
Psychological Theories Of Criminal Behaviour Of Ted Bundy As A Serial Killer

Introduction

The definition of 'serial killer' accepted by the police and academics says that a serial killer is someone who has killed, spaced through time, three or more people who were previously unknown to him. (Haggerty, 2009) However, as Haggerty (2009) states this definition can present some difficulties as other individuals who have killed three or more unknown people should be defined as serial killers when they are not, such as dictators or terrorists who kill those who do not share their beliefs.

Ted Bundy was a famous serial killer in the US during the 1970-80s, and his case brought to light the existence of serial killing. During the time that Ted Bundy's case developed, serial killers were a newly discovered phenomenon this resulted on his case being notorious among the other cases that were occurring at the time. Thanks to the amount of attention that Bundy's case had, there are a lot of information about his killings as well as personal information about him, which help professionals study this type of cases and, possibly, find ways to avoid them in the future.

Literature review

According to Arndt, W. B., Hietpas, T., Kim, J. (2004) one of the explanations of serial killing relies on the description of the perpetrator. They argue that the age of a serial killer differs depending on the type of killing, for example sexually motivated killers will range from 16 to 48 years old and that the median age of the first murder is 27. Furthermore, they argue that the Hispanic and Asian serial killers are rarely reported compared to other ethnicities. (Arndt, W. B., Hietpas, T., Kim, J., 2004) Another explanation for serial killings is the Trauma Control Model by Hickey (2013). This model states that during their early years, the future killer is traumatized by different factors such as sexual and physical abuse, the death of a parent, or negative parenting among others. The consequences of these lead to feelings of rejection and a sense on incompetence hidden behind a mask of self-control and self-confidence. Many facilitators, such as violent pornography, creates fantasies and further their need to kill. Next, these fantasies become an addictive reality as they start stalking and entering and eventually killing their victim. The murdering serves as a substitute for their early trauma and therefore they feel the need to continue killing in order to satisfy their needs. (Hickey, 2013)

R. Bartels and C. Parsons (2009) made a social study involving data from the court hearing of Dennis L. Rader, a serial killer who confessed to have killed 10 people and was charged for it. They concluded that there were three different major debates after analysing Rader's talk in court: the perpetrator as 'driven by sexual fantasy', as a 'serial killer', and as 'sympathetic'. Rader explained that sexual fantasy was behind many of his crimes and actions, which aid to justify his actions and excuse him. Second, by categorising Rader as a 'serial killer' it allows Rader to behave in a certain way typical of said category, not allowing him to have a choice over his actions. Finally, Rader's version depicts his actions as sympathetic, helping the

construction of a picture where he is a caring, understanding and positive person and therefore trying to neutralise presumptions suggesting a violent motive for his actions. Summarising, these three ideas show the construct that a serial killer can be a good, caring person who cannot control their sexual fantasies and just happens to be a serial killer. (Bartels, R., Parsons, C., 2009)

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (2008) categorised the motives they believed lead to serial killing. This includes among others: anger, where the offender exhibits hostility towards a certain subgroup of the population; psychosis, the offender suffers a severe mental disorder and is killing due to the disorder, and sexually-based, where the offender is driven by sexual desires/needs which would support Bundy's final confession where he stated that his killings were because of pornography. Furthermore, the FBI also provides an explanation as to how offenders select their victims as it states that it depends on vulnerability, availability, and desirability. Vulnerability is described as the degree to which a victim is prone to be attacked. Availability refers to the lifestyle of the victim that permits the offender access the victim, for example some of Bundy's victims were at a crowded community party where they were more accessible. Finally, the desirability is explained as the attractiveness of the victim to the offender. It involves several factors based on the offender's motivation such as race, gender, age of the victim, or other specific preferences. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008)

Overview of Ted Bundy's case

Ted Bundy preyed on young women by lying to them, often by wearing an arm or leg fake cast. He used this fake disability to convince the victims to help him to his car. Bundy began his killings near his home in Washington at first, but then moved to Utah, Colorado, and Florida. Bundy raped and murdered an estimate of 30 women during the 1970s. He used to strangle or hit the victims on the head repeatedly as well as sometimes even mutilated them after death. (Crime Museum, 2017)

As the number of bodies arose and witnesses' descriptions circulated, people reported Ted Bundy as a matching suspect. However, police dismissed this based on his presentable appearance and upstanding character. Ted Bundy was arrested for the first time in 1970s, in Utah after running away from a patrol car. In his car, police found handcuffs, rope, masks, and other items although they were insufficient to link them to the killings. After being released, he was again arrested months later for the kidnapping and assault of one of his victims. Ted Bundy managed to escape prison twice, during which he continued his killing spree, before he was sentenced to death in 1980 and finally died in the electric chair in 1989. (Crime Museum, 2017)

