

What Makes a Woman Become a Serial Killer?

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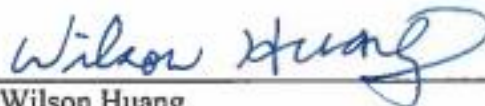


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ABSTRACT

The offender profile information that surrounds the stereotypical serial killer is that the killer is mostly a Caucasian male suspect in his thirties. Males usually kill strangers, and almost all their victims are females killed by a sexual agenda. Female serial killers have much less information known about their motives and killer profiles. Women serial killers are often considered even more dangerous than male serial killers because they kill the unsuspecting and weak (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998). A female serial killer almost always kills a close friend or family member, or someone in their own household (Vronsky, 2007). While most people consider the dangers of society to be outside the home, the female murderess is even more frightening because she hunts for victims within her own home.

A group of 58 previously-researched female serial killers were examined following certain variables as discussed in the gender-responsive literature. The risk assessment of these women was examined to see if their actions did in fact follow the pathways of deviance outlined in the gender-responsive approach to deviance and recidivism. While there is not a specified sequence in which these events must occur, they all are a culmination of what shapes the woman's probability to lead a life of criminality. The more variables experienced in a woman's life, the greater her chances are of choosing criminal activity in her lifetime. This study found that a woman who experiences a very tumultuous life with abuse, divorce, homelessness, and poverty will have an increased likelihood of inclusion in crime and deviance.

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DEDICATION

To both of my MRGs. Love always.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Any suggestion of a “female serial killer” was presumed to be a fallacy throughout history. That is, until the cold-blooded crimes of Aileen Wuornos began to unveil themselves along south Florida’s busy interstates between 1989 and 1990 (Vronsky, 2007, p. 8). Crime statistics show that women can kill the same number of victims as men, but it wasn’t until Wuornos’ crimes were discovered that she confirmed in the minds of society that women could be just as predatory as their male counterparts (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 75). This doubt of the female murderess was based on a lack of awareness stemming from earlier definitions that series killers were most commonly Caucasian men. Most information found on serial killers is indicative of a male being the suspect. While statistics do show that most serial killers are males, it also shows that one in ten serial killers are women. This small group of murderers has been overlooked, with a much smaller amount of data available about the female serial killer and their typologies. Since murder is a crime that is closely followed and scrutinized in this country, having adequate data available on the female murderer is crucial.

Defining a Serial Killer

Over the past 30 years, there have been many proposed definitions as to what defines a serial killer. Each definition shares a very similar theme, usually one factor will be slightly varied from another. These differences can range from the number of completed murders required for classification, the motivation of the crimes, and the time restraints

of the murders (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000, p. 7). To resolve this discrepancy and move towards an adoption of one singular definition, the attendants of the Serial Murder Symposium decided to develop a single definition of what is a serial killer (Keeney & Heide, 1994). The new definition involved the same person killing at least three individuals with a break of time between each killing. The passage of time, also referred to as the cooling-off period, is the main difference between classification for either a mass murderer or a serial killer. A mass murder is defined as four or more killings in the same incident without the passing of time (Keeney & Heide, 1994). This definition was adopted in 1998 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as being the criteria to help distinguish between the two types of murderers. As such, this definition will also be used for the present study.

Summary

This thesis will seek to find any correlations between the life experiences of female serial killers, and the gender-responsive literature that explains what can put a woman on the pathway to deviance. One theoretical explanation that will be examined is gender-responsive literature. The gender-responsive literature will be studied, and then be applied to the data collected from these women about their lives before, during, and after their crimes. This analysis seeks to determine what life experiences could be an attributing factor as to why women decided to kill, and what experiences increase the probability that they will become a serial killer later in life.

Most criminological theories were developed from information gathered about males and then applied to females. This framework of criminality fails to consider how women are inherently different from men, including their criminal pathways. The gender-

responsive literature seeks to define the differences in experiences in both genders that lead them to pathways of deviant behaviors (Hubbard & Matthews, 2008, p. 2). It also seeks to implement a set of guidelines on how to further prevent female deviance, and give support to females once they end up in the criminal justice system (p. 2).

Throughout this document, there will be several chapters that will discuss different sections of the analysis. Chapter 2 will be a thorough review of literature with a concentration in gender-response theory and how it pertains to the female deviant population, as well as pathways of criminality. Chapter 3 will demonstrate the methodology of the analysis, including the sample group, variables, and the code book formulation. Chapter 4 will give an overview of the results found in the study of the sample group examined. The information will also be alternatively displayed in a visual manner with the utilization of tables throughout. The final chapter will be a conclusion of all the information analyzed. This chapter will also include policy implementations, study limitations, and a discussion of how the results in this project were similar and/or different from the previously published literature.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While there is much more known about male serial killers, there are some characteristics known about the female killer. Female serial killers, on average, tend to start killing earlier in life and have careers that last much longer than males because they can operate without suspicion of their activities. These women have careers lasting between 8 and 11 years of active murdering, while men only have an average of 2 years before being apprehended. Female serial killers murder, on average, nine victims during their careers as compared to the male average of seven (Vronsky, 2007, p. 3). While proportionately much smaller in population than males, female serial killers almost never kill with a sexual motive (p. 37). The planning and meticulous actions of her murders, as compared to her male counterparts, tend to keep her evaded from capture. (Holmes, Holmes, & Hickey, 1991).

In cases where male and female murdering teams are found to be the suspects, the male tends to be the one who gets more attention from the media from a society that assumes a female perpetrator could not have been the mastermind of the crimes (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 6). This lack of believability that females could kill someone, especially a family member or friend, keeps the female serial killer from attracting any attention to her crimes (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). Even small amounts of suspicion of the female serial killer tend to get overlooked.

History has shown that usually males are the ones behind serial killings, so it would be assumed that females would murder in ways that are different from their male

counterparts. The male serial killer does not always set out to kill their victim, but sometimes their death is just part of the process. For most males, the gratification and enjoyment from their victim comes from the torture, rape, and humiliation of their victim (Vronsky, 2007, p. 41). Those victims who survive their attacks by a male do so simply because they were strong enough. Those who are chosen by a female serial killer almost never survive. The only goal for the female victim is the ultimate death of the person (p. 9). There is never any other sort of gratification needed from the person, and the only goal is to end the person's life. In the female mind, once the person is dead, the problem is then solved by means of freedom from the person (from a child or spouse), or the eventuality of monetary gain (via life insurance on the victim) (Wilson & Wilson, 1998). The victims, motives, and methods differ between male and female serial killers including when they become involved in their crimes.

Initiation

Women serial killers have been around for decades; however, not much is known about them as their male counterparts. What we do know is that there are more female serial killers to date than there were 10 years ago (Vronsky, 2007, p. 3). The average age of a male serial killer when he kills his first victim is 27.5 years of age. The average age when a female serial killer commits her first murder is at age 32.9 years of age (Keeney & Heide, 1994). Schurman-Kauflin (2000) similar results, concluding that the average age for female serial killers was 32.5 years of age at the first murder. Female serial killers tend to start killing later in life than males, and usually have longer killing careers when compared to males. The typical cut off age for male serial killers is around 40, whereas a female might kill well into her 60s or 70s (Vronsky, 2007, p. 39). The

youngest female serial killer in history was 11-year-old Mary Bell from England. She killed two young boys in 1968 and attempted to kill a small girl when she was caught by the child's father in the act (p. 40).

