

Identifying murderers who had earlier been sexually abused was accomplished by using interview or official record information about whether the subject had been sexually abused as a child, adolescent, or adult. Information about symptoms and criminal behaviors was obtained in a similar manner. A "yes" response required confirmation through offender disclosure and background record; an answer recorded as "suspected" was based on the offender's recollection. For this aspect of the research, both answers were coded as "yes." We acknowledge the limitations of this variable, which could be either underreported due to memory loss over the years or incorrect because of offender error in memory reconstruction. In addition, the increased public attention to sexual victimization may have influenced offenders to give a positive response. It is important to keep in mind that all subjects in this study were convicted of sexually oriented murder. This report is based on our analysis of convicted, incarcerated, sexual murderers for whom there were data available on early sexual abuse in their life histories; on their sexual/aggressive interests, fantasies, and practices; and on their criminal behaviors. At the time of data collection, these men represented a group of sexually oriented murderers who were available for research purposes (that is, whose appeal process was complete), and who were also able to participate in the in-depth interview conducted by the agents. Murderers were excluded from the sample if they were acutely mentally disordered and unable to respond to interview questions ( $N = 2$ ). They were selected for a project to investigate law enforcement profiling techniques (Ressler et al., 1985); in addition, they do not represent a random sample.

### FINDINGS

When questioned about prior sexual abuse, 12, or 43%, of those murderers responding (28) indicated such abuse in childhood (age 1-12); 9, or 32%, were abused in adolescence (age 13-18); and 10, or 37%, as adults (over age 18).

*Symptoms and behavior indicators.* The comparison of sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence by symptoms and behaviors present in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood for murderers who had and who had not been sexually abused is presented in Table 1. For the overwhelming majority of symptoms and behavioral indica-

tors, the higher incidence is in the direction of those offenders who were sexually abused. Those sexually abused in childhood are significantly more likely than nonabused offenders to report the following symptoms in childhood: cruelty to animals, isolation, convulsions, cruelty to children, and assaultive to adults. In addition, those men sexually abused in childhood are more likely to report experiencing the following symptoms in adolescence: sleep problems, isolation, running away, self-mutilation, temper tantrums, rebelliousness, and assaultive to adults. In adulthood, differences are noted in the areas of poor body image, sleep problems, isolation, self-mutilation, and temper tantrums.

Those sexually abused in adolescence are more likely than non-abused offenders to report the following symptoms in adolescence: running away, fire setting, and cruelty to animals. In adulthood, differences for those sexually abused as an adolescent include the behavioral indicators of nightmares, daydreams, rebelliousness, and cruelty to children. (See Table 2.)

*Sexual issues.* Our analysis of the total murderer sample found that over 50% of the murderers report concern with various sexual issues. These include sexual conflicts (69%), sexual incompetencies (69%), sexual inhibitions (61%), sexual ignorance (59%), and sexual dysfunction (56%).

Regarding sexual activities, over 50% of all murderers report interests in pornography (81%), fetishism (stealing, wearing, or masturbating with women's undergarments; attraction to specific body parts, articles, or inanimate objects) (72%), and voyeurism (71%). A total of 39% report interests in bondage sex (S&M), and 25% indicate involvement in indecent exposure. Less than one-fourth disclose interest in sexual contact with animals (23%), obscene telephone calls (22%), rubbing against others (18%), cross-dressing (17%), prostitution (11%), and coprophilia (7%).

An analysis of the relationship between prior sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence and sexual issues shows that the sexually abused offenders are more likely to report sexual conflicts (92% versus 40%;  $p = .01$ ), sexual dysfunction (69% versus 50%), and sexual incompetence (77% versus 60%). There is little or no difference in sexual ignorance between the two groups.

An analysis of the relationship between sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence and participation in certain sexual activities indi-

TABLE 1  
Symptoms and Behaviors for Sexually and Nonsexually Abused Murders  
(in percentages)

Symptoms and Behaviors	Symptoms as a Child		Sexually Abused as an Adolescent		Sexually Abused as a Child		Sexually Abused as an Adolescent		Sexually Abused as an Adolescent		Sexually Abused as an Adult	
	Sexually Abused	Not Sexually Abused	Sexually Abused	Not Sexually Abused	Sexually Abused	Not Sexually Abused	Sexually Abused	Not Sexually Abused	Sexually Abused	Not Sexually Abused	Sexually Abused	Not Sexually Abused
	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused	Abused
Enuresis	78	55	67	50	22	10	60	57	20	14	56	60
Poor body image	58	42	75	46	75	42*	80	63	100	40**	100	40**
Nightmares	78	50	78	55	67	45	50	60	50	31	50	31
Eating problems	36	17	50	18	50	25	67	40	67	40	67	40
Sleep problems	60	27	70	27**	70	27**	50	29	50	43	50	43
Headaches	40	20	50	20	60	30	33	36	17	36	17	36
Accident prone	33	31	33	36	22	36	14	25	14	13	14	13
Convulsions	36	8*	30	15	28	8	88	75	75	75	75	75
Isolation	91	57*	100	62**	91	62*	100	71*	100	71*	100	71*
Daydreams	91	71	91	71	18	8	50	44	43	50	43	50
Running away	36	36	73	23***	60	38	43	40	75	59	75	59
Phobias	40	31	50	33	64	64	88	65	50	53	50	53
Chronic lying	73	64	73	71	56	50	86	76	14	36	14	36
Stealing	70	43	90	71	30	27	63	56	43	31	43	31
Destroying property	60	54	64	54	54	17**	33	19	57	44	57	44
Self-mutilation	27	15	40	8*	70	31*	75	44	100	63**	100	63**
Temper tantrums	64	46	73	38*	90	62	100	75	63	25*	63	25*
Rebellious	80	57	100	69**	50	25	75	59	38	19	38	19
Cruelty to children	73	38*	67	62	36	15	75	38*	43	29	43	29
Fire setting	60	46	64	38	40	29	67	31*	100	76	100	76
Cruelty to animals	58	15**	58	31	90	79	100	75	29	40	29	40
Assaultive to adults	50	17*	100	69**	50	25	48	33	88	78	88	78
Destructive to possessions	44	15	50	25	82	73	88	78	88	78	88	78
Compulsive masturbation	82	80	82	80	82	73	88	78	88	78	88	78

\*p < .09; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .01.

TABLE 2  
Behaviors with Significant Differences Between  
Sexually Abused and Non-Sexually Abused Murderers

<i>Symptoms as a Child</i>	<i>Sexually Abused as a Child</i>		<i>Sexually Abused as an Adolescent</i>	
	<i>Symptoms as an Adolescent</i>	<i>Symptoms as an Adult</i>	<i>Symptoms as an Adolescent</i>	<i>Symptoms as an Adult</i>
Convulsions	Sleep problems	Poor body image	Running away	Nightmares
Isolation	Isolation	Isolation	Fire setting	Daydreams
Cruelty to children	Running away	Sleep problems	Cruelty to animals	Rebellious
Cruelty to animals	Self-mutilation	Self-mutilation		Cruelty to children
Assaultive to adults	Temper tantrums	Temper tantrums		
	Rebellious			
	Assaultive to adults			

cates that the sexually abused murderers are more likely to engage in sexual contact with animals (40% versus 8%;  $p \leq .06$ ), bondage sex (55% versus 23%), fetishism (83% versus 57%), obscene phone calls (36% versus 15%), indecent exposure (36% versus 21%), pornography (92% versus 79%), frottage (27% versus 15%), and cross-dressing (18% versus 7%). There is little difference or no difference noted in the area of voyeurism. Prostitution and coprophilia were dropped from this analysis due to an inadequate number of responses.

*Rape fantasies.* For 19 of the 36 murderers who responded to a question about at what age they began to fantasize about rape, the ages range from 5 to 25 years old. The results of a test of mean age differences shows that sexually abused murderers (11) began to fantasize at an earlier age than did those not abused (8), or ages 11.6 years versus 15.3 years ( $t = 1.99$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ).

