Some Psychosocial Factors That Serial Killers Have In Common:

Can Such Data Be Used To Prevent Potential People From Killing?

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Abstract

Although serial killers have been around for centuries, there are still many factors that are not fully understood. Because of this lack of knowledge as well as their elusive nature, many serial killers remain at large for years, or even decades. Several factors contribute to the difficulty of finding and capturing serial killers, including their tendency to kill strangers and the apparent arbitrary nature of the murders they commit. However, when analyzing the data available from known serial killers, some similarities among them become evident. Using these similarities, we can construct theories to help us better understand and possibly even predict the behaviors of serial killers. This paper discusses the definition of a serial killer and the classifications of different kinds of serial murderers. This paper isolates three variables that many known serial killers have in common: sexually motivating factors, victim patterns, and childhood behavior. This paper then analyzes those three variables using case studies of three known serial killers: Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, and Ted Bundy. It is hoped that by comparing and analyzing sexually motivating factors, victim similarity, and childhood behavior of known serial killers, it may be possible to predict behavioral and psychosocial trends of future serial killers.

Introduction

There is evidence that serial killers have been offending all over the world since as early as the fifteenth century. The earliest recorded serial killer in American history was in the nineteenth century, and there have been hundreds of documented serial killers, and likely many more that have gone free and therefore undocumented, in the United States since then (Waller, 2010, p. 222).

The victims of serial murderers are usually strangers or mere acquaintances to the killer, which increases the difficulty of the search since there is no known link to provide a lead. Additionally, it is not uncommon for serial killers to remain mobile for years (Holmes, 2010, p. 6). So by the time law enforcement in one area realizes they might have a serial killer on their hands, the killer may have already moved on to another city or state.

Unlike many other crimes, serial murders appear to be senseless. Because the victims are usually strangers to the killer, it is difficult to find motivating factors for the murders. This apparent lack of motivation, mobility of serial killers, and seemingly arbitrary pool of victims makes it very difficult for law enforcement to find and capture serial killers.

Fortunately for criminologists, serial killers are not a new phenomenon. Because serial killers have been popping up for several decades in many different countries around the world, there is a good amount of data on known serial killers. This data includes their family history, childhood behavior, past trouble with the law, mental health, methods of killing, victim selection, victim disposal methods, etc (Goodwin, 2008, p. 16). Most of this data can be analyzed and used to look for similarities and patterns among known serial killers.

Existing research has already identified several factors that many known serial killers have in common as well as proposed theories about what "makes" a serial killer. (Knight, 2006; Waller, 2010; Keppel and Weiss, 1994; Godwin, 1998). However, there exists little research that attempts to analyze similarities among serial killers and use that analysis to suggest potential predictor of behavioral and psychosocial trends of future serial killers. This paper suggests that, by comparing and analyzing common factors of known serial killers, specifically sexually motivating factors, victim similarity, and childhood behavior, it may be possible to predict behavioral and psychosocial trends of future serial killers.

Operational Definitions

To facilitate a clear expression of the analyses in the body of this paper, it is necessary to first present some operational definitions of terms that will be recurring. The following are definitions of terms that have been agreed upon in the field, and are presented in their context of this paper.

A serial killer is someone who kills three or more people during a period of thirty or more days, with a significant cooling-off period in between. Generally, serial killers use methods of killing that require intimate contact, such as knives, rather than distance weapons, such as guns (Levin, 2008, p. 19).

A sexually motivated serial killer is a serial killer whose motives include sexual dominance, power, and sexual satisfaction. Sexually motivated serial murders are often accompanied by rape, sodomy, necrophilia, and sexual mutilation of the victim (Holmes, 2010, p. 108).

The three serial killers analyzed in this paper - Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, and Ted Bundy - are considered to be "Organized" serial killers. Organized serial killers typically have average or above-average intelligence and are functional members of society. Organized serial killers are apt to plan and prepare for their offenses, and they often use restraints on their victims. Organized serial killers tend to take "trophies" or "souvenirs," such as a part of their victim's body. Organized serial killers bring a weapon to commit the murder and take the weapon with them when they leave the crime scene (LaBrode, 2009, p. 156).