Preferred Methods

For female serial killers, the most common weapon of choice is poison (Vronsky, 2007, p. 43). Female murderers do not leave bodies strewn about the woods and roadways like their male counterparts, and are typically very diligent in the details of their murders. Women do not tend to go back and desecrate their victim's bodies or partake in necrophilia, nor do they torture their victims before their deaths. Sexual pleasure or gratification motives are typically far less common for female serial killers as compared to their male counterparts (Farrell, Keppel, & Titterington, 2011).

Females tend to exhibit a much simpler approach concerning their methods of murdering someone, and their motives are more commonly fueled by the accumulation of either power or profit (Farrell et al., 2011). Females tend to have much longer killing careers, and they operate under the radar more often. Females usually murder their victims alone and have tend to have more victims on average than men when their killing careers are compared (Farrell et al., 2011). Men almost always kill a stranger or someone that is just an acquaintance to them, whereas a female tends to select her victims from the group of people that she is closest to (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 6). This group often includes a family member, friend, or someone she is close to emotionally.

Women Who Know Their Victims

For many female serial killers, their motive is fueled by financial gain (Vronsky, 2007, p. 44). In this situation, the victim is usually tied to a life insurance policy. The

killer sees the death as a means of a monetary payout, which could possibly be a solution to her financial troubles. A study of incarcerated female serial killers found that 74% of the women were at least partially motivated by the financial gain of their victim's death (p. 44). When women who were incarcerated for only killing one person were asked the same question, only approximately 10% were motivated by financial gain (p. 44).

Other women take advantage of their intimate relationships with their victims. The home is considered a place of safety and sanctuary for all members of the family. While most people would assume that their safety is never a concern in their own home, this is not always the case when the mother decides to murder the children or the other members of the household. The mother-female-serial-killer has access to everything ingested in the home. Those around her are typically unsuspecting of her actions, not concerned whether or not their food is tainted. This cloak of innocence allows the female serial killer to poison her victim without them being any wiser to her actions. A record of the child being ill over time looks less conspicuous than a sudden death of a seemingly healthy child or spouse. Statistically, the female serial killer will deliver doses of poison over time, extending the illness of the victim rather than giving one lethal dose of poison all once (Kelleher & Kelleher, 2005, p. 7).

Some instances in history have a woman killing her children because of a lover's quarrel, in order to get back at their father. Other times, women wanted to rid themselves of their children to move on to a new life without them (Nicholls & Petrila, 2005). While the typical victim of male serial killer is almost never someone he knows, nearly 50% of females killed someone in their family or with whom they were acquainted (Hickey,

2002). While most woman choose victims that have close relationships to them, some women choose victims who are strangers.

Women Who Kill Strangers

Not every victim is a family member or close acquaintance to the female killer. In the instances of Angels of Death, nurses kill those patients they are set to care for. While their motive is for financial gain at times, other motives are often unknown (Vronsky, 2007, p. 44). The female caregiver tends to choose victims in a place where she is most comfortable, such as a hospital, nursing home, or care facility where she works (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 60). Her victims are always the very young, the very old, or the very ill and frail (p. 61). The Angel of Death is obsessed with the control of the lives she is supposed to be caring for, even to the extent of killing them when she sees fit (p. 60). She strives on being able to decide when a person is fit to die when she deems appropriate.

There are always two characteristics of the victims: the victim is always someone who is too weak to fight off an attack from the killer, and they believe that their caregiver is someone genuinely concerned with their care (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 61). The vulnerability of the victim is always taken into consideration when the killer decides to act against her victim, ensuring she has full control of the death of her victim. She also chooses victims that she believes to be doomed to die anyway. In her mind, she justifies the death because the victim has no chance of survival. Since the occurrence of death is not out of the ordinary in a medical facility, there is not always suspicion around a patient's death, especially if the person was very ill in the first place. This type of setting gives easy access to victims, methods of murdering the victims, and a cover of assumption as to why the victim died (Vronsky, 2007, p. 181).

The Angel of Death will kill her adult and child victims differently. If the victim is an adult, she will usually poison them with substances found in the care facility that she can easily access (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998, p. 61). The favored substances for injection are potassium chloride, insulin, or other similar substances found in the facility (p. 61). When she decides to kill a child, her methods differ. The female Angel of Death will usually resort to suffocation, which mimics sleep apnea in the child or other kinds of respiratory failures (p. 61). She will choose lethal types of injections less frequently than suffocation (p. 61). These types of methods leave little to no traceable evidence, so these crimes are sometimes left either unsolved or unknown (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). This lack of profiling about the female serial killer accounts for how these women tend to kill without being captured as quickly as men.

Detection and Evasion of Capture

Because instances of female serial killers have steadily been on the rise since the 1960s, criminologists and law enforcement have more information to help recognize these perpetrators and their crimes but this area in the research is still lacking (Vronsky, 2007, p. 3). Females are not typically “location-specific” when it comes to where they kill their victims, as compared to men who do choose a special location for their crimes. This can make it somewhat difficult to pin point multiple murders on one woman due to the lack of a pattern in the crime’s locale. Statistically, females kill within their own home or a place that they are accustomed to being on a regular basis (Vronsky, 2007, p. 7). Since the woman is not out of place or in a place that is deviant for her norm, there is not much suspicion as to her presence or suspicion of her actions since she is usually in that area. Most murders occur in the home, so women tend to be overlooked because of

the maternal roles society tends to place on them (p. 4). It is assumed that the woman will always be the one caring for the family, and have their best interests in mind when they make choices for everyone. It is not until there is overwhelming evidence against her that the suspicion will finally fall upon the female serial killer (p. 6). Being overlooked and unnoticed usually gives her more time to claim more victims.

Much is to be learned about the initiation, continuation, and desistance of the female killer. While there is some research in this area, explanations on how a woman develops into a serial killer is weak at best. Because this instance of female serial killers has grown over the past 20 years, it is important to know more about this population. The present study attempts to add to this growing body by looking at the causal factors that might explain why these women kill.

Theoretical Background

It has been hypothesized that a murderer is made, that they are simply a product of their environment and how the person is treated and raised into adulthood (Landay, 2010). Others believe that a murdering instinct is something that is internalized within the brain of the person, and no amount of intervention can change this characteristic (Landay, 2010). This analysis seeks to determine what life experiences could be an attributing factor as to why women decided to kill, and what experiences increase the probability that they will become a serial killer later in life.

One theoretical explanation as to what causes women to choose criminality can be found in the gender-responsive literature. The population of female offenders is growing at an even faster rate than the male population (Harrison & Allen, 2003). Most criminological theories were developed from information gathered about males and then

applied to females. This framework of criminality fails to consider how women are inherently different from men, and does not include their criminal pathways.

The gender-responsive literature seeks to define the differences in experiences in both genders that lead them to pathways of deviant behaviors (Hubbard & Matthews, 2008, p. 2). It also seeks to implement a set of guidelines on how to further prevent female deviance, and give support to females once they end up in the criminal justice system (p. 2). This body of work outlines how the uniqueness of experiences and pathways of deviance for females establishes the need for specially formatted programs and implemented interventions to help address their deviance (p. 2).

Gender Differences

Research conducted on gender-specific deviance has found evidence that gender is an important variable when predicting how and why a person ends up being deviant. Steffensmeier and Allan noted there was a “profound difference” between men and women, both being effected differently by their histories and pathways to deviance. Women tend to use crime as a means of survival, typically as an escape from abuse, poverty, and substance abuse (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1998). Female offenders are usually women of color, low income, and undereducated women with an erratic history of employment (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2002). While there are obvious differences between genders, there are also important differences between individuals within each gender based on race and ethnic background, sexual orientation (heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual), age, and social and economic status (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2002).