*First consensual sex.* For 19 murderers, the age of first significant, consensual sexual experience ranged from 11 to 35 years of age. The results of a test of mean age difference shows that sexually abused killers report an earlier age for this activity than do murderers not sexually abused (14.7 years versus 16.2 years). However, this difference was not statistically significant ( $t = 1.12$ ,  $p = 0.14$ ).

*Aversion to sexual activity.* It was clear to the interviewers that some of the murderers could not answer the question of age of consensual sex because they had never had such an experience. Thus in reply to the question about whether they experienced a marked

aversion or inhibition to sexual activity with peers, the affirmative response of 26 offenders is not surprising.

Of these 26, 11 were sexually abused as children and 15 were not (see Table 3). Results indicate that there is no difference in aversion to sexual activity in childhood for sexually versus nonsexually abused murderers (9% versus 7%). Murderers who were sexually abused in childhood are more likely than their nonabused counterparts to report aversion to sex in adolescence (73% versus 27%) and in adulthood (73% versus 33%;  $p = 0.05$ ).

*Mutilation of murder victim.* The results of assessing the relationship between sexual abuse in childhood and the mutilation of murder victims after death show a positive relationship (see Table 4). Mutilation is defined as the deliberate cutting, usually after death, of the sexual areas of the body (breasts, genitals, abdomen). Sexually abused murderers are more likely to mutilate victims than are those offenders not sexually abused (67% versus 44%). We also see a positive relationship between adolescent sexual victimization and the mutilation of the murder victim (78% versus 42%;  $p = .07$ ).

## DISCUSSION

### Sexual Interests and Behaviors

In our examination of sexual interests and behaviors we find some association in our population between early sexual abuse and the development of sexual deviations or psychosexual disorders (DSM III, 1980). As described by the DSM III (1980), the essential feature of psychosexual disorders is that unusual or bizarre imagery or acts are necessary for sexual excitement. Additionally, the acts tend to be involuntarily repetitive and the imagery necessary for sexual arousal must be included in masturbatory fantasies. In the murderer sample, those sexually abused offenders were more likely to have the paraphilia of zoophilia and to begin to experience rape fantasies earlier than the nonabused group. The complexity and bizarreness of the offender's fantasy life needed to obtain and sustain emotional arousal suggest that the ultimate expression of his perversion is in the mutilation of the victim.

There are many significant differences of behavioral indicators comparing across developmental levels of childhood, adolescence,

TABLE 3  
Inhibition or Aversion to Sexual Activity of  
Sexually Abused and Nonabused Murderers  
(in percentages)

<i>Aversion to Sexual Activity</i>	<i>Sexual Abuse</i>			
	<i>As a Child</i>		<i>As an Adolescent</i>	
	<i>Yes (11)</i>	<i>No (15)</i>	<i>Yes (8)</i>	<i>No (18)</i>
In childhood	9	7		
In adolescence	73	27	63	39
In adulthood	73	33	63	44

NOTE: n = numbers in parentheses.

\*p < 0.05

TABLE 4  
Mutilation of Murder Victims and Sexual Victimization of Offender

<i>Victimization</i>	<i>Mutilation of Victims</i>		<i>N</i>
	<i>Yes %</i>	<i>No %</i>	
<b>In childhood</b>			
Yes	67	33	12
No	44	56	16
<b>In adolescence</b>			
Yes	78	22	9
No	42	58	19

\*p = 0.07.

and adulthood for abused and nonabused murderers. We note the consistently reported behavior of isolation as an outcome of childhood sexual abuse with varied symptom clusters of sleep problems, nightmares, daydreams, poor body image, and convulsions; behaviors of self-mutilation, running away, temper tantrums, rebelliousness, fire setting, actions of cruelty to children and animals, and assault of adults. Some of the symptoms suggest internalized undisclosed sexual abuse (i.e., sleep problems, running away, self-mutilation, and poor body image) whereas other symptoms suggest externalized aggression.

Although it would not be expected to see differences between murderers who were sexually molested in childhood reporting a greater peer sex aversion than the nonmolested as a child, those

molested in childhood do have more aversion of peer sex in adolescence and those molested in adolescence also have a high report rate of aversion at this time. This finding suggests that there is a complex interaction between basic developmental issues of sexuality that interact with molestation at different times in the development of the child and are linked with avoidance of peer experiences in adolescence. It is speculated that this aversion not only jeopardizes the development of constructive and normative sexual and interpersonal experiences but also increases social isolation and fosters a reliance on fantasy for impulse development and discharge.

Hypersexuality or the sexualization of relationships is an important indicator of sexually abused children, and children can be expressive both verbally and behaviorally about sex. Often when this sexuality is expressed aggressively toward others, it reflects directly on the aggressive and exploitive nature of the initial abuse (Burgess et al., 1984). Sex, rather than linking these men (abused and nonabused) with their peers, somehow impedes the connection. One speculation is that the adult role of the abuser in the original childhood victimization is maintained in the repeated fantasy and thus the preferred sexual relationship is a child/adult pairing. In addition, relationships with younger children, peers, and adults are marked by aggression.

#### **Murder Behavior**

One finding of our analysis of crime scene evidence approached a level of significance with sexual abuse. There was a striking difference in the style of sexual assaults on victims between sexually abused offenders and those offenders who did not report abuse: Those who were sexually abused in childhood tended to mutilate the body after killing, as contrasted with murderers who raped and then killed ( $p = 0.07$ ). We speculate that undisclosed and unresolved early sexual abuse may be a contributing factor in the stimulation of bizarre, sexual, sadistic behavior characterized in a subclassification of mutilators.

Although we do not have systematic data collected on the intentions of the mutilations, some murderers volunteered information. One murderer said the mutilation was a way of disposing of the body, implying he had a pragmatic reason for the mutilation. However, the autopsy report revealed that in addition to cutting up the body, he also pulled out the victim's fingernails after death, something he

claimed not to remember. This man went to prison for the first killing. When he was released he knew he would kill again. He revealed that he sought the high level of emotional arousal not in the killing, but in the successful dismemberment of his victims and the disposal of the parts without detection—an act that took thought and planning.

MacCulloch and colleagues (1983) observed in their sample of sex offenders with sadistic fantasies that from an early age, the men had difficulties in both social and sexual relationships. They suggest that this failure in social/sexual approach might be partly responsible for the development of a feeling of inadequacy and lack of assertiveness. This inability to control events in the real world moves the man into a fantasy world where he can control his inner world. This fantasy of control and dominance is bound to be repeated because of the relief it provides from a pervasive sense of failure. MacCulloch and colleagues (1983) suggest that when sexual arousal is involved in the sadistic fantasy, the further shaping and content of the fantasy may be viewed on a classical conditioning model; the strong tendency to progression of sadistic fantasies may then be understood in terms of habituation.

Eysenck (1968) argues the acting out of elements of the deviant fantasies is a relatively short step in those whose personalities predispose to repeated thinking or incubation. In these cases the fantasies would theoretically at least form part of a conditional stimulus class and possibly become a necessary condition for sexual arousal. Thus a conditioning model, writes MacCulloch and colleagues (1983), may explain not only the strength and permanence of sadistic fantasies in these abnormal personalities but their progression to nonsexual and sexual crimes. This model provides an explanation for what Reinhardt (1957) called the "forward thrust of sexual fantasies in sadistic murderers." Our last example of a mutilator murderer underscores the reality-orienting fantasy of successful disposal of the body as the cognitive set, driving repeated murders.

Although all murders in our study contained a sexual element, it was apparent that motives differed. Some victims were raped and then murdered; others were murdered and then sexually mutilated. Rapists who murder, according to Rada (1978), rarely report any sexual satisfaction from the murder nor perform sexual acts post-mortem. In contrast, the sadistic murderer (Brittain, 1970), sometimes called *lust-murderer* (Hazelwood & Douglas, 1980), kills prior to or simultaneously in carrying out a ritualized sadistic fantasy.