Most serial killers are believed to be psychopaths, sufferers of Antisocial Personality Disorder, and/or sociopaths. Though there is debate over the use of the terms "psychopathy," "Antisocial Personality Disorder," and "sociopathy," the three terms are related (Walsh and Wu, 2008, p. 135). Although Antisocial Personality Disorder is the only term of the three which can be formally diagnosed using the DSM-IV, persons who suffer from psychopathy or sociopathy generally share similar traits with someone suffering from Antisocial Personality Disorder. Traits of psychopaths, sociopaths, and persons with Antisocial Personality Disorder include, among others, a lack of remorse after harming or otherwise hurting others, deceitfulness, and a lack of compliance with social norms (Walsh and Wu, 2008, p. 136;). Psychopaths often use charm, intimidation, and sometimes impulsive and cold-blooded violence to attain what they want.

<u>Case Studies: Known Serial Killers</u>

Jeffrey Dahmer

Jeffrey Dahmer is perhaps one of the more well-known serial killers in American history because of his cannibalistic tendencies and the particularly gruesome nature of what he did with his victims' remains. Dahmer's first murder, which he described as an impulsive killing, happened when he was eighteen years old. He was with a one-night-stand sex partner who wanted to leave to go home. Dahmer, not wanting to be abandoned, impulsively bludgeoned the man to death (Martens, 2011, p. 495). After that first killing, he began killing regularly. Dahmer initially tried to avoid killing his victims and instead attempted to turn them into living zombies by drilling holes in their skulls and dousing their brains with either boiling water or acid. His motive was to get his victims to stay with him and to be in complete control of them. When he did eventually kill his victims, he often dismembered their bodies and consumed or preserved parts of their remains (Dore1, 2012). Dahmer had seventeen known victims, many of whose body parts he consumed or kept as souvenirs (Ramsland, 2006, p. 103).

John Wayne Gacy

John Wayne Gacy was a contractor and professional clown, beloved by his suburban Chicago community. He was a husband, brother, father, and godfather, and he appeared to live a normal life. Unknown to his community, he killed at least 33 teenage boys using primarily strangulation and asphyxiation. He raped and sodomized many of them. Gacy lured many of his victims to his house with the promise of employment. He buried 26 of his victims in a crawl space he built under his house, where their bodies remained for years

until he was caught in August of 1968. When he ran out of room for the bodies in the crawl space under his house, he began disposing of his bodies in a nearby river (Seltzer, 1998, p. 138).

Ted Bundy

Ted Bundy was a charming college graduate and law student. He was devastated when his girlfriend broke up with him in his early twenties (Hickey, 1991, p. 227). He began stalking her and her new boyfriend and seemed unable to get over her. He worked hard to get his girlfriend to take him back, and when she finally did, he dumped her suddenly (Hickey, 1991, p. 228). Between 1974 and 1978, Bundy traveled around the country, raping and murdering school-aged women who resembled his ex-girlfriend in appearance. He sexually mutilated the bodies of some of his victims, but then he would later visit the bodies of some of his victims and apply makeup to their faces. He often donned a sling on his arm and lured women into his car by acting helpless. Some of his murders he committed when he broke into women's houses. Although Bundy was convicted of only 30 murders, one investigator who worked on his case suspected that Bundy killed over 100 women (Hickey, 1991, p. 158).

<u>Common Factors of Known Serial Killers</u>

Sexual Motivation

Sexually motivated murders are murders that are fueled by a desire for power, sexual dominance, and/or sexual satisfaction. When a serial killer is sexually motivated, often that means he or she finds violence and the torturing of others to be sexually gratifying. When a person finds sexual gratification in the suffering of others, that is considered sexual sadism (Godwin, 2008, p. 65).

With sadism, the emotional effect on the object is crucial. The main aim of sadism is to cause the victim to suffer. The victim's reaction is crucial to the sexual satisfaction of the offender. One explanation for why serial killers choose contact weapons is because of their intimate nature (Martens, 2011, p. 493). Using contact weapons not only causes a slower death, but it also requires the killer to be in close proximity to the victim. The fact that many serial killers either keep their victims' bodies or transport them to a location that they select indicates that the killers stay with their victims throughout the entire time they are dying instead of abandoning the body. If the motive was exclusively to kill the victim, then abandoning the dying victim once the killer knows death is certain would be just as satisfying. Being present for the death must therefore yield some sort of pleasure.