Overall, both genders have very different precursors and pathways that lead a male or female to commit crime. While risk factors for men tend to surround antisocial

thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, antisocial personalities, and antisocial peers, female risk factors for the initiation, maintenance, and desistence in criminal behavior are quite different. Females who become involved in crimes generally have high rates of drug use, psychical and sexual abuse, homelessness, and dysfunctional relationships (Owen, 1998). The gender-responsive literature also shows that women are at a higher risk of being victimized, having mental health problems, having difficulties establishing meaningful relationships, and suffering from high rates of substance abuse (Hubbard & Matthews, 2008, p. 2).

The Pathways Perspective

As previously stated, the most common pathways to crime are based on a woman attempting to survive abuse, poverty, and substance abuse (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). The relationship between these three factors is complex and very significant. Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse is very common in the histories of female offenders, with this abuse often cited as the root cause of substance abuse, usually for purposes of self-medicating (Boehm et al., 2005).

Kathleen Daly (1998) identified five gender responsive pathways pertaining specifically to females. The pathway classifications categorize the women based on their background and crimes. Each one of these pathways states specific crimes and motivations for why a woman chose to commit deviance. First, the street woman describes a woman who ran away from their abusive households and then turned to the streets to survive (Bell, 2012, p. 14). The harmed and harming woman details women abused in childhood and then went on to abuse drugs and experience mental health issues as an adult (p. 15). The battered woman pathway includes women who experienced

abuse from early childhood into their adult lives, but not always by the same offender (p. 15). The drug-connected woman is involved with drug use and distribution because of the relationships she shares with others, typically influenced by her significant other (p. 15). The other woman outlines how this group of women committed crimes for some sort of financial benefit for themselves (p. 15). This analysis identified women in all five categories.

Daly notes that the most common variables that determine a woman's pathway into crime include family support, child abuse, adult abuse, housing safety, relationship dysfunction, mental health, and anger (1998). These variables were later expanded to include risks factors involving parental stress, parental involvement for both men and women pathways to criminality (Bell, 2010). The more of these types of behaviors and experiences that are associated with one women, the greater the likelihood of the woman becoming a deviant later in life (p. 16).

Relationships

Most deviant women become involved in the justice system because of the relationships they share with others (Bell, 2010, p. 15). The offenders are typically in a mental fight with their abusers. They are plagued with dysfunctional relationships and compromised housing safety. The drug connected women are often affiliated with manufacture or sale of illegal drugs, especially when the crimes are happening in the context of intimate relationships (p. 15). These women also have a lack of family support. Other women begin their deviant behavior due to a motivation of financial gain. These women often lack any previous risk history, were not drug addicted, and had no history of violence or abuse whatsoever (p. 15).

Deviant women are also often first introduced to drugs and crime through those with whom she has a close relationship (Owens, 1998). These unhealthy relationships are often a strong indicator of the woman eventually becoming involved in criminal activity, especially when the acquisition of illegal drugs is involved. These same women tend to continue to use, and gain their drug of choice through their partner who first introduced them to the drug. When the woman becomes addicted, desperation to finance her habit will sometimes lead the woman to prostitution. While this scenario often includes physical violence within the relationship, the woman will often stay involved even with the poor treatment happening in the relationship (Owens, 1998).

Family relationships are also extremely important to initiation of deviance in the female offender. Family ties have been found to be either beneficial or detrimental for females. Daly's research suggests that the importance of family connections and how they can help to reduce deviance and recidivism in the female offender (1998). Supportive relationships from the family give a better social standing to the female, and are something that she will work towards to try and maintain (p. 94). When there is a lack of these relationships, the female has less to look forward to in her life, and therefore will be at a greater risk to end up on a pathway to crime (p. 94).

The importance of relationships for females is stressed in the gender-responsive literature. Healthy relationships are just as important as the relationships that promote criminality. If a female is in a healthy relationship with support and acceptance, then she will be less inclined to partake in criminal behaviors (Bell, 2010, p. 27). A positive link between the importance of good parenting has been found to be a causal factor for females, but not for males (Bell, 2012, p. 18). Relationships that are maintained between

parents and the female offender have been shown to be a positively rated success factor pre-crime for the female; however, when there is a lack of these positive relationships in the female's life, she is on the pathway for deviance per Daly and her pathways of deviance (1998).

Abuse

The variables that examine child and adult abuse tend to be more heavily weighted on the outcome of crime pathways. These experiences have the greatest effect on women, and this type of abuse has a longer lasting impression on female offenders. Adult abuse is significantly linked to the recidivism rates of females in multiple pathway variable categories (Daly, 1998). This same generalization is very difficult to make about males because of their lack of disclosure of their adolescent experiences (Bell, 2012). While most women will divulge their past abusive experiences, males tend to avoid these topics (p. 17). A connection has also been made between the mental health status of females and their likelihood of deviance, with environmental factors seeming to make the problems worse for some diagnosis's (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003).

Female offenders who have a history of sexual or physical abuse tend to succumb to subsequent delinquency, substance abuse and addiction, and criminal activity (p. 22). Abuse is one of the major variables that turns a woman on to the pathway of crime. When the family dynamic is structured around abusive action against the girl, her likelihood of later turning to crime are is more than double than a girl who was not abused in her childhood (p. 22).

Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

While there are more accounts of males suffering from mental illness than females, both groups are more likely to suffer from a different diagnosis (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Those females in jails, correctional facilities, and prisons have a higher prevalence of mental health issues than the rest of the general population (Raines & Laws, 2009). Mental illness is a contributing factor to the woman suffering from emotional disconnections. Approximately 8 in 10 female offenders with a mental illness have also reported some sort of physical or sexual abuse during their childhood (Bell, 2010, p. 26). Women who have mental illness have a much greater likelihood of suffering a comorbidity between substance abuse and their mental health status (Bloom, Owens, & Covington, 2003).

Merlo and Pollock (1995) demonstrated with research, that the link between drug use and crime is strongly correlated. Women in state prisons reported having substance abuse problems in approximately 80% of the population (Bell, 2010, p. 26). Approximately 50% of the same incarcerated female population disclosed that they had been using alcohol, drugs, or both during that time they were offending (p. 26). These women in state prisons also admit that their incarcerating offense was usually motivated by needed to obtain money to support their drug use, and half of these women are self-proclaimed daily users (p. 27).

Mental illness is also exacerbated by drug use. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is also much more common in those with substance abuse problems, with an average occurrence of 12-34% of users suffering from both afflictions, as compared to the national average of only 8% (Boehm, Harvey, Malloy, Mestad, Bush, Richman, & Ney, 2005). Mental illness and symptoms of these disorders can be a trigger for substance

abuse, which the drug use can then exacerbate those same symptoms, causing a greater likelihood of being victimized and more traumatic experiences for the woman (p. 4).

Institutional facilities have found that helping incarcerated women manage their mental health issues through means besides just medication, that there is a positive impact on the institutional environment, individual behavior, and recidivism success rates (p. 4).

Poverty

When economic disparity is coupled without the means of legitimate ways to obtain financial support, these two factors often lead women into the criminal pathway (Bell, 2010, p. 26). The experience of economic marginalization, often accompanied by a disconnection from conventional means such as diminished scholastic achievement and joblessness, is a significant predictor of criminal behavior (p. 26). Suffering relationships, economic suppression, drug addiction, and abuse are all complications that further push women down the pathway of criminality. A lack of financial support often leads to homelessness, further complicating the lives of these women. Homeless women are much more likely to have a child in their care than males, and this disparity to provide for their child can also lead them to participate in criminal acts (p. 26).

