murders. This is a 410% increase in less than four decades. As far as serial murders are concerned, Wisconsin has been home to three known serial murderers

to include two cannibals Edward Gein and Jeffrey Dahmer and Joseph Franklin.

The remainder of this chapter will review a small sample of literature related to serial murder to include academic textbooks, online articles, journal articles and mainstream periodicals. The research related to the criminal mind of serial killers has examined several different theories to explain the existence of what some term “monsters” of our society. These theories can be divided into three main categories to include biological, psychological and sociological explanations. This chapter will examine several different prominent pieces of literature related to the criminal mind of serial killers.

The first academic textbook by Steven Egger includes a chapter on a synthesis of literature and research related to serial murder. Within the chapter is a section related specifically to the patterns of serial killers. In 1977, Lundsgaarde examined the pattern between the sentence and the relationship of the murderer to the victim. Lundsgaarde found that those who killed a stranger received a harsher sentence. The identity of the murderer’s victim also helps to examine some characteristics of the murderer ( Lundsgaarde, 1977).

De River in categorizing serial killers examines the Freudian aspect related to deviation or perversion of the sexual impulse (1949,p.99). These type of killers are generally “cold, calculating and egotistically sadistic” (DeRiver, 1949, p.120).

Dr. Helen Morrison, a practicing psychotherapist, who has interviewed a number of serial murderers, tends to disagree with the theory related to a sexual theme of serial murder . She states, “the incidence of sadomasochistic sex is very high. The incidence of mass murder is not, at least in the sheer number of perpetrators” (McCarthy, 1984, p.1).

Levin and Fox (1985) found that a murderer is trying to feel superior over the victim and triumph or conquer by destruction (Levin & Fix, 1985). Egger (1985) has noted that the motivational factor of a serial killer seems to be consistent with research on the nature of rape (Egger, 1985). Leyton (1986) identifies deprivation as a provocation for the multiple murderers’ frustration. Leyton has also argued that multiple murders are a “kind of sub-political and conservative protest, which nets the killer a substantial social profit of revenge, celebrity, identity and sexual relief” (Leyton, 1986, p.26).

Wilson (1972) would agree with Leyton: “If man is deprived of meanings beyond his everyday routine, he becomes disgusted and bitter, and eventually violent. A society that provides no outlet for man’s idealist passions is asking to be torn apart by violence” (p.233). Norris (1988), in his book “Serial Killers” lists a behavior pattern he labels “serial killer syndrome”. The “serial killer syndrome” includes 21 patterns or symptoms of episodic aggressive behavior, which provide a



profile or predisposition ( Norris, 1988).

Levin and Fox (1985) found the terms “sociopath” and “psychopath” used interchangeably to describe serial murderers ( Levin & Fox, 1985). Dr Helen Morrison, who examined John Gacy for 800 hours feels the serial killer is a new personality type (Berger, 1984).

Theories regarding inadequate socialization and childhood trauma are often found in homicide literature as a possible causal factor of serial murder. Starr (1972) theorizes that human cruelty may be connected to the development of a serial murderer (Starr, 1972). Willie (1975) found the most common feature of the family background of serial murderers to be violent punishing practice inflicted upon the child ( Willie, 1975). Other literature has identified the existence of an unusual or unnatural relationship with the serial killer’s mother (Lunde, 1996). Ressler (1984) found that a number of serial murderers had been fascinated with law enforcement.

Research, to this point, has not been able to completely profile a serial killer. Serial murder is predominantly a “stranger to stranger” crime and research conducted is done from a case study approach. There has been little effort to combine or collate research to examine patterns of a larger population of serial murderers.

Vetter has researched the correlation between dissociation, psychopathy and the serial murderer. It is often just assumed that someone who commits serial murder must be “out of his or her mind”. The current field of psychology does not offer society a handy assessment tool that can easily identify a would be serial killer. Part of the current problem is the near impossibility of conducting research in which the judicial process takes precedence over any other consideration. Another equally important piece is the lack of a conceptual frame of reference to approach convicted serial murderers in confinement (Vetter, 1991). Bernstein and Putnam (1986) have created an evaluation tool that can be used in the research of dissociation and serial murderers. The Dissociative Experience Scale is a 28 item self-report questionnaire that offers a means of reality measuring in normal and clinical populations (Bernstein& Putnam, 1986).

In the book “Serial Murder” authors Holmes and DeBurger (1988) examine the types of serial murder in our modern society and take a closer look at background and behavior patterns. In classifying serial murder four basic questions must be asked, which focuses upon looking at the behavioral background of the perpetrator, exploring the characteristics of the victims, examining the pattern of killing and method used and finally the location of the serial murders. The behavioral background examines three major root sources of

criminal behavior to include biogenic, sociogenic and psychogenic. Motives can also be extrinsic in that the motives to kill are located outside the individual psyche or intrinsic when the motives are in the psyche of the killer.

In examining the victims the researcher is examining traits to include specific and nonspecific traits. The selection of the victim is important to in examining whether the killer made a random or nonrandom selection. Finally, the relationship pattern is important. It is important to determine whether the killer and victim were strangers or affiliates.

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) identify four types of serial murder. They include the visionary type; the mission oriented type, the power/control type and the hedonistic type. The visionary type includes those serial killers that respond to “voices” within. The mission oriented type serial killer has a goal of eliminating a particular group or category of people. The power/control-oriented type seeks satisfaction from having complete life and death control over the victim. Finally, the hedonistic type is oriented toward pleasure or thrill seeking.

Holmes and DeBurger (1988) examine the social cultural background of known serial murderers in the United States. There are two basic sociocultural sources that are important to the origins of multicial behavior. One of these includes the persistent culture of violence in today’s society that is occupied by

continuous change in the nature of society-individual relations. The other significant factor is in the impact of violence in early development in a family setting ( Holmes & De Burger, 1988).