Evidence from this study suggests that the murderer with a sexual abuse history will first kill the victim to achieve control before he makes any sexual expression. The murderer may not necessarily have any orgasmic experiences with the body, but rather may masturbate on or beside the body. The release of tension may also occur through substitute action such as mutilation of the body, or perhaps using, as noted with Brittain's study (1970), a phallus substitute.

Consistent with our study are others (Brittain, 1970; MacCulloch et al., 1983) that underscore a feeling of relief and pseudonormal behavior following the murder. Many of the murderers recount going home and sleeping deeply after a murder. After several days, they would reflect on the murder in great detail.

#### IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of data specific to the variables of childhood sexual abuse and subsequent symptoms and criminal behaviors suggests that several variables (e.g., daydreams, isolation, cruelty to children and animals) play an important part in the subgroups (i.e., rape-murder and murder-mutilate) of sexual murderers. There is every indication that the motivation for murder is a complex developmental process that is based on needs for sexual dominance at the destructive expense of the victim. It appears from this exploratory study of convicted killers that there is an important difference in the symptom constellation among those with a history of sexual abuse and those without such a history. Although it is not clear whether there is a difference in psychological motivation for sexual murder, what is apparent is an early onset of specific behaviors that are noted in the subgroup of murderers who mutilate.

The association of the specific impact of sexual molestation in the lives of these offenders and subsequent mutilation of their victims requires further investigation. To speculate on a possible link between the adolescents who were sexually abused and those who mutilate the body suggests a premeditated pattern where acts of self-mutilation are then transferred and carried out on others.

Our exploratory study raises far more questions than it answers. Current understanding of disclosed childhood sexual abuse has focused on the initial treatment (Burgess et al., 1978; Conte, 1984; Sgroi, 1982), legal process (Buckley, 1981), sequelae (Browne & Finkelhor,

1984), and prevention efforts (Conte, 1984; Swift, 1977). Yet our understanding of undisclosed childhood sexual abuse and its long-term effects is limited in regard to gender differences and behavioral outcomes. It becomes even more imperative, given our findings on behavioral differences, that we not only learn how to detect cases of child sexual abuse early but also delve further into behavioral outcomes particularly in noncriminal abused adults.

For the men who repeat sexual murder, their internal processing and cognitive operations appear to sustain and perpetuate fantasies of sexually violent actions. As a result, clinicians are urged to take careful note of patients reporting sadistic as well as criminal fantasies and record a systematic history on the content, duration, progression, and affect triggered by the fantasy. For law enforcement, murder that appears to be motiveless—that is, the victim is a stranger and there is no profit to be gained from the death of the victim—suggests that the victim and offense must be seen as having symbolic meaning to the offender reflecting violent sadistic fantasies.

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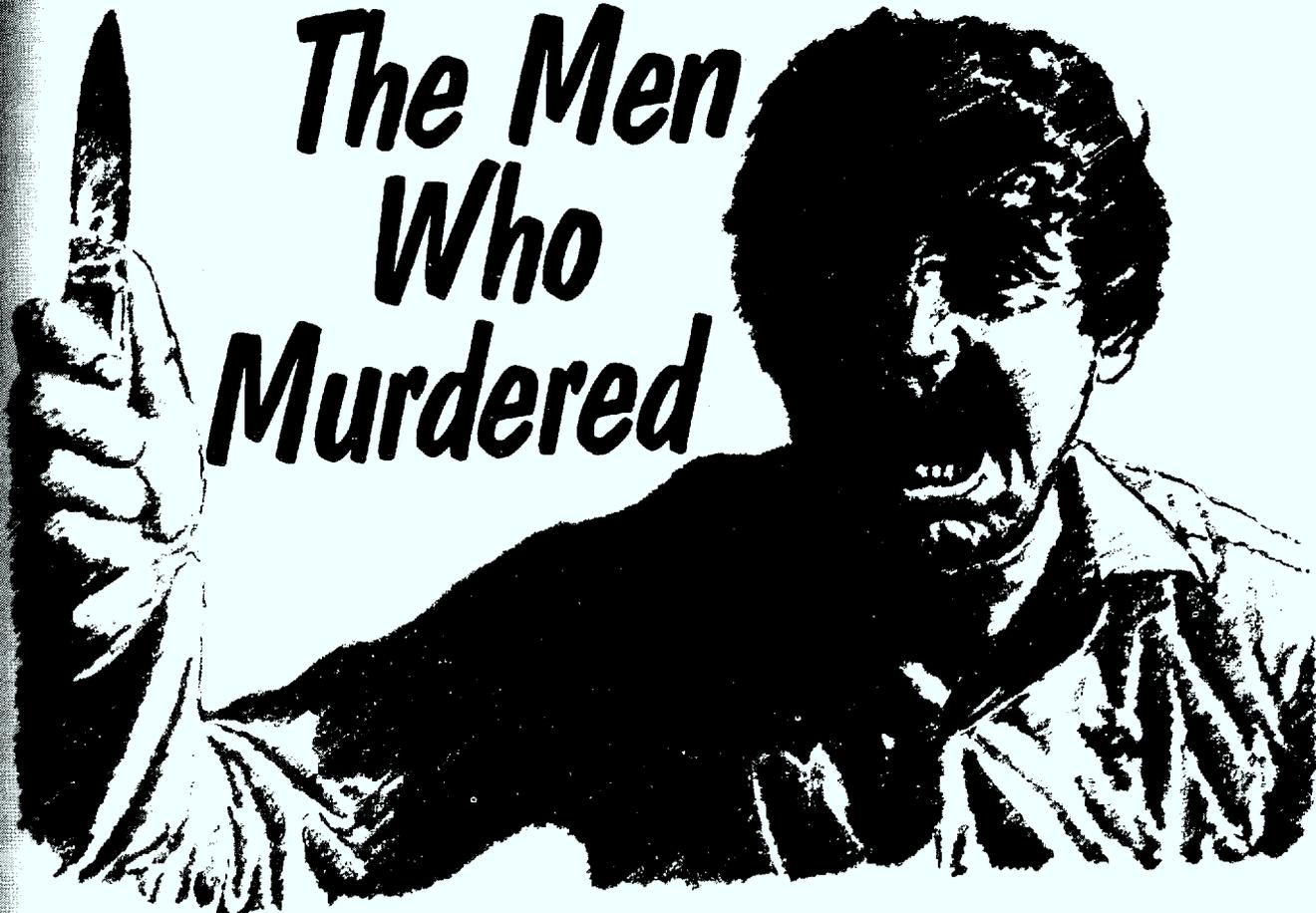
Ressler et al. / MURDERERS WHO RAPE AND MUTILATE

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# The Men Who Murdered



Statistics from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports document the alarming number of victims of sexually violent crimes. One of the disturbing patterns inherent in these statistics is that of the serial or repetitive criminal. Law enforcement officials have questioned whether a small percentage of criminals may be responsible for a large number of crimes, that is, a core group of habitual serious and violent offenders. This has been documented in one study on juvenile delinquents,<sup>1</sup> and other studies have reported similar results,<sup>2</sup> with average estimates of from 6 to 8 percent of delinquents comprising the core of the delinquency problem.

To address this problem, law enforcement is studying techniques to aid in apprehending serial offenders. These techniques require an in-depth knowledge of the criminal personality, an area that, until recently, was researched primarily by forensic clinicians who interviewed criminals from a psychological framework or by criminologists who studied crime trends and statistics. Missing from the data base were critical aspects relevant to law enforcement investigation. Researchers have now begun to study the criminal from law enforcement perspectives, with a shift in focus to the investigative process of crime scene inquiry and victimology.