The socioeconomic context of these women's lives also has a very important role in how these women end up in the criminal justice system. These women usually live in poverty, causing the feeling of disadvantage. Couple these feelings of disparity with little education, few job skills, and an unreliable job history, the likelihood of the woman being able to solve her issues of poverty through legitimate means (Boehm et al., 2005). Many women depend on public assistance, and these systems are changing to a framework that

does not allow individuals with felony drug convictions to receive benefits, causing further desperation for financial stability (p. 7).

Many of these women in the criminal justice system are raising children alone. While some women can lessen their financial struggle with finding a decent-paying job with minimal skills, this is not the case for all women (p. 8). Some will not be able to find legitimate means of work, causing them to become involved in crime to care for their children. Some women also depend on their family members or significant other for support; however, this is not always a dependable means of financial support (p. 8).

By specifying the events and contexts of the lives that promote criminal behavior, the pathways perspective in gender-specific literature has made substantial contributions to understanding of female deviance. Daly's pathways have been very promising in providing a layout and framework of the development of gender-responsive literature (Bell, 2012). By better understanding the early variables and experiences of females who are part of the criminalistics population, a better solution can be formulated to help intervene and modify behaviors before the younger generation becomes deviant.

Chapter III

METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this analysis is to explore the female serial killer, her motives, and her methods. The main research question focuses on what specific life experiences in the female serial killer's history impacts the probability of her becoming a serial murderer later in her adult life. Many women involved with the criminal justice system have experiences in their life that have led them to crime. Research suggests that women often have very different pathways to crime than men. While there is much known about male serial killers and their pathways to their offenses, there has not been a study that combines historical and social factors to offer a better understanding of what causes a female to act on her compulsions and kill.

This study utilized a content analysis to explore this topic. A content analysis is a research technique used to make replicable and valid interpretations by understanding and coding textual material. By thoroughly evaluating texts, such as newspaper articles, books, and research articles, qualitative data was gathered and used to define and summarize the possible characteristics of those women who would become serial killers later in life. Because this analysis used previously collected data from past crimes and individual experiences, this work is exempt from the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) policies, standards, and requirements of research principles. See Appendix C for the exemption form as provided via the university.

Sample

This study examined the lives and crimes of women found in two texts that focus on female serial killers. Specifically, the texts from Kelleher and Kelleher and Vronsky were chosen for the selection group of women because they were the most recently published texts, which also included the most recent female convictions. Choosing the most recent texts published allowed for the most current list of women to be accessed. The lists from the appendix section of both texts were compared to identify the full list of female serial killers.

Each woman analyzed must have killed at least three victims, the crimes must have happened in the United States, and there must be time that passes between each separate murder to align with the standard definition of a serial killer. Eligibility is defined as women who had met the previous definition of a serial killer (killed three or more in the United States, and had a period of time passing between each killing) and also acted solo in their crimes, and were not part of the Team Killer classification.

Variables

Each woman varied in the number of victims and the age of when they first killed. The texts include killers from seven mentioned categories: Black Widows (kill their spouses), Angels of Death (kill their patients or children they babysit), Sexual Predator (crimes are sexually fueled), Revenge, Profit (kill for material gain), Team Killers (women killing with at least one other person), and Unexplained. For this analysis, the Team Killers category was not included in the study group because this study focuses on females who worked alone in her crimes. Because of this influential factor towards her behaviors, it cannot be positively identified if her actions were influenced by her life

experiences (as related to life course theory), or whether she wouldn't have acted in such a way if she was committing crimes solo. Since there was not a way to determine if the actions of the female were her own idea or if her actions were influenced by her teammate counterpart, females from this category were omitted. Unsolved murders were also omitted from this analysis because no one was formally charged with the crime.

The female offenders were examined individually. The information collected included their ages, victim counts, and other historical information, as well as any known abuse they women might have experienced at any point in their lives. Age of offense, age at capture (if she was captured), number of confirmed victims killed, and the motives for the offenses were also gathered to respond to the research question. The independent variables in this analysis were historical factors related to each woman. The cumulative effects of these factors were hypothesized to lead these women to become serial killers later in life.

Data Analysis Plan

Four texts were used to examine the lives and crimes of each woman. The first text utilized was authored by Kelleher and Kelleher, *Murder Most Rare: The Female Serial Killer* (1998). The second text was Peter Vronsky's *Female Serial Killers: How and Why Women Become Monsters* (2007). The third text, *Wicked Women: World's Worst Female Serial Killers*, was written by David Elio Malocco (2014). The final text utilized was written by Deborah Schurman-Kauflin and titled *The New Predator - Women Who Kill: Profiles of Female Serial Killers* (2000).

In addition to these texts, information for each woman was gathered from published newspaper articles. While some of these crimes made national news, this was

not the case for each woman. Most the newspaper articles found were local publications from the area where the women committed their crimes. Each newspaper article must have either been editorial in composition, and all must have originated inside the United States.

To obtain the newspaper data, each woman was searched in the Galileo online library service via Valdosta State University's online database. Once logged into Galileo, the database called ProQuest was accessed to find the newspaper articles containing the information about each woman. This database contains thousands of national and local publications in one database. Each woman was searched by name and the most currently published article for that woman was analyzed. Only one article was accessed for each woman, and each article was then coded per the codebook. There was a total of 58 articles retrieved and coded (one for each woman).

The newspaper articles were mostly gathered from local publications in the area where the woman lived or committed her crimes (see Appendix B for full list of publications). These local publications were used for 42 women (72.4%). The *New York Times* was used for nine women (15.5%), and 8.6% ($n = 5$) of the articles were found in the *Los Angeles Times*. *USA Today* and *New York Daily Times* each accounted for only 1.7% ($n = 1$) of the articles found. All published articles were published between January 11, 1873, and March 7, 2016. For a full list of the article publications that were utilized, please see Appendix B.

Codebook Formulation

After examining the theoretical constructs of gender-responsive literature, the codebook for the present analysis was developed. The gender-responsive literature

recognizes certain experiences in a person's life that attribute to participation in criminality. The codebook includes variables to capture data about the home life of each woman as a child and adult in the categories of poverty, domestic abuse, marriage, family dynamics and size, abortion, ages of first crime and capture, if there was any sort of diagnosed mental illness.

The construction of each woman's crimes to include victims, motives, and methods of murder were also examined and documented via the codebook. Major events in her life were also accounted for, including her marriage(s), birth(s) of her own child(ren), and the relationship she shared with both her parents and her spouse(s). According to gender-responsive literature, examining each woman's life experiences and her development of personal relationships should show a pattern of factors that predict her later deviance.

Any historical information about these women before they committed their murders was then coded. By using a variety of sources, the present study expected to find some themes throughout the life course of each female. This information can then be used to better understand what early behaviors and experiences could be linked to the increased likelihood that a young girl might murder later in life. Knowing what might cause these women to later kill in their adult life could help in identifying strategies to intervene with these women before they murder someone.