Discussion

There are some possible explanations as to what the motivations behind Ted Bundy's killings were. One of them is criminological explanation of the labelling theory. This theory divides the creation of a criminal into two phases: primary, and secondary deviance. It describes how an individual who commits an offence for the first time (primary deviance) is labelled by the community as a criminal. This relates to Bundy's teenage years as he was a known shoplifter and was caught peeking through neighbours' windows. Once the community labels him, they start to treat the offender differently, either by cutting relationships with him, insulting him, etc. This behaviour would lead the delinquent to offend again (secondary deviance), but by

committing a bigger criminal offence. In Bundy's case, kidnapping and killing. (Walsh, A., Jorgensen, C., 2018)

Also, there are some possible psychological explanations that could explain Bundy's behaviour. During the trials, his attorneys aimed to prevent Ted Bundy from entering jail due to a series of mental disorders that were later rejected. However, the behaviour he showed throughout the whole investigation shows symptoms of possible mental health disorders, such as psychopathy antisocial behaviour. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, also known as DSM-5, some of the symptoms for antisocial behaviour include using aliases and conning others for personal pleasure, normal cognitive empathy but low affective empathy – understanding someone's feelings but not wanting to help them -. More symptoms that he showed include lack of responsibility and reckless disregard for his safety when he decided to represent himself in court as he believed he was a unique person that could only be associated with other high-status people, like the judge during his trials. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) Furthermore, other psychological disorders could lead individuals to offend, such as Peter Sutcliffe who suffered from schizophrenia and murdered 20 women and attempted to kill another 7 women, and Andrei Chikatilo who suffered from borderline personality disorder with sadistic features and sexually assaulted, murdered, and mutilated 43 women and children in a period of 12 years.

Another explanation to his behaviour is the social structure theory of Urbanism. This theory explains how murder rates are usually higher in cities highly populated. Ted Bundy moved around the country during the time of his murders, always from and to densely populated states. This is usually associated with poverty, broken homes, disassociation, and social disorders, which could link with the Dark triad mentioned above or other mental health disorders. Furthermore, due to the density of population on the cities where Bundy killed, the possibility of becoming a victim because of frequently coming across strangers increases. (Haggerty, K., Ellerbrok, A. 2011)

Gottfredson and Hirschi developed the Low Self-Control Theory which agrees with the classical idea that the result of uncontrolled human impulses to enhance pleasure is crime. They argued that people with low self-control have the traits that put them at risk of offending. These traits are: lack of patience, and diligence, to which crime offers a quick way of obtaining sex, money, etc.; being self-centred and insensitive, so they are able to commit a crime without any guilt; and being more focused on the present rather than the future, and so crime gives them an immediate satisfaction rather than delayed. These traits can be seen in Ted Bundy's behaviour as he showed no guilt towards the victims and the crimes he committed, his need for sex being this the cause of his crimes as he confessed later, and overall reckless behaviour regarding his future. (Walsh, A., Jorgensen, C., 2018)

One more possible explanation to Bundy's behaviour and crimes is the Social Bond Theory by Hirschi. He found that the typical offender is a young male who grew up without a father and has a history of difficulty in school. He inferred that those more likely to offend lack the four components of social bonding: attachment, commitment, belief, and involvement. (Walsh, A., Jorgensen, C., 2018) A lack of attachment to parents and respect to them becomes a lack of attachment and respect for bigger social groups, such as children at school and others in the future. Those who lack commitment, such as school dropouts like Ted Bundy who abandoned university before obtaining his degree, do not have a sound investment in traditional behaviour and are therefore more likely to commit an offence. Hirschi argued that involvement is a

consequence of commitment and that non-involvement in traditional activities increases the risk of contact to illegal activities. Hirschi also argued that a belief system empty of traditional morals is bothered only with self-interest. Therefore, this theory would explain why Bundy became an offender as he grew up without a paternal figure until his mother married the man who would adopt him, making him Ted Bundy, as well as showing no commitment with school as he caused trouble during high school and then dropped university and social norms. Furthermore, during his teenage years he was caught shoplifting and peeking through neighbours' windows, showing that from a young age he was inclined towards illegal behaviour. (Walsh, A., Jorgensen, C., 2018) (Serena, K. 2019)

Conclusion

Overall, there are many different explanations to criminal behaviour, in this case serial killing. These theories focus on the psychological health of the offender, whether the offender – Ted Bundy in this case – suffers from any behavioural disorder such as psychopathy antisocial behaviour disorder. These mental disorders have symptoms that could explain this behaviour, such as narcissism, lack of emotional empathy, lack of responsibility towards his safety and others, and being masters of manipulation in order to achieve what they want. Other explanations focus on how society and their interactions with it might influence their behaviour, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory of low self-control. Nevertheless, referring to the crimes Ted Bundy committed, many explanations concur by stating that the main motivation behind these was a sexual motivation as the gender of the victims and the method of killing show this. However, although many have attempted to explain the reasons for crime, there is no official explanation but a variety of them focusing on different aspects of the offenders' lives.

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