Our research is the first study of sexual homicide and crime scene patterns from a law enforcement per-

spective. It includes an initial appraisal of a profiling process and interviews of incarcerated murderers conducted by FBI Special Agents. The interviews contain specific questions answered from compiled sources plus lengthy, open-ended interviews with the murderers themselves. A subsample of 36 sexual murderers was selected for analysis to develop further information for profiling these murders. Here, we present what we learned about these 36 men. It is important to recognize that we are making general statements about these offenders. Not all statements are true for *all* offenders, although they may be true for *most* of the 36 men or for most of the offenders from whom we obtained data. Responses were not available from all offenders for all questions.

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**“Law enforcement officials have questioned whether a small percentage of criminals may be responsible for a large number of crimes. . . .”**

**Background Characteristics**

Although their birth years ranged from 1904 to 1958, most of the 36 offenders (all male) grew up in the 1940's and 1950's. They were predominantly white and were usually eldest sons (first or second born), which gave them a distinct advantage, given the dominant-male attitudes in the country at that time.

Most of these men, as adults, had pleasant general appearances, suggesting that as boys they were not unattractive. Their heights and weights were within the norms, and few had distinguishing handicaps or physical defects to set them apart in a group of boys or men. The majority of the men were of average or above-average intelligence, with one-third having superior intelligence.

The majority initially began life in two-parent homes, and half of the mothers were homemakers. Although the majority of fathers worked at unskilled jobs, they were steadily employed; only five men reported the family living at substandard economic levels.

Thus, poverty was not a significant factor in the socioeconomic status of families; mothers were in the home; fathers were earning stable incomes; the subjects were intelligent, white, eldest sons. With such positive personal characteristics and social factors, the question is: What went wrong? Is there any evidence of what may have turned these men into sexually oriented murderers?

**Family Background**

It is often argued that the structure and quality of family interaction is an important factor in the development of a child, especially in the way

the child perceives the family members and their interaction with him and with each other. For children growing up, the quality of their attachments to parents and other members of the family is important in how these children become adults and relate to, and value, other members of society. Essentially, these early life attachments (sometimes called bonding) translate into a map of how the child will perceive situations outside of the family. Because of this, we were especially interested in specific factors within family relationships that best show the offenders' levels of attachment to people.

The family histories of these men revealed that multiple problems existed in the family structure. Half of the offenders' families had members with criminal histories; over half of the families had psychiatric problems. This suggests insufficient contact between some family members and the offender as a child, as well as the possibility of inadequate patterns of relating. Nearly 70 percent of the families had histories of alcohol abuse, one-third of the families had histories of drug abuse, and sexual problems among family members were either present or suspected in almost half of the reported cases. Thus, it is unlikely that most of the offenders experienced a good quality of life or positive interactions with family members.

When examining the patterns described by the murderers regarding their own families, one is impressed by the high degree of instability in homelife and by the poor quality of attachment among family members. Only one-third of the men reported growing up in one location. The majority (17) said they experienced occasional instability, and six reported chronic instability or frequent moving.

Over 40 percent of the men lived outside the family home before age 18 in places such as foster homes, State homes, detention centers, or mental hospitals. Twenty-five of the men for whom data were available had histories of early psychiatric difficulties, thereby minimizing their opportunity to establish positive relationships within the family. In addition, the families had minimal attachment to a community, reducing the child's opportunities to develop positive, stable relationships outside the family that might compensate for family instability.

As stated earlier, both parents were present in over half (20) of the cases, with the father being absent in 10 cases, the mother being absent in 3 cases, and both parents being absent in 2 cases. However, of importance is that in 17 cases, the biological father left home before the boy reached 12 years of age. This absence was due to a variety of reasons, including separation and divorce. It is not surprising, then, that the dominant parent of the offender during the rearing phase of his life was the mother (for 21 cases). Only nine offenders said the father was the dominant parent, and two said both parents shared the parenting roles.

Perhaps the most interesting fact revealed was that most offenders said they did not have a satisfactory relationship with their father, and their relationship with their mother was highly ambivalent in emotional quality. Sixteen of the men reported cold or uncaring relationships with their mothers, and 26 reported such relationships with their fathers.

Twenty of the offenders had no older brothers and 17 had no older sisters. In terms of having a strong role model during formative years,

**"It appears that the childhood physical and sexual abuse experienced by these offenders was manifested in their preference for fantasy life."**

these men lacked an older sibling who might make up for parental deficiencies. Instead, they had to compete with younger siblings in an emotionally deficient environment.

Compounding the offenders' limited opportunities for positive attachments were their perceptions of parental discipline. Frequently, the men reported discipline as unfair, hostile, inconsistent, and abusive. These men believed they were not dealt with fairly by adults throughout their formative years.

This quote from a serial murderer illustrates these beliefs:

"See, if I had my way, you guys would never have grown up or become FBI agents. I wanted the whole world to kick off when I was about 9 or 10. I didn't want my family to break up; I loved them both. There was a lot of fighting and that had me crying watching it at night. They divorced. I've got two sisters and my mother treated me like a third daughter telling me what a rotten father I have. I'm supposed to be identifying with my dad and I never did. I got an older sister that beats up on me a lot—five years older. I got a younger sister that lies on both of us and gets us punished. I had the instinct to feel like I'm getting a rotten deal."

The data have suggested that most of the 36 murderers, while growing up, had weak attachments to family members. They felt uninvolved with their fathers, ambivalent toward their mothers, and little attachment to younger siblings. The parents were preoccupied with their own problems of substance abuse, criminality, or aberrant sexual behavior and were often arguing. It appears that while parents offered little guidance, they were role models for deviant patterns.

### **Individual Development**

When looking at individual development of the offenders, two factors stand out—the dominance of a fantasy life and a history of personal abuse.

Many of the murderers were able to describe the importance of a fantasy life in their early development. These fantasies were primarily violent and sadistic in nature. Twenty offenders had rape fantasies before age 18, and seven of these men acted out these fantasies within a year of becoming consciously aware of them.

There was evidence of abuse in the childhood histories of these men. Physical abuse (13/31), psychological abuse (23/31), and childhood sexual abuse (12/31) were noted.

When the offenders were asked to rank their sexual interests, the highest ranking activity was pornography (81 percent), followed by compulsive masturbation (79 percent), fetishism (72 percent), and voyeurism (71 percent). It is interesting to note the seemingly solitary pattern of these sexual expressions.

It appears that the childhood physical and sexual abuse experienced by these offenders was manifested in their preference for fantasy life. In addition, when questioned about the murders themselves and their preparations for the murders, the men identified the importance of fantasy to the rapes and murders. After the first murder, the men found themselves deeply preoccupied and sometimes stimulated by their memories of the act, all of which contributed to fantasies for subsequent murders.

One begins to understand how an early pattern used to cope with an unsatisfactory family life might turn a

child away from reality and into his own private world of violence where the child can exert control. The control of the fantasy becomes crucial first to the child and later to the man. These are not fantasies of escape to something better, as one often sees in children recovering from sexual assaults and abusive treatment. These men did not overcompensate for the stimulation and aggression by idyllic thinking or creative interests. Rather, their energies were funneled into fantasies of aggression and mastery over other people, suggesting a projected repetition of their own abuse and identification with the aggressor. As one murderer stated, "Nobody bothered to find out what my problem was and nobody knew about the fantasy world."

### **Performance**

Examination of performance behavior of these murderers revealed another paradox. Despite intelligence and potential in many areas, performance in academics, employment, sexual relationships, and military service was often poor. In all of these areas, performance did not match potential.

Although these men had the intelligence to perform well in school, academic failure was seen in their having to repeat elementary grades. The majority did not finish high school. In addition, school failure was frequently mentioned by the men, suggesting that they related this early failure to their sense of inadequacy.

The men also had the intelligence needed to perform skilled jobs; however, most offenders had poor work histories in unskilled jobs, and only 20 percent had ever held steady jobs.

About half of the offenders entered the military. Only 4 of the 14

who were in military service received honorable discharges, and 1 of the 4 had a criminal history in the service. Two men received general discharges, three were dishonorably discharged, three had undesirable discharges, and two received medical discharges.