Data Collection

All information that was gathered and coded for this study was stored exclusively in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 program. All data was analyzed via counts for everyone as pertaining to each variable addressed in the

codebook (see Appendix A for codebook breakdown). Once all individual's personal information was recorded and entered into SPSS, the information was then analyzed with the frequencies and descriptive processes available within the program. The data was then put into tables using Microsoft Word 2016, and writing of the entire document was done within the same program.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Childhood Demographics

Table 1 below describes the demographics of the women as children. Almost the entirety of the women examined were white ($n = 53$, 91.3%), and the remaining 8.6% ($n = 5$) were black. The women grew up in three states more commonly than any other: Illinois, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. Most the women had other siblings, leaving just a small portion an only-child. It was also unknown whether most of the women's parents were married or not, however 37.9% ($n = 22$) were married, but the remaining five women had parents that never wed one another.

Table 1. Childhood Factors

Variable		n	%
<i>State</i>	Illinois	6	10.3
	Georgia	5	8.6
	Pennsylvania	5	8.6
	Other States	42	72.5
<i>Race</i>	Caucasian	53	91.3
	African American	5	8.6
<i>Married</i>	No	5	8.6
<i>Parents</i>	Yes	22	37.9
	Unknown	31	53.4
<i>Only Child</i>	No	45	77.6
	Yes	5	8.6
	Unknown	8	13.8

There was childhood abuse in almost half of the women analyzed. Approximately one-fourth of the women had not experienced any kind of abuse. Poverty during

childhood was experienced by almost half of the women ($n = 26$), but it was not an issue growing up for approximately one third ($n = 18$) of the females who were examined. The occurrence of childhood poverty was unknown for the remaining women ($n = 14$).

Table 2. Childhood Poverty and Abuse

Variable		n	%
<i>Childhood Poverty</i>	No	18	44.8
	Yes	26	31.0
	Unknown	14	24.1
<i>Childhood Abuse</i>	No	14	24.1
	Yes	24	44.6
	Unknown	18	31.0

Adult Factors

Table 3 documents the physical and sexual abuse and trauma of the women as adults, based on other adults (like a spouse or parent) being the perpetrator. Abuse as an adult was reported in 19% ($n = 11$) of the women examined. There was not any abuse reported for 41.1% ($n = 24$) of the women, and the remaining 39.7% ($n = 23$) were unknown. Another key point in the research found that not one newspaper article mentioned any of the abuse suffered by any women, when there was in fact evidence that approximately half had been a victim of abuse as an adult. Adult poverty was mentioned in only 32.8% ($n = 19$) of the articles, leaving out the remaining 67.2% ($n = 39$). There was a mention of traumatic events in the lives of over half of the women in the analysis. Traumatic events included parental death(s) or death of a guardian, sexual or physical abuse as a child, or death of one's own child or spouse. Only 20.7% ($n = 12$) did not have any sort of traumatic event in their life.

Table 3. Adult Abuse and Poverty

Variable		n	%
<i>Abuse</i>	No	11	19.0
	Yes	24	41.4
	Unknown	23	39.7
<i>Poverty in Newspaper</i>	No	39	67.2
	Yes	19	32.8
<i>Abuse in Newspaper</i>	No	58	100.0
	Yes	0	0
<i>Traumatic Events</i>	No	12	20.7
	Yes	35	60.3
	Unknown	11	19.0

The rates of prostitution, homelessness, and substance abuse among the women examined are displayed in Table 4. Most of the women ($n = 53$) either did not or were unknown to participate in any sort of prostitution, but 8.6% ($n = 5$) of the women were prostitutes before committing their crimes. Homelessness was part of the lives of 12.1% ($n = 7$), while the remaining 48.3% ($n = 28$) were not homeless during their life. Abuse of drugs and alcohol were a problem for 17.2% ($n = 10$) of the group, while 53.4% ($n = 31$) did not have abuse issues, and the remaining women were unknown as to their drug and alcohol use status (29.3%, $n = 17$).

Table 4. Prostitution, Homelessness, and Drug Abuse

Variable		n	%
<i>Prostitution</i>	No	53	91.4
	Yes	5	8.6
<i>Homelessness</i>	No	51	48.8
	Yes	7	21.1
	Unknown	23	39.7
<i>Substance Abuse</i>	No	31	53.4
	Yes	10	17.2
	Unknown	17	29.3

Table 5 illustrates the home life of the women examined during the analysis. The females were married in three-fourths of the cases ($n = 45$). The remaining five women were never married in their lifetime. There was no mention of any of the women having an abortion ($n = 58$). Of all the women in the study, three-quarters had children of their own. The remaining women either never had children, or it was unknown if they did or not. Of all the women in the study, half were employed at the time of their murdering careers. The remaining half of the group either were not employed, or their employment status was unknown.

Table 5: Home Life

Variable		n	%
<i>Married</i>	No	5	8.6
	Yes	45	77.6
	Unknown	8	13.8
<i>Had Children</i>	No	6	10.3
	Yes	45	77.6
	Unknown	7	12.1
<i>Employment</i>	No	12	20.7
	Yes	30	51.7
	Unknown	16	27.6

The Crimes

The newspaper articles mentioned the names of the victims in approximately three-fourths of the articles. For all the women ($n = 58$), the number of victims she claimed were mentioned in each article. There were 364 victims killed by the 58 women included in the analysis. The average number of victims was 6.28 people per serial killer. When examining victims per killer, 17 women killed three victims, 11 women killed five victims, and eight women killed four victims. The average age of when these women first killed was 30.36 years, and the average age of capture was 37.79 years of age. This

approximates each woman's killing career lasting for 7.43 years, which was almost twice of what male killing careers are in length, approximately 4 years comparatively (Vronksy, 2007).

Table 6 illustrates the demographics of the committed crimes. The victim was a family member or spouse of the female 65.5% of the time. Females killed a stranger 17.2% ($n = 10$) of the time. Friends or acquaintances were killed 10.3% ($n = 6$) of the time, and 6.9% ($n = 4$) killed those in multiple categories of relationships. The method of murder was primarily poisoning, followed by smothering, and injection of lethal agents. Most the crimes were made to look like an illness or accident. Eight women (13.8%) made no attempt at disposing their victims at all. The punishments for the crimes were primarily life without parole, death, and a set amount of years to be served by the killer.

Table 6. Crime Specifics

Variable		n	%
<i>Victim Relationship</i>	Spouse/Family member	38	65.5
	Stranger	10	17.2
	Friend or acquaintance	6	10.3
	Multiple categories	4	6.9
<i>Murder Location</i>	Home of victim or killer	49	84.5
	Killer's workplace	6	10.3
	Home of victim and killer's workplace	2	3.4
	Outside/wooded area	1	1.7
<i>Method of Murder</i>	Poisoning	23	39.7
	Smothering/suffocation	11	19.0
	Injection of lethal agents	6	10.3
	Gunshot	5	8.6
	Multiple methods	5	8.6
	Other	4	6.9
	Bludgeoning/beatings	2	3.4
	Stabbing	2	3.4
<i>Body Disposal</i>	Framed crime as accident/illness	46	79.3
	Made no attempt at disposal	8	13.8
	Hid the body in the home	3	5.2
	Burned body	1	1.7

<i>Punishment</i>	Life without parole	19	32.8
	Set amount of years	14	24.1
	Death	12	20.7

Represented in Table 7, 21 women admitted they had a life insurance policy insuring at least one of their victims. The remaining women ($n = 37$) did not have any sort of insurance policy naming them as the beneficiary of the policy. However, 55.2% ($n = 32$) admitted they were motivated to kill for financial gain, while the remaining 44.8% ($n = 26$) did not. Women admitted 36.2% ($n = 21$) of the time that they had a life insurance policy insuring at least one of their victims, while the remaining 63.8% ($n = 37$) did not have any sort of insurance policy naming them as the beneficiary of the policy.