Sexual motivation can also extend past the act of killing itself. Many serial killers like to have their way with the bodies of their victims once the victims have passed. This can include necrophilia, sodomy, sexual mutilation, or cannibalism (Ramsland, 2006, p. 129). What the serial killer does with the body after the victim dies can provide just as much insight into his motivation as his method of killing.

Sexual Motivation in Jeffrey Dahmer

Jeffrey Dahmer began associating violence with sex when he was in ninth grade. During biology class, he found the dissections to be particularly exciting. He eventually moved on to looking for dead animals in the road, taking them with him into the woods, and cutting them open. He would skin them, look inside them, and hold their organs, which he found arousing (Dore1, 2012).

Around this time, Dahmer began experiencing obsessive thoughts of violence intermingled with sex, which got more and more intense with time. When Dahmer did eventually begin killing, his objective was to have his victims under his complete control. He went to gay bars, bath clubs, and bookstores to seduce his victims. When they agreed to come home with him, he put sleeping pills in their drinks to render them unconscious. Once they were under his control, he killed them (Dore1, 2012).

Dahmer expressed that the killing was his least favorite part. He said that killing for him was more of a means to an end. His ultimate goal was to be in complete control of his victims, which was why he first attempted to turn them into living zombies. When that didn't work, he resorted to killing (Martens, 2011, p. 501). After killing his victims, he dismembered their bodies. He preserved body parts of some of his victims and ate other body parts (Martens, 2011, p. 502).

Sexual Motivation in John Wayne Gacy

John Wayne Gacy was a husband and father who identified as a heterosexual male. However, his first marriage ended when he was convicted of sexually assaulting one of his male employees who was a minor. Although he claimed their sexual encounter was consensual, the boy convinced law enforcement that Gacy coerced him into performing

sexual acts on him. Gacy was sent to jail but was released early for good behavior (Hickey, 1991, p. 165).

When Gacy got out of jail, he remarried another woman. Throughout the time he was married, he spent nights luring young men to his home. He promised some of them that he would provide them with drugs and alcohol. Others were prostitutes that he promised employment. When he got them to his home, he would render them unconscious with chloroform, sodomize them with foreign objects, and kill them using a tourniquet (Ramsland, 2006, p. 129). Once they were dead, he buried them in a crawl space that he had built under his house.

Sexual Motivation in Ted Bundy

Ted Bundy was an attractive, intelligent, and charming young man. He grew up in a religious household in a religious community. At a young age, he discovered a pornographic magazine in his neighbor's trash. He claimed to develop an addiction to pornography early on. After finding that first magazine, he kept seeking more pornographic materials, and eventually he looked for more and more hardcore literature until he was consuming violent pornography. He spent a few years in a stage where he would just look at violent pornography, but his fantasies progressed to thoughts about real women. He described the need to commit these acts with actual women as a "frenzy" or "compulsion." Eventually, something snapped, and he began raping and killing women (Serial, 2013).

Bundy killed at least 30 women. He raped, sodomized, or otherwise sexually violated most of his victims, acting out the fantasies he had developed from hardcore

pornography. Many of his victims' bodies were found with laceration marks on their genitals from foreign objects. He bit the nipple off of one of his victims (Serial, 2013).

Why Should We Focus On Sexually Motivating Factors?

Sexually motivating factors can provide a great amount of insight into what is driving a serial killer to murder his victims. Of course, one obvious explanation is that the serial killers simply find sexual satisfaction in overtaking another person. But while that may be true in some cases, looking into a serial killer's past, as well as their psychosocial tendencies, can provide some answers as to why they might find sexual satisfaction in overtaking another person in the first place.

Let's look at Jeffrey Dahmer first. Dahmer not only raped and killed his victims, he also dismembered their bodies and kept some body parts and ate other body parts. In an interview with Stone Phillips in 1994, Dahmer admitted that eating and saving his victims' body parts made him feel like they would always be with him (Dore1, 2012). This is related to his main motivation for taking his victims hostage in the first place: to combat his loneliness. Dahmer first killed when a sex partner wanted to leave him. He killed the man who wanted to leave him so that he could prevent the man from leaving him. He then repeated this behavior with his other victims by rendering them unconscious with sleeping pills and attempting to turn them into living zombies with boiling water or acid. By killing his victims and saving their body parts, Dahmer was ensuring that part of them would be with him for as long as he chose to keep them. Eating their body parts took this further by making his victims become a part of him.