In the book “To Kill Again: The Motivation and Development of Serial Murder”, author Donald Sears examines a “profile” of a serial murderer. By compiling and assessing the behavioral and developmental traits, a profile emerges of a “typical” serial murderer. Sears found that the early home life of serial killers is often one in which a stable nurturing atmosphere is absent. “Most serial killers tend to come from homes where they are physically or psychologically abused” (Sears, 1991, p.37).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1985 completed an exhaustive study that found that most serial killers spent their childhood in unhealthy, uncaring and abusive homes (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 1985). The study also found that family histories of serial murderers highlighted multiple problems to include alcohol and drug abuse. The study found that most of the murderers evaluated had a weak attachment to their family members, and that there was present a parent whom suffered from problems of substance abuse, criminality and aberrant sexual behaviors. A common theme among all the murderers was a childhood with the absence of the development of self worth. Fantasy was also a common theme

among these murderers as often being isolated they turned to fantasy to escape their unpleasant environment (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 1984).

Sears goes on to examine other personality traits that appear to be common among serial murderers. The absence of the presence of a loving and nurturing relationship with parents creates great difficulties in developing and maintaining meaningful relationships. The absence of meaningful relationships also impacts the aspect of sexual relationships. Often exposed to abuse and neglect as children, these murderers becomes fascinated with fantasy related to sex and violence. An obsession with pornographic materials acts as an aid for a serial murderer to construct a sexual relationship on his mind.

The serial murderer may appear to be very normal often pleasant and amiable. There is often the absence of any overt mental illness. Serial murderers have been found to be usually quite intelligent. Research has found the IQ level of such serial murderers as Ted Bundy, JohnWayne Gacy and Wayne Williams ranged between 118 and 124.

In both an academic and professional life, serial killers tend to be most successful and promising. Examples such as John Wayne Gacy and Ted Bundy are often cited. John Wayne Gacy was a very successful businessman and Ted Bundy was an up and coming attorney.

Sears concludes his brief overview of the profile of a serial killer by stating “the serial killer is obviously a distinctive and extremely dangerous criminal“. He possesses a superficial charm, whereby he may effectively mimic appropriate socially approved behavior in any given setting, but behind this carefully constructed facade he exhibits no genuine feelings and is insensitive to the welfare of others” (Sears, 1991, p.51).

In examining the biological explanations of the serial murderer, Sears points out that it is still a mystery of how human physiology, and more specifically the brain, can be linked to aggression and violence. Research has identified five aspects related to biological functioning to explain the existence of serial killers. The five biological aspects include retardation in the development of the brain, head trauma, heredity and genetics, and increase in the male sex drive.

The first biological aspect is the retardation in the development of the brain. Researchers have examined electroencephalogram (EEG) readings of murderers’ abnormality rates in individuals identified as psychopathic or psychotic. No specific research has ever been conducted on an identified group of known serial murderers. It has been theorized that since some serial murderers suffer from some of the same characteristics of psychopaths and psychotics, retardation in the development of the brain could be a possibility.

The second biological aspect considered by Sears is focusing the attention on the thalamus, hypothalamus and their connection to aggression. If a serial killer suffers from an impaired thalamus it may cause a lack of empathy for the pain he inflicts on others as the thalamus is responsible for the relay center for processing sensory information. To this point no work has been done to examine the correlation between the thalamus and motivation to commit serial murders.

The third biological aspect examined by Sears was the issue of head trauma. According to Sears “as an explanation for serial murder, this theory offers at best a limited answer. Although it is true that many serial killers suffered some type of severe head injury during childhood, many others have no such history” (Sears, 1991, p.112).

The fourth biological aspect examined by Sears was the issue of heredity and genetics. Despite the series of genetic research, there has been no “crime gene” located. Many studies involving children who had been separated from their biological parents at birth examined the concept of inherited criminal characteristics. Researchers have found that what may be inherited aggression is a metabolic condition known as Lesch-Myhan disease. It may be possible that serial murderers inherit a tendency for aggressive behaviors and turn to murder as a last resort when other more appropriate outlets are not visible. The final biological

aspect identified by Sears was the increase in the male sex drive. Levin and Fox have theorized that the cause of serial murder is directly related to an increasing sex drive in men (Levin and Fox, 1985). According to Levin and Fox a “serial murderer pursues this increased need for sexual stimulation to the point of murder” (Sears, 1991, p.116). There appear to be a number of biological explanations, but without further research no one biological factor can be identified as “the” cause of serial murder.

In examining the psychological explanations of serial murder the most predominant theory is he suffers from an antisocial personality disorder. Individuals with antisocial personality disorder display the following characteristics: superficial charm, intelligence, absence of delusions or irrational thinking, lack of nervousness, unreliable, untruthful, and insincere, exhibits poor judgment and fails to learn from experiences, pathogenic egocentricity and incapable of love. The antisocial personality disorder or psychopath is common among serial killers. A serial killer often engages in related criminal acts, experiences anxiety and tension, but experiences no guilt or remorse for his actions.

Sears theorizes that a serial killer’s behavior “may be due to a deficient psychological makeup that prevents normal emotional development” (Sears, 1991,



p.59). Some researchers (Quay) postulates that a serial killer may be a hybrid form of psychopath have theorized it. This certainly would explain the even greater need for increased stimuli. A serial killers inability to feel emotion may also explain the serial killers need to kill again and again.

“ Donald Lunde, in his book “Murder and Madness”, proposes another theory, asserting . Those mass murderers, in general, are almost always insane” (Sears, 1991, p.62). Sears goes on to examine Lunde’s beliefs that serial killers can be classified into two types to include paranoid schizophrenics or sexual sadists. The paranoid schizophrenic experiences hallucinations, delusions, bizarre religious ideas, suspicion and aggression. Sears doesn’t believe this classification fits the behaviors of serial killers. Sears feel the second classification proposed by Lunde related to sexual sadism is far more accurate.

Another popular theory reviewed by Sears related to hatred. Some theorists have proposed that serial killer harbors some deep hared toward all women due to underlying hate for some significant female in his life. In psychological terms this is often referred to as “displaced aggression”. As we have seen in cases such as Gacy, the hatred may also be towards young men and boys. This may play an important role in the motivation to kill.

A final psychological explanation proposed by Sears suggested that serial

killers' crimes come from some form of retarded or impaired emotional development that may have begun in early childhood. Researchers have found the absence of emotional development in serial killers. Psychoanalysts may postulate that a serial killer is the product of an impaired emotional development that may be the result of improper parenting. The problem with these theories is the absence of clinical testing and objective evaluation to determine the correlation that may exist between poor parenting and impaired emotional development.