Table 7. Motives for Murder

Variable		n	%
<i>Life Ins. Beneficiary</i>	No	37	63.8
	Yes	21	36.2
<i>Financial Gain</i>	No	32	55.2
	Yes	26	44.8

Killer Demographics

Table 8 represents the demographics and murdering characteristics of each woman. The most predominant classifications of female killer found those with unexplained motives ($n = 18, 31.0\%$), Black Widows ($n = 12, 20.7\%$), and profit killers ($n = 11, 19.0\%$). Angels of Death ($n = 8, 13.8\%$), and revenge ($n = 8, 13.8\%$) were the least common. There was only one woman (1.7%) in the entire group who was classified as a sexual predator. It is worth noting here that while some of these women could be technically classified in multiple groups based on their motives, these classifications were

derived from the texts where the information about them was found. Hence, each person was only classified in one category, as represented in this data and table demonstration.

Table 8: Classification

Variable	n	%
Black Widow	12	20.7
Unexplained	18	31.0
Profit	11	19.0
Angels of Death	8	13.8
Revenge	8	13.8
Sexual Predator	1	1.7

Women were diagnosed with some sort of mental illness (shown in Table 9) in over half of the analyzed cases (51.6%, $n = 30$). However, the remaining women (48.4%, $n = 28$) were not professionally diagnosed with having any sort of mental illnesses. It needs mentioning at this point that while each woman could have possibly been diagnosed with multiple psychological afflictions, the information that was used for each woman only stated in the literature texts as having one diagnosis per female. Personality disorders were found in 12.1% ($n = 7$) of the women. Both depression and Munchhausen's syndrome affected 10.3% ($n = 6$) of the women in the analysis. Women suffered from both schizophrenia and issues of legal insanity 8.6% ($n = 5$) of the time. There were four women who had an unknown diagnosis (6.9%), and only one woman (1.7%) who was diagnosed as a psychopath. The mental health status was mentioned in the newspaper articles for 36 women (62.1%), and was omitted from the articles of 22 women (37.9%). Mental health issues were mentioned in 62.1% ($n = 36$) of the newspaper articles, and was excluded in 37.9% of them ($n = 22$).

Table 9: Mental Health

Variable	n	%
Diagnosed	30	51.6
Undiagnosed	28	48.4

DISCUSSION

The overall findings of this analysis showed that all 58 women analyzed suffered some sort of a traumatic event in their life. Some women suffered from sexual or physical abuse as a child, suffered from homelessness or lived in poverty. It is hypothesized that life events and experiences are related to why these women became multiple murderers in their life, with their victims usually being either a family member or acquaintance. As explained in the gender-responsive research, those women who suffer from abuse, homelessness, and poverty are more likely to become involved in criminal activity. While these aligned with the gender-responsive literature, there were other findings that merit additional discussion.

Methods of Murder

This analysis discovered the most preferred method of murder for this group of women was poisoning. The ease of access and the ability to frame the crime as either an accident or a previous illness made this method of murder the most frequently used. Years ago, arsenic could be found at any local hardware store or with any pharmacist. This ease of accessibility made poisoning a very convenient method of killing, and was rarely tested for after death. If there was suspicion of foul play, the testing would be done but routinely it was not (Vronsky, 2007). The use of arsenic to cause death made the body react in a way that was sometimes referred to a stomach ulcers or just extreme fever for the cause of death. These same patients were usually treated multiple times for other

complaints resulting from the unknown poisoning, but rarely was foul play suspected (Vronksy, 2007). It wasn't until 1840 that there was a dependable arsenic test developed by James Marsh, but the test was not widely available, and was somewhat difficult to conduct (Vronksy, 2007).

While poisoning was the most commonly used method of killing, there were many different agents used. Vronsky mentioned that most people who are poisoned are someone close to the serial killer. Most victims in this analysis were poisoned (39.7%), and almost all the victims (65.5%) were either a family member or a spouse of the killer. This information also corroborates Vronsky's research that most serial killing women will poison their victims, even if they are in the same household or share a relationship.

Career Length

While females are known to kill, they tend to defy the norms that have been set by their male counterparts. Women serial killers tend to start their killing at a younger age, and are not apprehended until much later than men. This is the attributing cause of a woman having a longer killing career with much longer active periods than men. This factor also accounts for her having a higher number of amounted victims in her lifetime.

Gender-Responsive Variables

The gender-responsive research of criminology was the basis for the theoretical understanding for criminal behavior for this study. Overall, this theory suggests that women who experience certain things and exhibit specific behaviors are more likely to succumb to a pathway that leads to criminality. The data in this analysis does align with many of the key elements of this theory, including women suffering from mental illness,

homelessness, drug abuse, unsafe home life, and both physical and sexual abuse (Daly, 1998).

As previously stated, the gender-responsive theory proposes that what is applicable to males is not always applicable to females, and vice versa. Kathleen Daly formed what she referred to as pathways. While women had specific characteristics or experiences, they were all put on different pathways that ultimately ended in some sort of crime being committed. While gender-responsive literature recognizes many different experiences and characteristics, it does not weigh one variable as more or less important than another. The culmination of multiple variables in the offender's life is what raises the likelihood and expectation of her partaking in deviance.

Traumatic Events

In the present analysis, there were 26 women (44.8%) who had been abused by one of their own parents at some point in their youth. According to the theory, this can put an individual at an increased risk for initiation to a pathway of deviance. Daly specifically mentions traumatic experiences as a factor for beginning a person on the pathway of deviance. This analysis found that 60.3% ($n = 35$) of the examined female serial killers had some sort of traumatic experience in their youth. Traumatic events can have a huge impact in a person's life, especially if there is no sort of professional guidance to help sort through the emotions that will follow (Siegel, 2010, p. 275). When emotions are not handled properly, they can lead to introversion and a lessened ability to create relationships (p. 275).

Abuse

This analysis found that many of the females examined suffered from some sort of abuse at the hands of either a parent as a child, or from another adult once they were grown. Because of these experiences of abuse, it can be presumed that dysfunctional relationships continued into adulthood. The theory predicts that when a woman is abused as a young child or adult, these experiences increase the likelihood that she will become deviant. Young girls tend to run away from the abuse and succumb to the streets to survive, and adult women turn to the pathways outlined with abuse factors and unsafe home environments.

Relationships

Damaged or dysfunctional relationships, especially in the family unit, can be a precursor to a deviant pathway. These relationships begin at an early age, and flaws in the parent-child relationship are often hard to repair later in life. Early dysfunctional relationships then reemerge during school years, causing difficulty making connections with other children, and later difficulties with emotional connections with a women's spouse or children (Bell, 2010).

Poverty

Poverty was mentioned as variable in all five of Daly's pathways, and was found to be prevalent in the study group. Almost half of the women examined lived in poverty as a child, and only half of the women were employed at the time they committed their murders. Financial disparity could be a contributing factor in why these women killed, considering almost half of the women admitting to killing for some sort of financial gain.

Homelessness, Prostitution, and Drug Abuse

Homelessness was an issue for approximately 12.1% ($n = 7$) of the examined women, which is another contributing variable to pathways of deviance. Prostitution was also a problem for 8.6% ($n = 5$) of studied females, which is also mentioned to be a precursor experience to the deviance of a woman who cannot find legitimate means of financial stability. Drug abuse was a contributing factor to many of Daly's pathways to deviance, and the data collected shows that drug use was an issue for 17.2% ($n = 10$) of the women. Compiling the variables of drug abuse, prostitution, homelessness, poverty, and the motive for financial gain to kill someone, these experiences would make any woman feel desperate for a solution to her problems, and the answer happened to be murder for all the examined women.