The sexual performance of the offenders was generally at an autoerotic (solo sexual activity) level. Although 20 men were able to state an age of first consenting sex to orgasm, they did not report an extensive, peer-related sexual history. The ages of first consenting sexual experience ranged from 11 to 25. Of the 16 who did not report an age, it was clear to the interviewers that many never experienced consenting "normal" sex. There was an obvious preference for autoerotic activity.

The interviews with the offenders revealed many expressions of low self-esteem prior to the murders. Many offenders felt a sense of failure beginning at a young age. Again, we can speculate on the importance of fantasy life. It appears that what compensates for poor performance is the fantasy, in which the variables can be controlled.

### **Resultant Attitudes and Beliefs**

In reviewing background characteristics for the offenders as a group, a pattern emerges as we look at issues critical to sexual homicide. Although the personal strengths of the murderers (high intelligence, good appearance, average socioeconomic family status, oldest son or first/second born) are usually positive attributes for success, something occurs which causes a negative outcome for these men. From the perceived quality of family structure and

function, the history of abuse, the dominance of fantasy, the preference for solo sex, and the performance failure of these men, the data suggest the emergence of certain attitudes.

### *Devaluation of People*

The men in the study experienced low social attachment, felt detached from family members as well as from peers, and did not experience the bonding through which people develop sensitivity toward other people. The murderers frequently described themselves as loners or as feeling different from others their age. The resultant attitudes include beliefs that do not consider or are insensitive to the needs of others. Essentially, the offenders do not value relationships—they are self-centered.

### *World Viewed as Unjust*

The men perceived discipline in the home, school failures, and other inadequate performance as part of an unjust and unfair world. Their resultant belief is that other people are responsible for their fates.

### *Authority and Life Viewed as Inconsistent*

These men view authority and life as inconsistent, unpredictable, and unstable. As a result, the offenders do not value or trust authority.

### *Obsession with Dominance through Aggression*

The intense desire to be strong, powerful, and in control becomes an obsession to dominate through aggression. This desire results from the way the offenders responded to the abuse in their families. It was subsequently manifested in their fantasies and later in their acts.

### *Autoerotic Preference*

The men reported few attachments to persons outside of the family. Rather, they admitted to an autoerotic preference (masturbation) that combined with fantasies of aggression and the realities of the abuse they were concurrently experiencing. Their visual interests (pornography, fetishism, and voyeurism) reinforced the sex and aggression.

### *Fantasy is Reality*

The offenders' active participation in the social world is limited, and their efforts at performing and fitting in are frustrated. Their need for a sense of adequacy and mastery of life is noted in their development of private worlds where fantasy and delusions predominate. This retreat triggers the thoughts that dictate criminal behavior.

### **Deviant Behaviors**

The data suggest that the deviant behaviors of rape, mutilation, torture, and murder have some roots in both the offenders' background characteristics and their attitudes and beliefs. (See fig. 1.) The deviant behavior identified at the crime scene provides some clues for understanding the type of criminal personality responsible for the crime.

### *Rape*

Rape is sexually deviant behavior that exhibits absolute disregard for the worth and value of an individual. Rape fantasies range from having power and control over a victim to more violent sadistic fantasies. Those who rape before killing are seeking to

dominate others, regardless of the consequences; those who sexually assault after death (necrophilia) need the absence of life to have total domination without fear of resistance and/or rejection. In both cases, there is a high amount of sexual dysfunction, most frequently ejaculatory failure. This inadequacy is projected onto the victim and may play a part in the escalation to murder.

#### Mutilation and Torture

The act of mutilation may be predicated on a primary fantasy (sadism) or on a secondary fantasy (e.g., disposing of the body). A mutilation fantasy includes symbolic patterns to the cuttings and markings on a body or the amputation of the sexual parts of the body. This is in contrast to the practical aspect of dissecting a body for disposal or transportation purposes.

Torturing a victim is part of a sadistic fantasy. Such fantasies include some type of stimulus enhancing an autoerotic condition and include slicing, cutting, burning, pulling out hairs or body parts, and biting.

#### Murder

Murder is the ultimate expression of dominance. The offender's aggression is self-generated from his own fantasies, not from any societal model of strength or power. His idea of mastering other people emerges through his violence and aggression. For these murderers, sexual interest is linked with violence and exploitation rather than gentleness or pleasure. Murder fantasies range from conscious deliberate planning to a spontaneous outburst of rage. Although the offender's fantasy life develops his predatory activities, the first actua-

Figure 1

### General Characteristics, Resultant Attitudes and Beliefs, and Deviant Behaviors of 36 Sexual Murderers

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS		
Family Background	Individual Development	Performance
Detachment	Dominance of fantasy	School failure
Criminality	History of personal abuse	Sporadic work record
Substance abuse		Unskilled employment
Psychiatric problems		Poor military record
Sexual problems		Solo sex
Inconsistent discipline		
RESULTANT ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS	DEVIANT BEHAVIORS	
Devaluation of victim and society	Rape	
World viewed as unjust	Mutilation	
Authority/life viewed as inconsistent	Torture	
Autoerotic preference	Murder	
Obsession with dominance through aggression		
Fantasy as reality		

lizing of the fantasy makes them real. Acting out the fantasy links the fantasy with reality, and the fantasy becomes reality. The offender believes he can now control reality.

#### Conclusion

What, then, can we glean from an analysis of background information and interviews with 36 sexual murderers? Although any speculations are general in nature and will not apply to every sexual killer, our sample indicates that child/adolescent energies were funneled into fantasies rather than into goal-directed learning behavior. Excessive involvement in solo sex, noted through the frequency of masturbation and the preference for visual isolated sexual experiences, such as fetishes and voyeurism, may have a link with the offender's dominant fantasy world. A high interest in pornography detracts from engaging in reality and relationships and further reinforces the fantasy. Excitement lies within the offender, not in his relationships with other people.

The roots of the murderer's actions appear to stem from their background experiences. The combination

of low social attachment, physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse, and a dominance of a violent, sexualized fantasy life sets into motion the attitudes and beliefs that trigger the deviant behavior of rape, mutilation, torture, and murder. One of the major relationship deficiencies for these murderers is in their interaction with men, perhaps stemming from the absent, cold, and unavailable father.

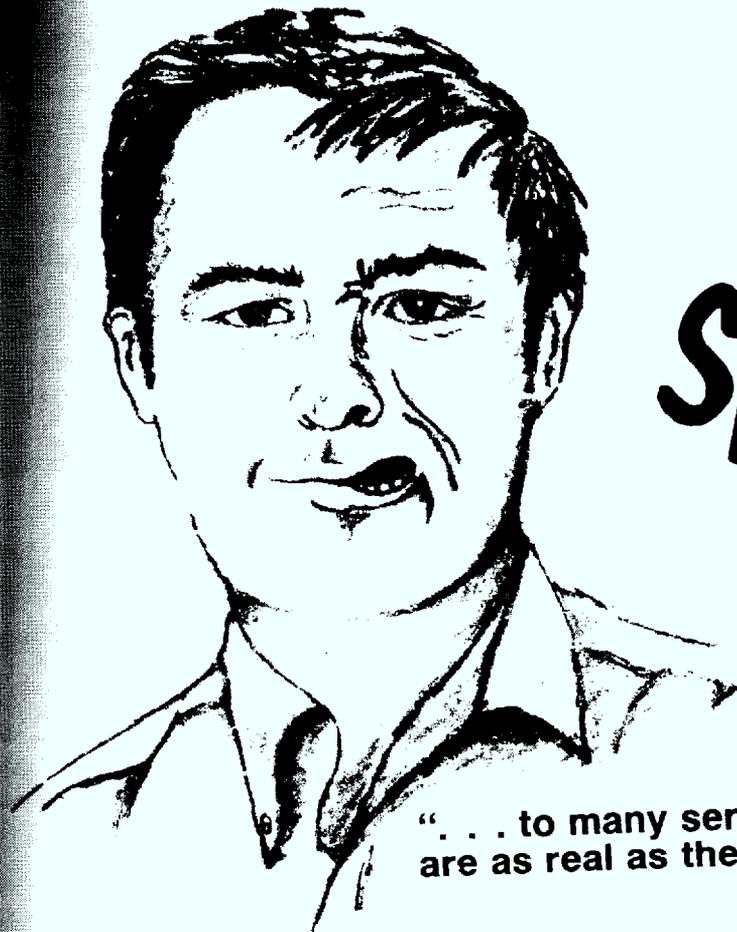
An understanding of some of the dynamics behind sexually deviant behavior provides law enforcement officials some insight into the suspects they are trying to identify and apprehend.