In examining the sociological explanations for the existence of serial killers, Sears makes the opening statement that "environmental factors are perhaps the most influential and very often a permanent affect in the shaping of the later development of a child" (Sears, 1991, p.79). Sears identifies seven aspects of the sociological explanations to include childhood deprivation, intense frustration, need for power, undercontrolled or overcontrolled behavior, excitement of the hunt, societal roles and media influence and pornography.

Research has revealed that a serial killer's childhood tends to be marked by a lack of nurturing and love. He tends to grow up in a neglectful and abusive and at times violent environment. Studies have shown that adults who were abused as children tend to exhibit violent outbursts. It has been theorized that emotional deprivation combined with other environmental factors or damage to the inhibitive

centers of the brain can account for the development of psychopathy.

The second aspect of sociological explanations includes intense frustrations. The presence of an inadequate home life of the serial murderer creates an inability to cope with failures. A serial murderer may commit murders in part because a build up of intense frustrations. This frustration buildup theory is similar to the psychodynamic theory developed by Freud. A buildup from birth creates aggressive energy. This energy is generally released in small amounts periodically. If not released it can cause an explosion of violent behavior. Frustration can also develop from failed interpersonal contacts, school, military or employment.

The third aspect of sociological explanations involved a need for power. This is one of the basic themes that have prevailed through most serial murderers. The serial murderer seeks a sense of power and control that his life seems to lack. He achieves this power and control by killing others.

The fourth aspect of sociological explanations involved undercontrolled and overcontrolled behavior. The undercontrolled individual tends to have limited ability to control aggressive behaviors and often engages in violence. This type of individual when frustrated responds by use of aggression.

The overcontrolled individual conversely learns to suppress aggression.

This individual tends to build up aggression and frustration until one day a small and insignificant event causes a violent and explosive reaction.

The fifth aspect of sociological explanations includes the excitement of the hunt. This aspect postulates that it is not the murder itself that motivates the crime of a serial murderer, but instead it is the exhilaration felt by the serial killer as he stalks his victim. If this theory is accurate it is questionable what actually causes the serial murderer to murder once the victim is caught.

The sixth aspect of sociological explanations includes societal roles. This theory proposes that the serial killer's actions portray the roles that society has assigned to man and women. Men are to be strong, powerful and unemotional. Women are to be weak and submissive. A serial killer looks to maintain society's roles by acting out what he perceives are expected of him.

The seventh and final aspect of the sociological explanations proposed by Sears includes media influence and pornography. Researchers have completed numerous studies, which have correlated media violence and aggression. "Thus, violence in the media does play a role in the short-term aggression exhibited by serial murderers as well as the general public" (Sears, 1991, p.97). Pornography is now also being linked to serial murderers. Often lacking interpersonal relationships, serial murderers develop an insatiable appetite for pornographic

materials. Researchers believe that a serial murderer derives his ideas about torture and domination from the submissive roles he sees women and children play in this pornographic material. One of the professional articles by Shirley Lynn Scott takes a closer look at the development of serial killers in her article “What Makes Serial Killers Tick?”. She examines biological, psychological and sociological explanations. In examining biological explanations Scott examines the question of natural born killers. Scott claims that environment alone can not explain deranged behavior. To this point research has been unsuccessful in identifying a “kill gene”. Scott cites six possible biological aspects that may lead to an explanation of the existence of serial killers. The six possible biological aspects include extra chromosomes, high testosterone, heavy metals, brain defects, and absence of fear and sensory deprivation (Scott, 2000).

The first aspect related to extra chromosomes involves a history of research that has led to the identification of Klinefelter’s syndrome involving an extra X (female) chromosome in males. Research has also examined the presence of an extra Y (male) chromosome. The extra Y chromosome was once believed to be an explanation for violence. Further research has proved that theory to be wrong. There is no evidence that currently links X and Y-chromosomes to serial

killers.

A second biological aspect examined looks at levels of testosterone and serotonin. It has been found that when testosterone levels are high and serotonin levels are low it tends to lead to increased aggression and sadistic behavior according to Scott (Scott, 2000).

Heavy metal was the third biological aspect examined by Scott. Research has shown that some violent offenders tend to have higher levels of toxic heavy metals (to include manganese, lead, cadmium and copper) in their systems. Scott states that mass murderer James Huberty was found to have excessive amounts of the toxic cadmium in his system (Scott, 2000).

The fourth biological aspect examined by Scott involved brain defects. Many researchers have identified a correlation between brain defects and injuries to violent behavior. Some of the more common brain injuries that affect emotions and violence include injuries to the hypothalamus, limbic brain and temporal lobe. The hypothalamus contains centers that control sexual instinct and violence. Injury to this area merges the centers to sexual instinct and violence together and can create lust murderers. The limbic brain is associated with emotion and motivation. Injuries to this area can cause an individual to lose control of emotion.

Finally, the temporal lobe is very susceptible; in as much as it is located where the skull is thinnest. Damage to this area can create hair trigger violent reactions and increased aggression according to Scott ( Scott, 2000).

Scott also examines a psychological explanation of the existence of serial killers examining psychopathy in serial killers. “In the 19th century, psychopathy was considered to be moral insanity”. Today it is commonly known as “antisocial personality disorder” (Scott, 2000, p.1).

Psychopaths are described as being purposeless, irrational, lack conscience and are thrill seekers and literally fearless. Genetics have taught us that the nervous system of a psychopath varies from a normal person’s. Psychopaths tend to need higher levels of stimulation and thus they seek dangerous situations. This thrill seeking leads a lot of serial killers to become police officers.

The psychopath tends to not consciously feel anger and many killers seem to go into a trance during their predatory and killing phases according to Scott. The psychopath sees the victim as a symbolic object. Psychopaths are generally completely out of touch with reality, but seem to know what is right and wrong in society. Psychopaths are smooth talkers often well versed in psychology and skilled at manipulating evaluators. Serial killers who are psychopathic often blend

into society.