Mental Illness

Mental health was also a very common variable among the pathways. Mental illness was diagnosed in over half of the examined female serial killers. These women all suffered some a magnitude of different diagnoses, with personality disorder and depression being the some common. People with mental illnesses do not tend to process and receive information in the same context as someone without mental health problems. Each of Daly's deviant pathways mentioned mental health as being a contributing factor to why these women were committing crimes, or in the case of this analysis, committing murders. Being able to intervene with an appropriate diagnosis and treatment plan before the people are involved with criminality would be much easier to treat before a culmination of other variables are an issue.

While there is not a specified sequence in which these events must occur, they all are a culmination of what shapes the woman's probability to lead a life of criminality. A

woman who experiences a very tumultuous life with abuse, divorce, homelessness, and poverty will have an increased likelihood of inclusion in crime and deviance. The more variables experienced in a woman's life, the greater her chances are of her choosing criminal activity in her lifetime.

Interacting Factors

The more variables present in the life of a woman, the greater her probability of deviant becomes. Each variable (poverty, drug use, mental illness, etc.) interacts with the other variables that might be present. If a woman lives in poverty, the greater her chances are of becoming homeless. Homelessness, coupled with a lack of education and legitimate means to change one's financial situation, will often lead a woman to prostitution for survival. These women often self-medicate with drugs and/or alcohol, which further pushes them into financial despair. Once an addiction forms, the woman will become desperate to find a means of financing her habit. While not every woman suffers from some sort of substance dependency, the variables still interact with one another in other ways.

A woman who has a mental disorder and then tries to self-medicate using drugs and/or alcohol, can exasperate her psychological problems. While these women can often go undiagnosed until later in life, they experience the same interactions between variables. Mental illness gives a distortion to the patient's perspective of their environment, clouding one's thinking or judgement. When the female adds mind-altering substances to her already-skewed mental state, the results can be disastrous. A woman might see that the illegitimate means in which she has been forced to utilize for survival is not as profitable as it before. Her conclusion can sometimes be turning to murder

someone for a profit. Her mindset might lead her to believe that she is doing someone else a favor by killing them, much like the Angels of Death believe they have done after killing their victims.

Often, the very beginning of these serial killer's lives were marked with poverty, trauma, and physical and/or sexual abuse. Some women felt the only solution to their problems at home was to run away. This uncertainty of where she might sleep, or gain her next meal could be something that drives her to find a solution with only illegitimate means. This is most often a culmination of her killing someone, a futile attempt at becoming more financially stable.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

The foundation for stability starts as a very young age. When this foundation is built incorrectly there can be later implications that may cause a person to become involved in crime. Strong family support systems help ensure the child has a sound structural foundation for their emotions, ensuring they can properly interact socially. When this does not happen, some children will struggle for their lifetime. Those who struggle with poverty, drug abuse, and mental illness are on the pathway to deviance as outlined in the gender-responsive literature.

The studied women had higher instances of mental illnesses, poverty, homelessness, and abuse throughout their lifetime. Proper child upbringing in safe homes, with a proper family structure, helps women to stay off the track of deviance. Seeking help for mental illnesses and poverty are both variables that can be managed. When there are legitimate avenues for financial stability, the likelihood of participating in deviance are lessened. Being able to break the cycle of abuse, poverty, and drug abuse will allow young girls a chance at not ending up on a deviant pathway.

A lessened probability of deviance starts within the home. Healthy relationships and safe home environments help keep children within the home, rather than running away and turning to the streets for survival. When parents raise their children in healthy households and provide for their children as needed, the children tend to flourish. Good

scholastic performance can also result in careers where the woman can support herself and her family, and not resort to deviant ways of survival.

While there is not a specified sequence in which these life events must occur, they all are a culmination of what shapes the woman's probability to lead a life of criminality. A woman who experiences a very tumultuous life with abuse, divorce, homelessness, and poverty will have an increased likelihood of inclusion in crime and deviance. The more variables experienced in a woman's life, the greater her chances are of choosing criminal activity in her lifetime

While some of the variables mentioned in gender-responsive pathways cannot be controlled, such as abuse or experiencing traumatic events, others can be managed by the women. Not partaking in drugs, finding stable employment, and having healthy relationships are dynamic risk factors that are subject to change. Seeking help for mental health issues and following treatment plans are also ways to intervene on the pathway to deviance. The gender-responsive literature shows that when a certain pathway is presented to an individual, it is not a certainty that deviance will be the only route. With intervention and support, these females can get off the pathway to deviance and flourish in life.

Study Limitations

As this is a relatively unstudied topic, this study did have some limitations. There was only a small amount of information known about female serial killers in the literature, whereas much more is known about males. While some women only had information about their crimes available, others had a much larger amount of information regarding their early lives. This information was more prevalent for the murderers in later

years. Women with higher counts of murder victims, or motives that were not commonly associated with males, also tended to have less documented information from their adolescent years. This presented a problem obtaining historical information about their early development.

One factor that also limited the amount of information that was available on the early years of these women was the influence of the media on the coverage and reporting of these crimes. While the media coverage for some of the serial killers was extensive, others had very little information available, particularly regarding the newspapers. In some articles, only a very minuscule amount of information was reported. However, in the more infamous cases, such as Aileen Wuornos, the amount of information was abundant, starting from her early childhood years all the way through her death by lethal injection. This media coverage of this “new” sexually motivated female serial killer created a following of readers who could not get enough of Aileen. This yearning for more of her life resulted in more information reported about her crimes versus some of the woman who killed others in different circumstances, or in the earlier documented years.

Similar/Different Findings

Some of the findings were very interesting when compared to the common ideologies of female serial killers. This analysis also found the average age of when the female serial killer began her crimes to be approximately the same as previous literature. Schurman-Kauflin’s (2000) study reported the average age of 32.5 years, while this analysis found the average age to be 30.4 years. Other similarities showed the average killing careers of these women to be close to what was found in Vronsky’s (2007) text.

This analysis discovered that the average career length for women was 7.4 years in length, relatively close to Vronsky's 8-year-long killing career.

The discovered demographic factors were as expected: white females who had other siblings, middle-aged, employed, and were married with children of their own. Other similar discoveries were the prevalence of certain variables that each woman experienced. Most the women experienced childhood poverty and abuse. These same women suffered from poverty as an adult, and had also endured some sort of a traumatic event in their life before they committed their murders.

Similar discoveries in the crimes and previous research was also expected in a few areas. It was concluded that the victims were almost always a family member or spouse who was poisoned, and the victim was also killed in either their own home, or the home where the killer lived. Many the women were driven by financial gain, and an even higher percentage of the women found a way to gain this stability via life insurance policies taken out on the victim(s).

One of the differences found in this analysis were very few women utilized prostitution as a means for survival. Another difference that was somewhat unexpected was the small number of women who had a drug or alcohol dependency. Most of the gender-responsive pathways include some sort of drug or alcohol addiction, so seeing a somewhat small number of women who had this problem was interesting.

Another somewhat unexpected difference found in this analysis was the relatively small number of professional diagnoses regarding the mental health of these women. It was expected that there would be more diagnosed mental illnesses, but the data collected showed the opposite, with less than half having a legitimate Diagnostic and Statistical

Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) diagnosis. This manual is published by the American Psychiatric Association and covers all mental health disorders applicable to both children and adults (Vronsky, 2007).