Dahmer's sexual behavior was clearly motivated by loneliness and a fear of being abandoned. This likely stems back from his childhood. As a child, his family moved often

so he did not make a lot of friends (Martens, 2011, p. 502). In fact, his first grade teacher told his father that he was "inordinately shy." At home, his parents did not have a good marriage. They fought frequently and often in front of Dahmer. Dahmer would sometimes leave the house when his parents were fighting and go outside in the woods to escape it (Dore1, 2012).

Dahmer also admitted that when he started discovering his homosexual desires, he kept those feelings to himself (Dore1, 2012). So, his lonely tendencies started at a young age and were reinforced by his environment. Although his loneliness likely was not the sole cause of his mixing violence and sexual desires, it may have fueled his behavior.

Like Dahmer, Gacy's sexual behavior can be analyzed to gain insight into his deeper urges. Although Gacy married women and claimed to be heterosexual, the fact that all of his known victims were young men indicates that he was attracted to men. As a child, Gacy was interested in hobbies such as gardening that his father called "feminine." His father did not approve of his feminine hobbies, and subsequently he was never able to gain his father's approval (Seltzer, 1998, p. 189). Although there is no evidence that Gacy openly explored his sexuality while living with his father, the fact that his father did not approve of his feminine hobbies indicates that his father probably would not have approved of Gacy's homosexual feelings. So, Gacy attempted to bury his homosexual urges.

The first known instance when Gacy acted on his homosexual feelings was when he coerced his minor male employee to have sexual relations with him. Gacy was subsequently caught and put in jail, where he lost his wife and possibly the respect of many of his friends and family members. So when Gacy got out of jail and acted on those urges

again, it can be argued that he chose to kill his victims so that he would not get caught and so that he could symbolically bury his feelings when he buried their bodies.

Ted Bundy's sexual behavior can also be used to shed light on his ultimate motives. For Ted, power was a significant motivating factor. As a child, Ted was told that his mother was his sister and that his grandparents were his parents. Later on in his life, he found out that his sister was actually his mother and that his mother's husband wasn't actually his real father. Ted also grew up in a family without a lot of money (Holmes, 2010, p. 167). Then later on in life, his girlfriend broke up with him. What all of these events have in common is that they were situations in which Ted was made to feel inferior and vulnerable.

These feelings of inferiority and vulnerability can explain some of Bundy's sexual motivation for the murders that he committed. All of his known victims were slender women, which are people he could easily overcome. He overpowered his victims and had his way with them. The sexual component of his murders put him in a position of power, which was something he felt he lacked often earlier in his life. Additionally, the fact that he attracted many of his victims by pretending to helpless and then transformed into his powerful, murderous self can represent his desire to repeatedly overcome his past feelings of vulnerability.

Victim Patterns

Victims patterns are noticeable similarities in the victims of one serial killer. These are particularly interesting and important because they give some organization to what first appears to be a random and senseless string of victims. Looking at the behavior of a serial killer as a whole only reveals a person who appears to get some sort of satisfaction

out of killing random innocent people. Looking more closely at the pool of victims, though, can reveal patterns or similarities that unveil more about the serial killer other than the fact that he simply enjoys killing.

Victim Patterns in Jeffrey Dahmer

All of Jeffrey Dahmer's known victims were men. All were, by his accounts, good-looking. Most of his known victims were in their twenties. In a study conducted by Bennett, a more precise similarity between Dahmer's victims was discovered. Out of 7 skulls that the author examined, all 7 were craniometrically similar (Bennett 1231). This means that they all shared similar facial characteristics. According to Bennett, all of Dahmer's known victims were "very pretty men, almost boyish, willowy, and effeminate" (Bennett, 1228). In addition to their similar appearance, Dahmer found most of his victims in gay clubs, bookstores, and bathhouses. This indicates that most of his victims were likely homosexuals.

Victim Patterns in John Wayne Gacy

All of John Wayne Gacy's known victims were young men in their teens and early twenties. Most of them were delinquent in some way; he chose young men that were either looking for drugs and alcohol, working as prostitutes, or had run away from home.