Scott also examined two closely related sociological factors to explain the existence of a serial murderer to include childhood abuse and childhood events. It is not uncommon for society to look at a serial killer's upbringing to find answers to the questions about how this monster could have been created. Society wants to be able to find someone or something to blame. Researchers have examined the correlation between child abuse and serial killer's behaviors. It should be noted that childhood abuse is not a direct link to a future of crime, but it is an undeniable factor in many of the serial killer's backgrounds. Scott quotes a passage from Joel Norris' book, "Serial Killer" in saying "parents who abuse their children, physically as well as psychologically, instill in them an almost instinctive reliance upon violence as a first resort to any challenge" ( Scott, 2000, p.2).

Relationships with mothers have been found to be an important indicator. Research has found that serial murderers frequently are found to have unusual or unnatural relationships with their mothers. An example of this is the relationship Ed Gein had with his mother. She convinced her son that women were "vessels of sin and caused disease". Ed Gein, in his twisted mind, misinterpreted this and literally made vessels out of women, by using their skulls for household items.



(Scott, 2000). On the opposite end of the spectrum are mothers who often overstep their boundaries and expose their children to inappropriate sexual behavior.

Mothers are not the only ones that researchers have found to contribute to the making of a serial killer. “It’s usually the sadistically disciplinarian father that pops up in the serial killer’s family tree” (Scott, 2000, p.4). Scott gives the example of John Wayne Gacy’s father, who repeatedly verbally abused him by making derogatory comments. He would frequently call John a sissy, queer and a failure. His father often physically abused John. In later years when John began to kill young boys and men, John would encourage his victims to be brave while facing death. Scott feels this was an effort on John’s part to “reassert his own vision of a masculine identity that had been squashed down by his father” (Scott, 2000, p.5).

Scott also examines several different childhood events that may contribute to the making of a serial killer. Adoptions are the first potential contribution. Scott theorizes that this is a child who first feels abandonment by his biological parents and second experiences a great deal of identity confusion as he tries to redefine his role in a new family. Scott states adoption alone does not create serial killers, but can create the beginning of a child’s disruption of self-identity.

The most commonly quoted factor of the making of a serial killer has been exposure to violence. Ed Gein, among others, witnessed the slaughter of farm animals as a child. Not every traumatic experience can lead a child to become a serial killer. But how much is too much. Research has not been able to provide us with a clear-cut answer.

One serial killer, Albert Fish ( Bettemann) points a finger of blame at a Washington, D.C. Orphanage. Other serial killers have pointed a finger of blame at reform schools, jails and prisons. Reform school and jails in the 19th century often had stories told of sadistic guards and medieval punishments. Does violence in a confined setting create more violence? Prison reform has helped to decrease the extent of this violence.

Another childhood event believed to contribute to the making of a serial killer is peer rejection. Often feeling isolated from peers these children turn to fantasy. Scott theorizes that the fantasies of violence often reveal themselves through two of three “triads” of predicting criminal behavior, fire starting and animal cruelty (Scott, 2000).

The “triad” includes animal cruelty, pyromania and bedwetting. As a child becomes more isolated and the fantasies related to violence more intense, a compulsion to commit violent acts becomes greater. Animal cruelty and fire

starting becomes a practice towards escalating crimes to include human beings. Bed wetting, according to Scott, is “the most intimate of these “triad” symptoms and is less likely to be willfully divulged” (Scott, 2000, p.4). Researchers have found that approximately 60% of multiple murderers wet their beds past adolescence ( Scott, 2000).

The final article reviewed was an article by Edward Mitchell (1996) titled “The Aetiology of Serial Murder: towards an integrated model”. In Mitchell’s article he examines the various theories of the aetiology of serial murder to include a sociological, psychiatric and biological explanation (Mitchell, 1996).

Mitchell begins by examining the sociological aspects. Mitchell cites ten sociological theories that might contribute to the explanation of serial killers. The ten theories include structural/functionalist approach, strain theory, differential association, societal bonds, subcultural theory, inadequate socialization, gender roles, ideology, glorification and the role of religion (Mitchell, 1996).

The first theory examined by Mitchell relates to structural/functionalist approaches. The origins of this theory can be taken from the 1965 work of Durkheim who theorized that deviance and crime is the result of a breakdown in a social consensus regarding society goals and values. Serial murder is an outgrowth from Durkheim’s theory, in that, it represents a feeling of hopelessness

and normlessness. The serial killer finds himself to be an outcast in society and unable to meet the goals and values of the society as a whole. The serial killer becomes helpless and turns to violence as outlet (Mitchell, 1996).

Mitchell next looks at the strain theory, which was first developed by Merton in 1968. The strain theory much like Durkheim's theory looks at the fact that social end and means to achieve them are learned behaviors. Some people have high aspirations and others do not. The cultural norm presents a goal of achievement and success. Some individuals within society lack the abilities to achieve that societal goal of achievement and success. These individuals thus feel the "strain" of society. In order to feel a sense of accomplish goals may be reached through illegitimate means. For the serial killer these goals and achievements are reached through killing (Mitchell, 1996).

The third theory reviewed by Mitchell involved differential association. In 1937 Sutherland theorized that criminal behavior is learned in primary group relationships rather than secondary sources such as television or the media. In this theory it is believed that serial killers are often incarcerated for other crimes before their first murder and often serial killers may learn advanced techniques of murder from fellow inmates at prison (Mitchell, 1996).

A societal bond is Mitchell's fourth theory related to the conception of

serial murder. Mitchell quotes in this theory Hirschi who theorized that law abiding behavior is reliant upon the bonds between people and conventional society. Hirschi, according to Mitchell, explained that societal bonds involve an attachment and a commitment. In an attachment an individual is sensitive to another's perception of him/her. In commitment there is an individual social reward that is often connected to conforming to societal laws. Serial killers often feel a sense of isolation from society and are unable to establish an attachment nor receive a commitment. In the absence of this bond with society breeds the hatred and anger that can lead to serial murder (Mitchell, 1996).

The fifth theory examined by Mitchell relates to the subcultural theory. Mitchell quotes, Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) who according to Mitchell describe a subculture as an environment where perhaps violence is not viewed as antisocial or morally wrong. Serial killers who have grown up in an environment filled with domestic violence and physical abuse may view violence as a more "natural" environment. This creates a subculture where violence is an acceptable action that is not viewed as morally wrong (Mitchell, 1996).