FBI

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> M.E. Wolfgang, R.M. Figlio, and T. Sellin. *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> R.M. Figlio and P.E. Tracy. "Chronic Recidivism in the 1968 Birth Cohort," unpublished manuscript, Washington, DC, NIJJDP, 1983; D.M. Hamarian, R. Schuster, S. Dinitz, and J.P. Conrad. *The Violent Few* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1978); L.W. Shannon. "A Longitudinal Study of Delinquency and Crime," in *Quantitative Studies in Criminology*, ed. C. Wellford (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978).



# The Split Reality of Murder

“ . . . to many serial killers, . . . fantasies of murder are as real as their acts of murder.”

“Murder is very real. It's not something you see in a movie. You have to do all the practical things of surviving.”<sup>1</sup>

Murder is, indeed, very real. Yet to many serial killers, their fantasies of murder are as real as their acts of murder. To them, their existence is split into two realities: The social reality of the “normal” world where people do not murder, and the psychological vitality of the fantasy that is the impetus for the killer to commit his heinous crime. It is a split reality because the fantasy life is such a preoccupation. It becomes an additional reality, distinguishable from the “other” reality of the day-to-day social world.

Interviews with 36 convicted sexual murderers have provided insights into their attitudes, beliefs, and justifications for their crimes. In order to interpret the murderer's sense of

what is important, this article presents thoughts and beliefs articulated by the murderers themselves. First, we discuss the structure of conscious motives for murder, the killer's longstanding fantasy of violence and murder. Second, we look at what happens when the fantasy of murder is played out through its various phases. By presenting our interpretation of the fantasy's importance to the serial killer, we hope to suggest perspectives for law enforcement on the investigation of sexual homicide.

## Motive and Fantasy

How does the motive for a murder evolve, and what triggers the murderer to act? Many murders puzzle law enforcement because they appear to lack the “usual” motives, such as robbery or revenge. Motives, however, need to be determined, since understanding the motive is criti-

cal to the subsequent apprehension of a suspect.

The 36 murderers in our study, replying to this fundamental question of what triggered their first murders, revealed that as a group, they were aware of their longstanding involvement and preference for a very active fantasy life and they were devoted to violent sexual fantasies. Most of these fantasies, prior to the first murder, focused on killing, while fantasies that evolved after the *first* murder often focused on perfecting various phases of the murder. The following illustrates an early fantasy of one of the serial murderers that developed following the move of his bedroom to a windowless basement room. This fantasy

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**“ . . . many offenders reported a history of sadistic behavior toward animals, such as killing, maiming, and threatening small animals. . . . ”**

seemed to introduce him in a more conscious way to a fantasy life which occupied much of his life:

“I was eight years old, having nightmares, that’s when I went off into the morbid fantasy and that’s when the death trip started. The devil was sharing my bedroom with me, he was living in the furnace. The furnace was there battling away in the corner with an eerie glow in the middle of the night.”

This man later in the interview described a conscious awareness of his motive to kill:

“I knew long before I started killing that I was going to be killing, that it was going to end up like that. The fantasies were too strong. They were going on for too long and were too elaborate.”

Following the first murder, the fantasy becomes reality that requires a change in the structure of the fantasy in order to repeat the crime. The same murderer tells of this fantasy development:

“It was almost like a black comedy of errors, the first killings, two people, it was terrible because I made three fatal errors in the first 24 hours. I should have been busted . . . I saw how loose I was and I tightened it up and when it happened again and again I got tighter and tighter and there weren’t any more slips.”

Motivation operates on many levels. We are referring here to the conscious or preconscious awareness of the murderers, the structure of their fantasies, and the resultant act of murder. We use the term “preconscious” since many of the interviews with the murderers reveal this level.

The man would state he remembered having vague thoughts or was able to remember some parts of his thinking but did not have this awareness clearly structured in his mind. This response in subjects led to our belief that much of the motive and intent in the form of fantasies are vague and loosely formulated *until* the murderers actually kill. With the reality of the murder, the fantasy feeds off itself and becomes more structured. As more murders are committed, the phases of the murders become more organized.

Although we discuss the “first” murder, many offenders reported a history of sadistic behavior toward animals, such as killing, maiming, and threatening small animals (cats, birds, fish). In one case, the murderer, as a young boy, had acquired the nickname “Doc,” apparently from his fondness for slitting open the stomachs of cats and observing how far they could run before they died.

One murderer connected his murderous acts to dismembering his sister’s doll heads. “I used to do my sister’s dolls that way when I was a kid . . . just yanked the head off her Barbie dolls.” Although this offender was able to note the connection to his early violent fantasies, many offenders were not able to make this link.

We are not discussing in this article any motives based on childhood experiences. Instead, we are referring to a level of motivation that later in the life of the offender serves as a basis for or triggers the murder.

It is at this later level of motivation that the offender’s fantasy life reflects itself in his social behavior—the line between fantasy and reality blurs. The offender may become isolated or socially aloof rather than acting on the fantasy. This social isolation perhaps helps in inhibiting his desire to act on

the fantasy. What these 36 men revealed in terms of their first murder was that something happened externally to them that moved them to act out this fantasy.

The key person in the fantasy—the one doing the killing, maiming, or torturing—is the perpetrator himself. Sometimes, perpetrators fantasize self-victimization, such as ordering their own evisceration, but most victimize others in their fantasies. Their actions are mentally rehearsed and are accompanied by emotion. The fantasy life is varied and has many dynamics that are idiosyncratic to the murderer.

A variety of factors can trigger the offender to act on his fantasy, including certain interactions between the murderer and the victim. The following case illustrates the murderer’s recall of the triggering event of the victim trying to escape, but not of the murder:

*Subject:* “We were upstairs and I was taking my clothes off. That’s when she started back downstairs. As a matter of fact, that’s the only time I hit her. I caught her at the stairs.”

*Agent:* “What happened?”

*Subject:* She wanted to know why I hit her. I just told her to be quiet. She was complaining about what time she would get home and she said her parents would worry. She consented to sex . . . then I remembered nothing else except waking up and her dead in the bed.”

Some murderers were aware of their fantasy to rape and their motive to kill. The fantasy of one juvenile who was caught after his first rape depicted total control over women. He

was infuriated at the female judge who sentenced him to a residential facility, and he continued to rape when on leave from the facility. The rape fantasy escalated to include murder when there was a threat to this power and control, i.e., his detection. One rape victim was killed because she showed some assertiveness by running away, even though she had said she wouldn't tell. The murderer revealed his fantasy for total control when he said, "When I think she is going to tell, I know I have to kill her." He raped and murdered four more victims.

Some of the murderers in our study did not report fantasies in a conscious way. Instead, they often described states of dysphoria, such as they were not feeling well, they were depressed, or they had been drinking. These descriptions often revealed an underlying stress that may have been based in their fantasy. The following is an example:

Subject: "It was the same as with the other one. I had been drinking at the bar. I don't even remember leaving. I don't know what made me kill her. I don't even know why I raped her. I had a good looking wife at home. I saw her get into her car and I walked up and got in the car with her, yelled at her, took her down there where I raped her. I kept telling her I didn't want to hurt her but I just started choking her."