Victim Patterns in Ted Bundy

All of Ted Bundy's known victims were young women. Most were high school or college aged, although he did have victims as young as 12 (Holmes, 2010, p. 170). Most of Bundy's victims were slender and attractive with hair parted down the middle. It was observed that most of them visibly resembled his ex-girlfriend. Bundy traveled across at

least 10 different states to attract his victims. Everywhere he went, he chose similar victims.

Why Should We Focus On Victim Similarity?

Victim patterns can reveal a great deal about a serial killer's motivations. As discussed earlier, one of the factors that makes serial killers so puzzling is that their victims are usually strangers. Killing a seemingly arbitrary group of strangers leaves much to be wondered about the serial killer's motivations. But closer scrutiny of the victims can reveal patterns, and these patterns can reveal factors of the serial killer's motivations.

We'll look at Jeffrey Dahmer first. What all of Dahmer's known victims had in common was that they were all males, likely homosexual, attractive, and had similar skeletal frameworks. These were men to whom Dahmer was attracted, which we know by the fact that he had sexual relations with them and wanted to keep them with him. However, his homosexual urges were something that he had kept private his entire life. The fact that he killed men that he was attracted to could indicate that he was killing something that he disliked about himself. However, since he did admit that he did not enjoy the killing aspect and that it was just a means to an end, it is more likely that Dahmer's victim patterns are more of an indicator of how strong the sexual motivations of Dahmer's murders were. Thus, studying victim patterns in Jeffrey Dahmer's murders reveals that Dahmer's behavior was largely motivated by his loneliness and his coalescence of violence and sex.

Gacy, similarly, chose victims to whom he was attracted. Some evidence suggests that there was an inverse relationship between Gacy's sexual relations with his wife and his murders; as he continued raping and murdering his victims, he had less and less sexual relations with his wife. This shows that he was gaining all of his sexual satisfaction from

his forced relations with the young boys that he captured. Like with Dahmer, the similarity among Gacy's victims - age and sex - reveal that his murders were strongly sexually motivated.

Ted Bundy's victim patterns are perhaps the most revealing of the three. The most striking similarity among most of his victims was that they resembled his ex-girlfriend. When Bundy's ex-girlfriend broke up with him, he was driven to stalking her and was obviously upset by the breakup. Clearly, being dumped put him in a position in which he felt very vulnerable. Bundy lured many of his victims into his car by donning a sling and appearing vulnerable. Once he had his victims in a position in which he could overpower them, he raped and murdered them and in some cases violently mutilated their bodies. There is a strong argument to be made that by having complete control over multiple women who resembled the woman who hurt him, Bundy was trying to take control of the situation that had made him the most vulnerable.

Childhood Behavior

Childhood behavior is a factor that is most revealing of potential biological roots of serial killer behavior. Since the evidence indicates that the serial killers focused on in this paper did not begin killing until they were adults, looking at their childhood behavior can provide insight into the nature versus nurture debate. Looking at serial killers' childhood behavior can tell us whether they exhibited violent tendencies early on and whether their environment helped shape and reinforce these tendencies.

Jeffrey Dahmer's Childhood Behavior

Dahmer grew up in a tense household with parents who constantly fought. His family moved three times between when he was 6 years old and 8 years old, so he never made close friends. He often appeared apathetic about his life and did not appear to experience a normal range of emotions (Martens, 498). Dahmer's mother suffered from hysteria, depression, suicide ideation, and psychosomatic illness, which Dahmer blamed himself for. Dahmer began drinking alcohol at age 14 and soon developed an alcohol dependence. When he discovered his homosexual desires as a teenager, he felt helpless and frustrated and tried to change his sexual orientation.

Although Dahmer's environment during the time he was growing up certainly seems to be unhealthy and could have potentially fostered his violent sexual tendencies, there are other factors that may indicate that Dahmer was truly born a psychopath. He sometimes drew lines of nonexistent bodies on the floor at school (Martens, 499). Once his father was cleaning the backyard and found some chicken bones, which he put in a bucket. Jeffrey began playing with the bones and appeared to be fascinated. There is also the fact that Jeffrey found excitement in dissections in school as a young teenager.