Mitchell's next theory deals with inadequate socialization. Case studies have been conducted by several researchers and have found that children who have lacked the experience of normal communication and socialization lack

understanding that part of the world around them. Childhood environment again playing an important role in providing a foundation of knowledge about the world around us (Mitchell, 1996).

The seventh theory reviewed by Mitchell involved a look at gender roles. It is very interesting to note that only a few examples of female serial murder exist. Researchers theorize that violent behavior is often learned in the context of gender roles. Media, family and peer groups teach the differential roles of the genders. Males are taught to “take” and strive for power and women are taught to be passive and subservient. It is clear that serial murder itself is not socialized, but certainly the important precursors, such as violence and power are often socialized (Mitchell, 1996).

The eighth theory examined by Mitchell involves the theory related to ideology. Mitchell quotes Ratner (1996) who according to Mitchell has theorized that serial murder represents an “ideological breakage”. He explains it as a type of disruption in the status quo (Mitchell, 1996). Leyton has theorized that serial murder may even be a form of social protest (Leyton, 1986).

The ninth theory examined by Mitchell involves a theory related to glorification. The media has helped contribute to society’s intense interest in serial murder. The public interest has been peaked by such movies as “Silence of the

Lambs” and “Henry” Portrait of a Serial Killer”. This theory of glorifications looks at a serial killer’s motivation of gaining public interest that may at times supersede his motivation to actually kill (Mitchell, 1996).

The final theory examined by Mitchell looks at the role religion plays in the concept of serial murder. There is a great deal of debate as to how much or how little influence religion plays in serial murder. In the visionary serial killer, God may be telling him to kill. In cases such as Manson, Lucas and Ramirez there was a satanic cult link. The answer is not clear and in need of further research (Mitchell, 1996).

Mitchell has also examined psychiatric approaches to serial murder. In this area Mitchell identifies seven areas of psychiatry to be considered. These areas include psychosis and schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder, neurotic disorders, role of psychopathy, role of paraphillias, gender identity disorder, homosexuality and sexual dysfunction and substance abuse. Mitchell begins by examining probably the most obvious conclusion drawn by many as the main contribution to the making of a serial killer, which is psychosis. Lunde in 1976 was bold to claim that all serial killers are insane and that their insanity stems from paranoid schizophrenia or sexual sadism (Lunde, 1996). Further research since 1976 has challenged Lunde’s theory. Psychosis will usually be easy to detect, but

will not fully explain serial murder in general. It is believed that psychosis is not readily compatible with the crimes of serial murder as the effects of such a mental illness would make it nearly impossible to evade capture.

The second psychiatric approach examined by Mitchell includes multi personality disorder. The symptom of dissociation (the lack of integration of thoughts, feelings and experiences into consciousness) is often observed in serial killers. It is unclear as to whether this dissociation is an ongoing symptom or connected to commission of the offense. Bundy often talked about his crimes in the third person. It is not clear as to whether this was a legal ploy or a symptom of mental illness. Hickey (1991) identifies that absence of any well-documented cases of serial killers suffering from MPD (Hickey, 1991).

The third psychiatric approach examined by Mitchell includes neurotic disorders. Mitchell quotes Hirose(1979) in associating homicidal behavior with depression. Research has shown that serial killers tend to display higher scores in psychoticism and neuroticism on inventories than other subjects. In the past research mood has not been viewed as a major contributor in serial murder (Mitchell, 1996).

The fourth psychiatric approach examined by Mitchell reveals the role of psychopathy in serial killing. Criminal behavior is usually identified as a symptom



of psychopathy and is particularly associated with violent crimes. It is not possible to make a general statement that all serial killers are psychopaths. Even Jeffrey Dahmer showed remorse for his actions. It appears that the term psychopath is quickly used to label those individuals we do not understand. Serial killers are not well understood and quickly assumed to be psychopaths when they most likely are not (Mitchell, 1996).

The next approach examined by Mitchell relates to the role of paraphillias. Ressler et al in 1988 found a wide range of sexual behavior among serial killers to include necrophilia, sadism, exhibitionism, transvestism, voyeurism, frotterism, compulsive masturbation, piquerism (sexual excitement from stabbing/blood letting), coprophilia (use of feces in sex) and zoophilia (sexual activity with animals). It is believed that the role of paraphillias is fueled by the role of fantasy in the serial killer's life (Ressler, 1988).

Mitchell also examines the role of gender identity; homosexuality and sexual dysfunction as a contributing factor to serial murder. Lowenstein (1989) theorized that gender identity disorder and homosexuality are predisposing factors for murder and serial murder based on the fact that a number of murders occur involving such individuals. Further studies have failed to substantiate Lowenstein's theory. Sexual dysfunction is often reported by serial murderers, but

is that so unusual based on the fact that serial murderers have often become isolative and lack the experience of socialization.

The final psychiatric approach looked at by Mitchell is the role of substance abuse in contributing to serial murder. Studies have found a prevalence of substance abuse as high as 50% in serial murderers (e.g. Dietz, 1990). Sears has reported that in interviews he has had with known serial killers the report of drug and alcohol use is high. It is believed that drugs and alcohol may be more likely to be incidental to serial murder (Sears, 1991).

Mitchell lastly examines the biological explanations of serial murder. Mitchell looks at five biological aspects that may lead to an explanation of serial murder. The first explanation looks at the evolutionary and ethological approaches. For centuries man has sought to achieve power and control from the early days of the caveman to present day. Society reinforces this evolutionary belief through providing rewards for dominance and power. Power has often been gained through violence. Males have evolved to be effective users of violence to gain dominance and control. This very simple explanation is explained the rare existence of a female serial killer and the over abundance of male serial killers (Mitchell, 1996).

The second biological aspect examined by Mitchell involves the

neurological contributions. Research has shown great many case studies that have discussed the connection between a history of head trauma or abnormality with serial killing. Neurological retardation has been a focus of attention with EEG readings displaying a higher level of abnormality among aggressive prisoners. There has been some comparison of common characteristics shared between the serial killer and psychopath. No comprehensive neurological studies have examined a representative sample of serial murderers. Other attention has been focused on the thalamus and hypothalamus as previously discussed earlier in this chapter. Norris (1988) reports that abnormal genetic constitution may be indicative of neurological damage. Norris has identified several of these abnormalities to include long second or small toe, pterodactyloid fingers (long, clawlike), webbed fingers, earlobes connected to the side of the head; and bulbous extensions of the fingertips (Norris, 1988).