We suspect that these offenders were preoccupied with a kind of internal dialog that sustained anger, discontent, irritability, or depression. Drinking or drugs are attempts at moderating the internal stress, yet the fantasy continues. These offenders are unaware of how much internal dialog they experience. For example,

when chastized by a teacher or boss, these offenders talk to themselves about it—"If I ever got that son of a bitch I'd rip him apart; I'd smash him up." One offender, after performing poorly in the service and being intimidated by his sergeant, went a.w.o.l. on a drinking binge. While out on the street, he beat a drunk to death after the man grabbed at him. The offender felt justified in his actions and was unaware of the intensity of his rage or the impact of his blows. He then beat to death a second man. Finally, he abducted a female acquaintance. When he awoke the next morning, her dead body was beside him with a broomstick impaled in her vagina with such force that it had penetrated her lungs. Although he believes he killed her, he has no recollection of the incident. He even helped the police look for her.

Most people are aware of their fantasy life in terms of making pictures and carrying on dialog. When people report hearing voices, it is most often an hallucination. It is often described as either a voice from the outside or as someone transmitting thoughts into their mind. Something is in their heads of which they are consciously aware but they believe it is in the control of someone else and that they are the passive victim.

The fantasy of the serial murderer is a separate, distinct reality. It is vibrant and vital, distinguishable from the "other" reality of the social world. The offender believes he can move from one reality to the other, that ideas generated in fantasy are viable. No fantasy thought is ever seen as abnormal. For example, one murderer's fantasy involved an exceptionally good sexual experience, and when the woman's behavior did not match the fantasy, he became enraged and killed her.

Fantasies provide a sense of control to the offender. For the serial murderer, they become obsessions. Efforts are made to improve the fantasy's weak areas, and once this is accomplished, the offender moves to gain access to a victim. The symbolic figure in the fantasy is replaced with a real person in reality.

### Phases of a Murder

The fantasy underlying a sexually oriented murder drives the offender's actions through various phases of that murder. The act of murder has at least four major phases, including: 1) Antecedent behavior, which includes the motives and planning or thinking about the murder; 2) the murder itself, including gaining access to the victim and carrying out the crime; 3) disposal of the body; and 4) postcrime behavior, including reaction to the discovery of the body.

#### *Phase 1: Antecedent Behavior*

Murder is a behavioral act. Motivations for this behavior include either a conscious fantasy, plan, directive, or reason to kill or a triggering environmental cue that activates an unconscious fantasy for murder. Murderers who operate primarily on a conscious motivational level usually remember their thoughts prior to the murder. One of the murderers in our study described his entangled fantasy and perversions and said, "I had a compulsion during the day and hoped it would settle down—hoped I could wipe it out drinking." It did not settle down, and he acted out the fantasy and murdered after leaving the bar.

Murderers who are triggered into action by an environmental cue often state that they cannot remember their

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**“Sexual homicide is an act of control, dominance, and performance that is representative of an underlying fantasy embedded with violence, sexuality, and death.”**

precrime behavior, although they can recall how they murdered. They state they found themselves in a compromising situation, and they reacted with explosive rage. (“She was screaming and I strangled her.”) These killers usually described a spontaneous murder. The vagueness of the crime continued with subsequent murders; however, the men are aware that they will kill again.

*Phase 2: Committing the Murder*

Selecting a victim begins the acting-out level for the murderer with a conscious fantasy. The offender may have a list of criteria for choosing a victim, and many murderers are known to seek out the right victim. A delay before killing the victim often implies conscious planning and rehearsing of the fantasy. In these cases, the murderer often held an elaborate fantasy, laced with violence, aggression, torture, and sexuality, which also included the fate of the victim.

The history and circumstances of the victim are often important to the offender’s fantasy. The victim may be symbolic of someone in the offender’s history, as in one case where all the young women killed were symbolic of the offender’s sister for whom he harbored great jealousy. Certain actions of the victim may also trigger the fantasy. One murderer, who selected his victims through hitchhiking, said, “She was playing up the role, the big beautiful smile and getting in the car which was kind of tragic but she had advertised to get blown away.”

For the murderer without a conscious fantasy, a certain person or situation may, for example, cue in a strong belief of an unjust world. The

offender feels unfairly treated, and this sets into motion the justification to kill. As one murderer said, “I couldn’t perform sometimes. Somebody made fun of me and I blew my stack.”

Killing the victim moves the offender to another level of the fantasy. At this point, the reality of murder comes into play. The victim may not die the way the offender planned. The offender might have to use more violence, he may feel more frightened than anticipated, or he might be startled by the fact he feels excited. Some murderers are exhilarated—they broke the rules, they killed. Some will kill again, while others will, in horror over what they did, turn themselves in to the police.

During this phase, murderers are also confronted with the reality of a dead body. There is no such thing as killing with impunity—there is always some response. Some murderers respond by covering the body, washing the wounds, or otherwise caring for the body, a response that exhibits remorse or concern for the victim. Some murderers hide or bury the body, raising some questions about their motives. One reason for hiding or burying the body is to keep the secret and maintain control. Other murderers openly display the corpse in a public area, hoping the display will shock and offend society.

Some murderers need to believe that they will not show any concern for the victim. The actual murder goes beyond their fantasies of that killing. One murderer described his heightened excitement when driving his car with the dead bodies in the trunk. There is confirmation and reinforcement of the fantasy and pleasure or triumph in the power of the kill. These killers may torture and then kill, or kill and then mutilate the body.

The power of the fantasy during the murder is illustrated by one fetish burglar. He killed his victims only when he was interrupted, but not because he was afraid of being identified. He was acting out an intense fantasy, and the unexpected interruption made him furious. He acted on this rage and felt justified in the murder.

*Phase 3: Disposing of the Body*

After committing the murder, the offender must decide what to do with the body. If this confrontation with reality has not been anticipated, the murderer may give himself up to the authorities. As one murderer said, “It blew my mind killing those people. I wasn’t ready for that. The fantasies were there but I couldn’t handle the death trip and dead bodies. I freaked out and gave myself up.”

It is unclear why some murderers just leave the body, while others use elaborate methods of disposing of the body. One offender who described his internal dialog as he confronted the body of his first murder victim said, “I got a dead body on my hands. People see me come in here. How am I going to pack this out? Am I gonna put it in a double bag or sheet and carry it out of here? I figured the smaller the better. I chopped it up . . . stuffed some in the refrigerator . . . dumped guts in vacant lots . . . throwing pieces here and there what ever came out of the bag first . . . I was scared.”

In a second case, the murderer described a planned dismembering of the body after killing the victim in a car. He then carried the body in a

bag, up two flights of stairs to the apartment he shared with his mother, passing two persons coming down the stairs. He said, "It took meticulous work . . . about four hours . . . dismembering it, getting rid of the blood, the gore, completely cleaning the bathroom."

Some murderers became involved with the body through sexually sadistic acts. This may be part of the old fantasy or development of a new one. While the offender who "freaked out" and gave himself up was in prison, he spent an enormous amount of psychic energy rehearsing and mastering the body disposal phase. After his release, he murdered eight more women. He stated, "I got rid of that icky feeling of messing with the dead. Only one guy that gets more casual around a body than me . . . a mortician or a pathologist. But some of my fantasies were so bizarre that it would turn the stomach of a pathologist."

#### *Phase 4: Postcrime Behavior*

During this phase, the murderer's fantasy becomes reality, providing a sense of purpose for the offender. The authorities are looking for him so he now focuses his energies on not getting caught and perhaps even into improving his methods for the next murder.

An important aspect of the post-crime behavior is the discovery of the body. This discovery is sometimes included in the fantasy, and the murderer may try to maintain his level of excitement. He may telephone or write to the police, or he may be in a crowd at the scene when the body is discovered. The murderer may even confess to the crime in order to accompany police to the location of the body.

The importance of postcrime events to the overall fantasy is illustrated by one case in which the offender worked as a hospital ambulance driver. He kidnaped his victims from the parking lot of a restaurant and took them to another location, where he raped and murdered them. He then anonymously telephoned the police to report seeing a body, returned to the hospital to receive the ambulance call, and then drove the ambulance with the body back to the hospital. In essence, he orchestrated a scene that he had rehearsed numerous times in his mind.