John Wayne Gacy's Childhood Behavior

John Wayne Gacy appeared behave normally as a child. There is evidence that his environment during his childhood was unhealthy and could have fostered some abnormal ideations. For example, Gacy apparently never gained his father's approval, and this bothered him a great deal. Gacy was also apparently frequently tormented by bullies in school. Gacy's mother once admitted that she gave Gacy enemas as an infant, but she later recanted that story (Ramsland, 2006, p. 101).

Ted Bundy's Childhood Behavior

There is only a small amount of evidence that Ted Bundy exhibited warning signs as a child. His aunt recounts a time when Bundy was three years old, his aunt woke up to find that Bundy had placed knives all around her while she was lying in bed. Bundy was standing by her bed and grinning (Ramsland, 2011, p. 112).

In grade school, although Bundy was well-liked, he did not form many close friendships because he claimed he did not understand how to form interpersonal relationships or why someone would want to be in one. Bundy also developed an enthusiasm for pornography at a young age, which progressed well into adulthood (Serial, 2013).

Other than these factors, there is little evidence that Bundy's behavior as a child was exceptional. His childhood environment, however, may have been abnormal and unhealthy. Although Bundy claimed to have grown up in a normal, loving household, there is evidence to suggest that Bundy's grandfather often became violent and abused his wife and children.

Why Should We Focus On Childhood Behavior?

Looking at the childhood behavior of serial killers may be able to provide us with insight about a serial killer's potential biological or genetic propensity to murder. Analysis of childhood behavior and environment is also something that could potentially help us predict future behaviors of potential serial killers.

Unfortunately, unlike with sexual motivation and victim patterns, there are no clear-cut common factors among the three case studies. Because of this, it is difficult to point to any one behavior or environmental factor that is strongly correlated with future serial killer

behavior. However, there are still a lot of interesting factors from all three that certainly seem like they could have predictive value if examined further and compared to other known serial killers. For example, Bundy's aversion to interpersonal relationships as a child or Dahmer's fascination with the bones that his father found could potentially indicate predictive factors. However, further investigation of these traits in other known serial killers is needed before correlations can be drawn.

<u>Discussion</u>

Some Thoughts on Psychopathy

Though the term "psychopathy" literally means "disease of the mind," psychopaths are not necessarily sufferers of mental illnesses. In fact, the term psychopathy is used to describe someone who is not clinically or legally classified as mentally ill (Burkhead, 2006, p. 123). The horrific nature of serial murders and the desperation to understand the motivation behind such apparently senseless acts often leads to the conclusion that they must be "crazy" or "insane." Such an explanation is easy and comforting because it provides an explanation for evil behavior by diminishing the humanness of it. To say that a person committed multiple murders because of an illness that affects his cognitive functioning is to say that the person did not act entirely out of his own free will. This is reassuring because it provides an alternative to the notion that someone possessed a nature so evil that allowed him to commit acts that most people would find unfathomable. Thus, to say that serial killers are crazy is to say that the multiple violent crimes were the result of a disease and not human nature.

However, existing evidence supports a theory that serial killers are not crazy or mentally ill, but that they really are just evil in nature. Upon close examination of the three serial killers discussed in this paper, it is clear that all three were mentally stable. They all functioned well enough in society that they managed not to be linked to their crimes for years. They were all aware of what they were doing. And the fact that they all did manage not to get caught for so long indicates that they all knew that what they were doing was wrong. If they didn't, they would not have gone to such great lengths to hide their crimes. All three hid their secret activity from their friends and family, and all three planned and

prepared for their crimes and cleaned up afterward. Little evidence suggests that they were not in their right minds or that their behavior was the result of a mental illness. Rather, their behaviors suggest that they really are just psychopaths.

During his trial, John Wayne Gacy mounted an affirmative defense of insanity called the "irresistible impulse" defense. This meant that Gacy's attorneys tried to prove that Gacy lacked the ability to control his actions and therefore literally could not stop himself from killing his victims. However, the prosecution was able to deconstruct this claim by pointing out that Gacy planned his murders, dug his graves in advance, and constructed a map of the burial site under his house. The prosecution also claimed that Gacy could not have suffered from an irresistible impulse on 33 separate occasions (one with each victim) and never once try to seek help. The jury rejected Gacy's claim of insanity (House, 2012).