The next biological aspect examined by Mitchell included the biochemical approaches. Research has shown speculation about the role of serotonin in aggressive behavior. An excess amount of serotonin may play a role in the offense of serial murder. Hormonal factors may also play a role in serial murder. Androgens such as male testosterone may have a direct influence on the brain making a particular behavioral response. Adrenaline has been found to not be a

factor in aggression ( Mitchell, 1996).

Mitchell has examines the role of genetics in contributing to serial murder. Mitchell points out that there is no “serial killing gene”. A large amount of literature exists on genetics and aggression in general. The biggest problem in researching the impact of genetics is being able to separate out genetics and environment. To this point no research has been successful in being able to do that, so many questions about the role genetics plays in the serial killer still exist (Mitchell, 1996).

The last approach examined by Mitchell relates to race and serial murder. Statistics show that minorities are underrepresented in the offense of serial murder. Mitchell states that “offenses such as serial murder have no comparable socio-cultural/economic instrumentality, and therefore may not be a criminal activity “of interest” to ethnic minorities” (Mitchell, 1996, p.33).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This final chapter will provide an analysis of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The literature examined the criminal mind of the serial killer by addressing three distinct approaches to include biological, psychological and sociological. The six authors tended to agree on the content within each approach for the most part, but some variation was present.

The first area to be reviewed will be the biological aspect of the criminal mind of the serial killer. Of all the literature reviewed only three authors identified a biological aspect. Sears (1991) included five biological aspects in his review to include the development of the brain, head trauma, heredity, genetics and an increase in male sex drive (Sears, 1991). Scott (2000) in her article “What Makes Serial Killers Tick?” examined three biological aspects to include extra chromosomes, high testosterone, and heavy metals (Scott, 2000). The final author, Mitchell (1996) examined five biological aspects to include evolutionary/ethological approaches, neurological contributions, biochemical approaches, genetics and race ( Mitchell, 1996).

In comparing and contrasting the authors and their respective biological aspects of the criminal mind of serial killers, it is easy to see some distinct

similarities in thought as well as some extreme variations. All three authors identify the impact of neurological difficulties to include development of the brain and brain defects. Sears points out that although electroencephalogram (EEG) readings of murderers' have significant abnormalities, there has been no research that has ever been conducted on an identified group of known serial murderers. Sears also indicates that "although it is true that many serial killers suffered some type of severe head injury during childhood , many others have no such history"(Sears, 1991, p.112). Scott reveals that research has identified a correlation between brain defects and injuries to violent behavior, but fails to classify violent behavior to specifically refer to the population of serial killers. Finally, Mitchell makes comparisons between serial killers and psychopaths, but does admit that no neurological studies have been done on a representative sample of serial murderers.

Sears, Scott and Mitchell all have included biochemical aspects in their explanations as well. Sears looks more specifically at the effect an increased sex drive has on an explanation of serial murder. Sears looks to research conducted by Levin and Fox (1985) who theorized that serial murder was directly related to an increasing sex drive in men. According to Levin and Fox " a serial murderer pursues this increased need for sexual stimulation to the point of murder" (Sears,

1991, p.116). The problem remains that no formal research with a representative sample of serial murderers has been conducted to validate Levin and Fox's theory.

Sears and Mitchell have both examined the impact of genetics on serial murder. Sears is very quick to point out that there has been no "crime gene" located. Research in this area has tried to successfully correlate a parent's history of criminal characteristics or violence with a child's propensity to become violent. Researchers have been able to find what may be an inherited aggression in a metabolic condition known as Lesch-Myhan disease. Sears is very tentative to draw the conclusion that serial murderers inherit a tendency for aggressive behaviors. Mitchell also comments on the absence of a "serial killing gene". Mitchell states that the research on genetics and aggression tends to be very general. The biggest problem viewed by Mitchell is the absence of an ability to conduct research that can separate out elements related to genetics and elements related to the environment. Without an ability to conduct this type of research, the examination of genetics related to serial killers will not be accurate and reliable. Both authors address research regarding extra chromosomes that has been conducted. Previous research had theorized that an extra Y chromosome was indicative of violent tendencies. This research has since been found to be incorrect and at this point both authors point out that extra chromosomes can not be

identified as a cause of serial murder.

Scott has identified an aspect that has tended to be overlooked by the other two authors. Scott found some violent offenders tend to have higher levels of toxic heavy metals (to include manganese, lead, cadmium and copper) in their systems. Scott states that mass murderer James Huberty was found to have excessive amounts of the toxic metal cadmium in his system. Mitchell examined a biological element that was also overlooked by the other authors. Mitchell relates race to serial murder. Statistics show that minorities are underrepresented in the offense of serial murder. Serial murder continues to be predominantly a crime of the white males. Perhaps that is an important element that is easily being overlooked in the research.

In comparing and contrasting the psychological aspects of the authors in this literature review it is clear to see that there is a major theme among the authors. The primary focus is examining serial murder as a form of mental illness. Often times when someone commits an act that is so outrageous and can not be understood we as a society are quick to pathologize it. Society views a serial murderer as a “monster” that is not understood.

Historically, we have been quick to categorize serial killers as psychopaths or sociopaths, often not differentiating between the two labels as Levin and Fox



have pointed out in their research. DeRiver, in his research, examines serial killers from a Freudian aspect related to deviation or perversion of the sexual impulse (1949,p.99). These type of killers are often referred to as being “cold, calculating and egotistically sadistic” (DeRiver, 1949, p.120). Morrison, a practicing psychotherapist, tends to disagree with DeRiver’s theory and views serial killers as motivated by means other than sexual impulse. Morrison, after examining John Wayne Gacy for 800 hours, feels that the serial killer can be classified as a new personality type. Lunde in his book “Murder and Madness” makes the bold statement that mass murderers in general are almost always insane. Insanity, however, has evolved into a legal and psychological meaning. A serial killer can be legally insane yet not be “insane” from a psychological standpoint (Lunde, 1976).