#### **Conclusion**

Sexual homicide is an act of control, dominance, and performance that is representative of an underlying fantasy embedded with violence, sexuality, and death. Yet, for some killers, one act of murder fulfills their fantasy, while others feel compelled to continue killing.

Some murderers, while in prison, attempt to determine how they failed in the murder in order to be successful the next time. Their need to repeat the act of murder is connected with their sense of control.

Other murderers live in fear of repeating the crime; their compulsion to kill is bewildering to them. They don't want to get caught, yet at the same time they are hoping they will be caught. Several murderers wrote "stop me" statements in notes to police or on the wall at the murder scene, while others turned themselves in to police. Yet, the fantasies continued. One killer stated, "It is a development . . . getting tired of a certain level of fantasy and then going even farther and even more bizarre. Year after year [the development continued] and finally it got off in such deep ends that I'm still not exposed

to the worst of the fantasies that I have."

Interviews with sexual murderers provided information about their fantasies which, in turn, provide us with a partial answer to murders that appear to be motiveless. These crimes are committed, in part, as a result of the acting out of a psychological fantasy. These fantasies are extremely violent and range from rape to mutilation or torture and murder. Fantasies are an important part of the offender's basic personality and move beyond normal sexual, consenting, pleasure-based daydreams to aggressive, sadistic, and destructive thoughts. These fantasies become so vivid that they provide the impetus for the offender to act them out with victims of opportunity.

It is important for law enforcement officers to be aware of the existence of these fantasies and of the types of individuals who have them. While the crime, and therefore the fantasy, may appear to be bizarre to law enforcement, it is essential to realize that these fantasies play an important part in the offender's basic personality. Therefore, as law enforcement officers become sensitive to this phenomenon and seek out clues which imply the presence of fantasy, they will aid in profiling and apprehending the offender.

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#### **Footnote**

Serial murderer convicted of killing 10 people.

# Classifying Sexual Homicide Crime Scenes

## Interrater Reliability

The unsolved homicide presents a major challenge to law enforcement officers. These unsolved cases, which often include a sex-related component, usually have no apparent motive. The victim has been sexually abused, and the nature of the killing indicates behavior patterns that reflect sexual deviation, specific character traits, and perhaps even psychopathology. Also referred to as lust murders,<sup>1</sup> these murders often include severe beating and multiple stabbing of the victim, body mutilation (such as removal of sexual organs), and sexualized positioning of the body after death.

The FBI's Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) has been involved since 1972 in assisting city, county, and State law enforcement agencies in their investigations of unsolved murders by preparing profiles of the unidentified offenders, after extensive examination of the crime scene data, victim characteristics, and autopsy reports. This profile may include the perpetrator's age, race, sex, socioeconomic and marital status, intellectual and educational level, occupation, life-

style characteristics, arrest history, location of residence in relation to the scene, and certain character traits.

The Agents responsible for preparing the offender profiles have found it useful to classify the type of crime and the organizational structure of the crime scene. The crime is classified as sex-related, nonsexual, or unknown. Evidence of a sexual component anywhere within the crime scene justifies the sex-related classification. The organizational structure of the crime scene is determined by evidence of the amount of planning and premeditation by the offender, as well as of the offender's control over the victim. For example, a weapon taken to a crime scene and carried away suggests planning, as contrasted with a weapon used and left at the crime scene, suggesting opportunity and spontaneity.

In sex-related crimes, the structure of the crime scene provides insight into the offender's patterns of behavior. For example, a well-organized crime scene indicates an offender with a conscious plan of action after the murder to avoid detection and apprehension.

Currently, the BSU is systematically studying their profiling procedures through scientific and statistical analyses. Because of the importance

of correctly classifying the crime and the crime scene, we needed to establish the reproducibility of these classifications. This article reports our investigation of the Agents' ability to reproduce independently each other's classifications. This ability to replicate decisions is called *interrater reliability*.

### Study Design

Six BSU Special Agents with varying levels of experience in profiling participated in the reliability investigation. Data from 64 murder scenes, covering a variety of circumstances both sexual and nonsexual, were selected for the study. For each crime scene selected, one of the participating Agents was thoroughly familiar with the case. This Agent presented a short description of the crime scene and showed crime scene photos.

The presentation was restricted solely to information immediately available at the crime scene; no information from laboratory tests or later investigation was divulged. This restriction allowed the other Agents to focus on immediate data. Other details of the investigation, if discussed by the presenter, might have influenced the Agents in forming their



**“This study demonstrated that there is reliability in the classification of crime types and scenes by BSU Agents.”**

*Unknown Homicide*

When it is not obvious whether a crime is sex-related, the homicide is classified as unknown. For example, a skeleton buried or abandoned may not provide useful evidence, and a partially decomposed body may give confused indications, especially if the body has been mauled by an animal.

**Structure of the Crime Scene**

After the classification of crime type, each Agent was asked to classify independently the structure of the crime scene as organized, disorganized, mixed, or unknown. The presenter also classified the crime scenes based on what he believed the scene alone indicated. The distribution of the 64 murder scenes, as given by the presenters, is shown in figure 2.

*Figure 2*

**Crime Scene Classification By Presenters**

Crime Scene Type	Number	Percent
Organized.....	31	48.4
Disorganized..	21	32.8
Mixed.....	9	14.1
Unknown.....	3	4.7
Total.....	64	100.0

*Organized Crime Scene*

The organized crime scene indicates planning and premeditation on the part of the offender. For example, the crime may be committed in a secluded or isolated area selected by the murderer, or the victim may be killed in one location and transported to another.

*Case D:* This case involved a series of homicides in which the victims, who were found in rivers, had automotive parts tied to their bodies. The female victims were all grossly mutilated (removal of breasts and feet, pelvic damage). The victims had been reported as missing during the course of a day; one never returned after shopping. There were indications that they had been kept for several days before being thrown into the river. The murderer would have needed a car to transport them from where they were last seen alive to where their bodies were discovered.

*Disorganized Crime Scene*

The disorganized crime scene indicates spontaneity and a more frenzied assault. The scene itself is most likely the location of encounter.

*Case E:* A 16-year-old girl was last seen leaving to ride her horse in a favorite riding area. Police were notified when she was several hours late in returning home. A search team found the girl's body one-half mile from the farm where she lived. Her body was face up, spread-eagled, jeans and underpants pulled down to the ankles, a hooded sweatshirt draped across the left breast, her bra was pulled below both breasts, and another item of clothing was draped across her neck. A 10-inch vertical cut was present at the base of her neck; another cut was just below her right jaw. Blunt-force wounds were present on her head. It was determined at the crime scene that she had been raped, but probably after death.

*Mixed Crime Scene*

The mixed crime scene has signs of both organization and disorganiza-

tion. There may be two or more offenders involved in the homicide, or the offender may begin the crime in an organized manner before his planning deteriorates as unanticipated events occur. Inconsistencies are noted in the behavior of the offender. Although the organized or disorganized classifications fit many cases, not all crime scenes fit into one of these categories. In addition, crime scenes may display varying degrees of organization and disorganization. It is in these instances that the mixed category is useful.

*Case F:* A 21-year-old woman's body, partially hidden from view, was found at a garbage dump. The body had stab wounds in the vagina and groin, and the victim's throat had been slashed. In addition, her nipples had been amputated and her face severely beaten. Her hair had been cut and was found hanging from a nearby tree branch. Test results indicated the victim had been sexually assaulted and murdered shortly after leaving her job. Investigation revealed two brothers were involved in the murder, one of whom the victim was living with at the time of her death.

*Unknown Crime Scenes*

The unknown scene pertains to those cases that cannot be classified based on immediate crime scene data. For example, a decomposed, buried body probably would not provide enough information upon which a classification could be based.