Gacy also tried to convince authorities that he had multiple personalities. He claimed that his alter ego, Jack Henley, was responsible for all of the murders. However, multiple mental health professionals conducted thorough evaluations of Gacy's mental state and concluded that he did not suffer from multiple personalities (Hickey, 1991, p. 168).

Some Thoughts on Biology

As the nature versus nurture debate continues on, there is much to be said for both sides. Some experts in the field remain convinced that there is a biological component that causes evil in people. And while there is evidence to suggest an organic and possibly genetic component to psychopathy, that evidence can only go so far as to denote correlations. Science is still very far from finding a causal biological link to serial killer

behavior, if one even exists at all. Looking at the three serial killers featured in this paper, there is evidence both to support and to refute a biological root of serial killer behavior.

John Wayne Gacy's story contains evidence both to support and challenge the idea of a biological root. One potential factor is that Gacy suffered a head injury as a child. His injury was so severe that he experienced blackouts for five years until he finally received treatment (Hickey, 1991, p. 165). This injury could have caused damage that rendered Gacy unable to control his aggression, unable to empathize with his victims, or caused some other neurological deficit that contributed to his serial killer behavior. Gacy's primary therapist while he was in prison remained convinced that there was an organic component to his psychopathy. When he was executed, she analyzed his brain looking for organic abnormalities, but found none. Admittedly, Gacy was executed in 1994, almost 20 years ago. Neuroimaging technology has seen significant advances since then (Hickey, 1991, p. 165). If Gacy's brain were to be analyzed using today's technology, perhaps something would show up.

Bundy also has parts of his story that both support and refute a biological root of his behavior. There is some evidence that Bundy may have been the product of incest; it has been suggested that Bundy's grandfather fathered him (Ramsland, 2007, p. 110). However, this is a weak claim that has neither been supported nor fully disproven. In fact, Bundy's above-average IQ does not support a claim of incest. Something that does support a biological foundation for his psychopathy though, is his behavior at a very young age. At the age of three, before Bundy had his heart broken or experienced many of the events that potentially motivated his murders later in his adult life, he exhibited behavior that indicated a potential violent nature. The fact that these tendencies showed themselves at

such a young age suggests that biology could have potentially played a role in turning Bundy into the serial killer that he eventually became.

Dahmer's story also contains evidence of a potential biological root of his behavior. In Jeffrey Dahmer's father Lionel's memoir, he admits that he also experienced fantasies that mixed violence with sex. Lionel's accounts suggest that he may have passed on a genetic propensity for violence to Jeffrey.

Reliability of Information and Potential Limiting Factors

Though a good amount of the information used to conduct these analyses comes from what seem to be reliable sources like first-hand interviews with the serial killers themselves, the truthfulness of that information, and therefore the analyses themselves, are still questionable. After all, these are the accounts of people who spent years tricking everyone around them about who they were. Psychopaths, by definition, feel no remorse for their wrongful actions. If they continually kill without feeling remorse, then there is a good chance that they can be dishonest while experiencing that same lack of guilt.

There is concrete evidence that some of the information given to the authorities and the media was dishonest. John Wayne Gacy, for instance, confessed then subsequently recounted that confession multiple times. Although the 26 bodies found in the crawl space of his house make it pretty clear which of his stories - that of guilt or innocence - was not true, the mere fact that he gave two different stories at all shows that his accounts are not always honest (Serial, 2012).

Gacy also had a history of lying before he was even connected to his crimes. Some of his friends claimed that he would brag about his time spent serving in the military, when there is no record that he actually served. And when he was first arrested for having sexual

relations with his employee, he claimed that the encounter was consensual. Then when Gacy began burying the bodies of his victims under his house, he came up with many excuses for the smell that the bodies gave off, often claiming it was just the smell of the damp earth or dog urine (Serial, 2012).