Vetter and Mitchell focus their research on examining the psychotic and personality disorder aspect of a serial killer. Vetter’s research predominantly focuses on the symptom of dissociation. The public views dissociation as a state of being “out of one’s mind”. The current problem in psychology is the availability to evaluate dissociation and its relationship to serial killers. Bernstein and Putnam have developed an evaluation tool that can assist in the research of dissociation and serial murderers. The Dissociative Experience Scale is a 28 item self-report

questionnaire. The validity of a self-report questionnaire with individuals experiencing dissociation may be questionable. Mitchell, in his work related to psychosis and personality disorders, examines the connection to serial killers. Mitchell found that although psychosis is easily detected, it is not readily compatible with the crime of serial murder as the affects of such a mental illness would make it almost impossible to evade capture. Mitchell also looked at the connection between multi personality disorder and serial killing. The symptom of dissociation as Vetter discussed is often observed in serial killers. It is unclear if this dissociation is a symptom of a personality disorder or psychosis and connected to the crime of serial killing. Research conducted by Hickey has indicated that there is the absence of any well-documented cases of serial killers suffering from MPD.

Sears, Mitchell and Scott focused their research further on psychopathy and serial killers. Sears theorized that most serial killers suffered from antisocial personality disorder. Sears states individuals with antisocial personality disorder tend to have the following characteristics: superficial charm, intelligence, absence of delusions or irrational thought, lack of nervousness, unreliable, untruthful and insincere, exhibit poor judgment and fail to learn from experiences, pathogenic egocentricity and incapable of love. Scott theorized that psychopaths often see the

victim as a symbolic object and that psychopaths are generally out of touch with reality, but seem to know what is right and wrong in society. Mitchell's work as described above focused on multi personality disorder and serial killers.

Sears and Mitchell both addressed issues related to sexual sadism, paraphilias and gender identity disorders. Both take a Freudian approach in attaching serial killing to a sexual impulse.

Sears supports Lunde's theory related to the belief that serial killers can be classified into a type related to sexual sadists. Mitchell references the research conducted by Ressler et al related to serial killers and paraphillias. It is believed that paraphillias are often fueled by the role of fantasy in a serial killer's life. Mitchell also identifies the fact that sexual dysfunction is often reported by serial murderers.

In comparing and contrasting the sociological aspects of the authors in this literature it is clear that this is the most predominantly researched area related to the criminal mind of serial killers. Nine authors in this critical literature review were found to have examined the importance of the sociological aspects. In reviewing their research the author's findings can be generally grouped into four areas to include power/control, society norms/culture, violence and family issues and issues of self. The most prominent feature common among serial killers is the

desire to seek power and control. Levin and Fox (1985) found that a murderer is often trying to feel superior over the victim and triumph or conquer by destruction (Levin & Fox, 1985). Sears similarly found that a serial killer has a need for power and seeks a sense of power and control that his life seems to lack. Mitchell looked at a sociological concept of glorification. In this aspect a serial killer gains power and control through almost a celebrity status that is created by the media. In this theory the serial killer's motivation for gaining public interest at times may supersede his motivation to actually kill.

The next area common among the research related to sociological aspects of the serial killer would include issues related to society norms and culture. Leyton (1986) found in his research that multiple murderers are a "kind of sociopolitical and conservative protest, which nets the killer a substantial social profit of revenge, celebrity, identity and sexual relief" (Leyton, 1986, p.26). Sears found that societal roles play an important part in the development of a serial killer. This theory proposes that the serial killer's actions portray the roles that society has assigned to men and women. Men are to be strong, powerful and unemotional. Women are to be weak and submissive. A serial killer looks to maintain society's roles by acting out what he perceives to be expected of him by society. Mitchell bases his theory on societal bonds on Hirschi's work from 1969. Hirschi also

discussed the bonds between people and society. Beyond the expectation related to an individual's role there are also societal bonds based on attachment and commitment. In an attachment an individual is sensitive to another's perception of him/her. In commitment there is an individual social reward that is often connected to conforming to societal laws. Serial killers often feel a sense of isolation from society and are unable to neither establish an attachment nor receive a commitment. Sears also theorizes that media and the presence of pornography play important roles in the development of a serial killer too. Numerous studies have been conducted that demonstrate a clear correlation between media violence and aggression. As human beings we are able to "learn" a great deal of our behaviors from role modeling. Media presents an opportunity to "learn" how to be violent. The mere presence of movies like "Silence of the Lambs" and "Henry: The Portrait of a Serial Killer", although entertaining, may also be educational to a would be serial killer. Mitchell supported Sears' theory in his examination of a concept he referred to as "differential association". In this theory, Mitchell, and Sutherland before him in 1937, believed that criminal behavior is learned in primary group relationships rather than secondary sources. In this theory it is believed that serial killers are often incarcerated for other crimes before their first murder and often serial killers learn advanced techniques of murder from fellow inmates at prison.

Pornography, likewise, fuels an already over sexualized imagination. Often lacking interpersonal relationships, serial murderers develop an insatiable appetite for pornographic materials. Researchers believe that a serial murderer derives his ideas about torture and domination from the submissive roles he sees women and children play in the pornographic material. Mitchell has done a great deal of research on the sociological aspects of serial killers. He has looked specifically at the area of society norms and culture and has developed two theories to examine the correlation with serial murder. Mitchell's first theory looks at examining the structural/functionalist approach. This is modeled after Durkheim's 1965 work related to deviance and crime and the breakdown in a social consensus of society goals and values. Mitchell argues that our current society seems to be moving away from a common societal goal. Serial killers remain outcasts in society and are unable to meet the changing society goals. The serial killer feeling helpless turns to violence as an outlet. Mitchell's second theory somewhat similar to the first looks at social ends and means. In a society some people have high aspirations and others do not. The cultural norms seem to promote success and achievement. Some individuals in society lack the abilities to be successful and thus feel a "strain". Mitchell's strain theory proposes that these individuals will turn to illegitimate means to gain success. For the serial killer these goals and

achievements are reached through killing.