Dahmer also leaves room for doubt in his testimonials. Although he claimed to be relieved when he was caught because he was no longer carrying around his secret, his demeanor throughout some of his story seemed to be insincere. At the end of an interview that he gave with his father in 1994, he turned to his father and apologized for everything that had happened and told his father that he loved him. However, he appeared to be very uncomfortable and emotionless, which seemed to indicate that what he said was just for show (Dore1, 2012). Though this in itself is not reason to reject the validity of everything Dahmer says, there is still the fact that he managed to get away with at least seventeen murders before he was caught. Clearly, Dahmer had the ability to deceive the people around him. Whether he used this ability when giving confessions and interviews is questionable, since he did provide the authorities with a full confession. However, it is still important to keep in mind that the analyses based on Dahmer's first-hand accounts of some things might not be entirely accurate if they were based on false information.

There is much obvious incentive for serial killers to lie, even after they are convicted. For one thing, we do know that they understood that what they did was wrong. Otherwise they would not have gone to such great lengths to hide their actions. So after being convicted, even though serial killers probably understand that their chances of ever being let free are slim to none, they still understand that they are in the public eye. Additionally, many serial killers are sentenced to death row. Since they know that their

actions got them there, they may try to provide false information to get themselves off of death row or at least buy themselves more time.

There is also much variation in the stories given by the people around the serial killers. For example, Jeffrey Dahmer's father wrote a book about him, but Dahmer's mother contested much of the information in that book, including important facts like drugs that she took during her pregnancy and some of Jeffrey's troubling childhood behaviors (Dore1, 2012). Similarly, John Wayne Gacy's mother once confessed to giving Gacy daily enemas as a child, but she later recanted that story.

There are plenty of reasons that the people close to serial killers might provide false information. One obvious reason is to protect their loved ones. They may try to play down some of the more incriminating or disturbing facts to make the serial killers seem less like monsters. Another reason might be to protect themselves. Often, people close to serial killers, particularly parents or other family members who acted as mentors in some capacity, can catch some of the blame for serial killers turning out the way they do. The obvious discrepancies between Jeffrey Dahmer's mother's story and his father's story indicate that at least one of them, but likely both of them, did not want some information about Jeffrey's childhood to get out because they felt they might be partly to blame. Another reason could be that they felt guilty for noticing warning signs early on but never taking action.

Another potential limiting factor is the fact that most of the information about serial killers is recalled far after the fact. For example, when trying to gather information about a serial killer's childhood, natural resources to turn to are the person's family members and teachers. However, not only is the information being recalled often decades later, it is also

potentially skewed by present views of the serial killer. So the reliability of information coming from third parties might also not be entirely accurate.

So to conclude, the analyses presented in this paper, while made in good faith and based on ample sources of information, may be subject to constraints of inaccurate information. That is not to say that should not be taken seriously. Rather, this point is made to highlight the complexity of figuring out serial killers' behavior.

Conclusion

The study of what makes serial killers is an enormous undertaking. This is partly because there are so many different approaches that can be taken - biological, sociological, psychological, the list goes on. It is also because for every bit of information that we know about serial killers, there is just as much information that we still need to understand. Interviews with parents of serial killers and with serial killers themselves, analyzing their methods of killing, assessing their victim choices, and even performing extensive psychological evaluations can only tell us so much. The people who have the best understanding of what drives them to commit serial murders are probably the serial killers themselves, and it is possible that even they do not entirely understand what makes them do it. A likely explanation is that there is no one factor that makes a serial killer but rather a complex combination of factors. The fact that serial killers are so rare means that that fatal combination of factors that makes a serial killer is truly an anomaly. Discovering this combination is a long and painstaking process because of all the factors that we still don't know.

What we do know is that there are several similarities among known serial killers and analyzing them may be able to reveal some motivating factors. Looking at victim patterns and any sexual components of serial murders can provide insight as to why the serial killer kills and what he is trying to achieve by doing so. Studying serial killers' childhoods can shed light on what kinds of factors turned them into the monsters they became.

Unfortunately, two-thirds of these components (sexual motivation and victim patterns) can only be observed after the murders have already been committed. Although

this is helpful for looking back and understanding serial killers' behavior once they are discovered, it does not help with any sort of forward-thinking. It is difficult to predict future serial killer behavior if the data only comes once the behavior has been completed.

So, to address the question from the title of this paper - can such data be used to predict potential people from killing? - the answer is: Not yet. Analyzing the three variables covered in this paper is important because it provides another piece of the puzzle. But more information is still needed until we can accurately predict serial killers before they become serial killers.

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