The next common area of sociological aspects is the area of violence and family issues. This is an area that is equal to the significance of power. Violence has been demonstrated to be a major influence on serial killers. Several authors have made findings about the correlation between violence and serial murder. Starr (1972) theorizes that human cruelty may be connected to the development of a serial murderer (Starr, 1972). Willie (1975) found that the most common feature of the family background of serial murderers to be violent punishing practices (Willie, 1975). Holmes and DeBurger (1988) examined two basic sociocultural sources that are important to the origins of multicial behavior to include the persistent culture of violence in society and the impact of violence in early development in a family setting. Scott has found that although childhood abuse is not a direct link to a future of crime, it is an undeniable factor in many of the serial killer's backgrounds. Historically, the finger of blame related to child abuse has been pointed at mothers, however Scott quotes "it's usually the sadistically disciplinarian father that pops up in the serial killer's family tree" (Scott, 2000, p.4).

The environment of the home has found to have many correlations with the development of a serial killer as well. The Federal Bureau of Investigations in a

1985 study found that most serial killers spent their childhood in unhealthy, uncaring and abusive homes (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 1985). Sears as well in his studies found the absence of a loving and nurturing relationship with parents among serial killers. Studies have shown that adults who were abused as children tend to exhibit violent outbursts. Sears goes one step farther and theorizes that emotional deprivation, a direct result of the absence of love and nurturance, combined with other environmental factors can account for the development of psychopathy. Studies by Lunde (1996) and Scott (2000) found the presence of an unusual or unnatural relationship between mother's and serial killers.

The last sociological aspect that authors examined related directly to issues related to self. The Federal Bureau of Investigations in their studies found a common theme among all murderers to be an absence of self worth. Scott, in her studies, found peer rejection to also be a common theme among serial killer. Often isolated from peers these children turn to fantasy related to sex and violence. The isolation for these individuals can, according to Sears, lead to intense frustration. This frustration theory postulated by Sears is similar to the psychodynamic theory developed by Freud. This buildup of energy stemming from the presence of an inadequate homelike which created an inability to cope with failure produces an



explosion of violent behavior.

### Conclusions

The crime of serial murder is not a new concept yet it continues to baffle the field of psychology. Researchers have tried to look at biological, psychological and sociological aspects that may have led to the development of the criminal mind of a serial killer.

Norris (1988), in his book “Serial Killer” lists a behavior pattern he labels “serial killer syndrome”. The “serial killer syndrome” includes 21 patterns or symptoms of episodic aggressive behavior, which provide a profile or predisposition. These patterns of aggressive behavior include ritualistic behavior, masks of insanity, compulsivity, search for help, severe memory disorders and chronic inability to tell the truth, suicidal tendencies, history of serious assault, deviate sexual behavior and hyper sexuality, head injuries incurred at birth, history of chronic drug and alcohol abuse, alcohol or drug abusing parents, victim of physical or emotional abuse or of cruel parenting, results of an unwanted pregnancy, products of a difficult gestation period for the mother, interrupted bliss or no bliss of childhood, extraordinary cruelty to animals, arousal tendencies without obvious homicidal interest, symptoms of neurological impairment,

evidence of genetic disorders, biochemical symptoms and feelings of powerlessness or inadequacy (Norris, 1988, p.215-216). Norris has provided an extensive list of characteristics that he believes can be attributed to a serial killer. This list provides an excellent summary of the biological, sociological and psychological aspects discussed in the previous literature related to the criminal mind of a serial killer.

By far the most startling research related to the development of the criminal mind of a serial killer lies within a theory postulated by Dr. Herbert Streaan and Lucy Freeman. In their book "Our Wish to Kill", Streaan and Freeman theorize that the instinct or murder can lurk in all of our psyches and that some people can control those urges better than others. An example of that would be a situation in which you get angry with your spouse, partner or children and you blurt out the comment, "and you make me so angry I could just kill you". Could you really kill that person? It is certainly startling to think that you could actually commit the act of murder, but how many times have we learned of the tragedy of murder and perhaps known directly or indirectly the murderer and questioned how that person could have committed the crime of murder.

Research literature simply can't answer that question. Murder and especially serial murder has been a crime that psychologists have been unable to explain. There are various profiles of characteristics that have been found to be

common among serial murderers, but no one has been able to find the key to unlock the criminal mind of a serial killer.

### Recommendations

A major gap in the research related to the criminal mind of serial killers has been studies conducted on a “representative” sample of serial killers. Most of the research available today has utilized samples of various mass murderers and has been generalized to the very specific serial killer type.

Areas of research that need to be examined according to Hickey (1991) include a list of eleven specific needs to include:

1. Increased interaction and involvement between academicians and law enforcement in the form of seminars and workshops.
2. Increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies to better establish increased flow of data regarding violent offenders.
3. Increased training of local and state law enforcement personnel regarding serial murder and profiling.
4. Increased empirical research into all facets of serial murder to establish a greater base of understanding about offenders and victims.
5. To debunk and challenge many of the myths and stereotypes that surround serial murderers and their victims.

6. To generate an acceptable operationalized definition of serial murder that will inevitably reduce confusion among governmental and private agencies.
7. To explore improving methodological issues in data collection and analysis of multiple homicide offenders.
8. To examine prevention strategies using a team of experts, including law enforcement, social services, medical, psychiatric and academic personnel.
9. To create public awareness programs that filter information in a rational and responsible manner.
10. To allow for greater accessibility to serial killers through the establishment of special research programs and projects.
11. To establish projects funded by the federal government specifically for the advancement of multiple homicide research. (Hickey, 1991, p.241)

The answers to the questions are not black and white. The criminal mind of serial killers goes beyond a single biological, psychological or sociological cause. Research must look at a more integrated approach and realize that the serial killer remains a complex human being with very individual characteristics. A “profile” is merely a guide and can never be used to generalize the characteristics of all serial killers.

Each year our society buries approximately 20, 000 known victims of

murder to include serial murder. Statistics tell us that many more victims remain unknown to us. This is a societal problem that is not going to just simply go away. The field of psychology needs to carefully examine Hickey's recommendations and begin to plan today how it will address these needs for research, because without it 20,000 more people will lose their lives to serial murderers next year.

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