Policy Implications

There were several policy implications that were identified during this analysis. The first implication suggesting that some sort of program should be implemented for young girls at risk to learn how to interact with one another during the early education years. If there was a way to help teach young girls how to interact with one another in the social setting, with total inclusion of all those participating, this could help young girls to learn how to form strong, healthy relationships throughout life. Getting these children involved in sports programs, artistic programs, or other types of social activities of their liking are a great way to help girls meet like-minded individuals. Meeting peers with common interests is a great way for girls to feel comfortable around others, which can give them the skills and confidence they need to better communicate with the world around them.

Having a gender-responsive system of corrections and deviance that addresses the implications of the female offender is crucial for a lowered recidivism rate. Male offenders and female offenders enter the criminal justice system in different manners, therefore, they traverse the system and exit out of it in different ways. When there are effective intervening practices in place that helps to target the female pathway, the rates of success will likely rise. Having gender-responsive programs that allow for the rebuilding of familial relationships, most importantly with their children, and to

reestablish the woman's role in the community will increase the personal worth and confidence in these women.

Another policy implication from this analysis would be interventions for women suffering from mental health issues. Incarceration facilities have programs available to the inmates that can help them to manage their problems, but those women who are released need ongoing care which can be difficult to find, and sometimes be another financial burden on the woman. Substance abuse programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, Living Free, and state-funded rehabilitation programs can all be an affordable, realistic approach to getting individuals out of the cycle of substance abuse. When mental illness and drug abuse are treated congruently, the rates of relapse and recidivism are lessened.

One of the programs that has arose from the gender-specific literature is Women's Risk/Needs Assessment (WRNA), developed by Patricia Van Voorhis, Ph.D. This assessment gives a full risk-and-needs evaluation to each female, including both gender-neutral and gender-responsive factors. Once assessed, each woman receives a plan of action that will help rehabilitate or change her behaviors. These evaluations are available in versions that are formatted for prison, probation, and pre-release individuals. (Van Voorhis, 2010). This assessment stresses the unique pathways that lead women to crime, and ways to intervene in these paradigms. This stressing of a gender-responsive plan of action can be attributed to Kathleen Daly, Joanne Belnap, and Merry Morash. All these women were feminist criminologists who found find differences in the gender populations, formatted a program that could be utilized, and then applied to women in a manner that could produce a positive change in the deviant female population (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003).

The application of this research to everyday use is extremely relevant, as it can help to identify certain behaviors and events that raise the probability of deviance and/or recidivism in the female population. The gender-responsive literature also gives a new perspective to the policies that assess risk and need for females. One of the most common misconceptions is that all the high-need, seriously troubled women were more likely to end up in prison, causing them to suffer from adjustment problems and recidivism over time (Van Voorhis, 2010).

However, the assumption was based on male statistics and then applied to the female population. While one example works for the male population, the same cannot be said about how it works for females. Since the pathways differ, this perspective pointed out that there needs to be more attention on the principle of what the offender needs to help them change during treatment rather than just learning from their punishments.

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APPENDIX A:

Codebook

Section A- The Killer and Her Crimes

Female Serial Killer's Name-

Age at first murder (two digits)-

Age at capture (two digits)-

Number of victims (two digits)-

Ethnicity

0- White/Caucasian

1- African American

Method of murder-

0- Poisoning

1- Smothering/Suffocation

2- Bludgeoning/Beating

3- Gunshot

4- Stabbing

5- Injection of lethal agents

6- Other

7- Multiple methods

Type of Killer Classification

0- Black Widows

1- Angels of Death

2- Sexual Predator

3- Profit

4- Revenge

5- Unexplained

Location of murders-

0- Home of victim or killer

1- Her workplace

2- Vehicle

3- Outside/Wooded Area

4- Both home of the victims and in her workplace (typically acting as medical personnel, like nurse to the elderly or sick)

Victims relationship to killer

0- Family Member or Spouse

1- Friend/Acquaintance

2- Stranger/Never met before the crime

3- Multiple classifications

Were her murder victims involved with life insurance policy(ies) where she was listed as the beneficiary?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Was there any motive of financial gain from the murder(s)

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

How did she dispose of the body(ies)?

- 0- Buried them
- 1- Burned them
- 2- Framed the crime to look like an accident/illness
- 3- Put body in water (lake, river, etc)
- 4- Made no attempt at disposal
- 5- Hid the body somewhere in the home

What was the punishment for her crimes (if she was captured)?

- 0- Death
- 1- Life without parole
- 2- Time with possibility of parole
- 3- Set amount of years
- 4- Never was sentenced
- 5- Insane/sentenced to mental institution

Section B- Before the murders

State where she grew up-

Were parents married?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was she an only child?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was she abused in some way (psychically, sexually, verbally)?

- 0- No

- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was her family poor, or have money difficulties?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Did she have any children of her own?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Did she ever have an abortion?

- 0- Unknown
- 1- Yes

Was there a traumatic experience in her childhood (death of a parent, molestation, etc)?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was she employed at the time of the murders?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was she ever married herself?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was she ever abused by a parent/grandparent?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was she ever abused as an adult by a spouse?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Was she ever homeless?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Did she ever participate in prostitution?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Did she have any sort of drug or alcohol abuse problems?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes
- 2- Unknown

Diagnosed for any mental illness?

- 0- Diagnosed
- 1- Undiagnosed

Section C—Article Details

Newspaper woman was found in-

- 0- Wall Street Journal
- 1- New York Times
- 2- USA Today
- 3- Los Angeles Times
- 4- New York Daily Times
- 5- Other local publication

Pub Date: [mm/dd/yyyy]

Type of format

- 0- News
- 1- Opinion/Editorial

Did the article mention any crimes she committed other than murder? (forgery, robbery, etc.)

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Did the article mention the names of her victims?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Did the article include the total number of her victims, or conclude that the number was unknown?

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Did the article mention any of the following pertaining to the female serial killer?

Substance abuse

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Domestic violence

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Mental health status or diagnosis

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Poverty or low-income

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

Homeless

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

History of abuse

- 0- No
- 1- Yes

APPENDIX B:

Females in Study, State, and Newspaper Publication

Females in Study, State, and Newspaper Publication

Female Serial Killer	Home State	Newspaper Publication
Allanson, Patricia Taylor	GA	The Washington Post
Archer-Gilligan, Amy	CT	New York Times
Barfield, Margie Velma	NC	Los Angeles Times
Buchanan, Denise	NV	The Washington Post
Buenoano, Judia Anna Lou	CO	Los Angeles Times
Doss, Nannie Hazel	AL	The Atlanta Constitution
Etheridge, Ellen	TX	New York Times
Falling, Christine	FL	The Sunday Sun
Farrer, Nancy	OH	The Washington Post
Fisher, Constance M.	ME	Bangor Daily News
Gbrurek, Tillie	IL	The Daily Mirror
Gibbs, Janie Lou	GA	The Atlanta Constitution
Gifford, Bertha	MO	St. Louis Post
Gillian, Amy	CT	New York Times
Gray, Josephine Victoria	MD	The Sun; Baltimore, MD
Gunness, Belle	IL	Gainesville Sun
Hahn, Anna Marie	OH	The Washington Post
Hendricks, Susan Diane	SC	The Greenville News
Hilley, Audrey Marie	AL	Orlando Sentinel
Hoyt, Waneta E.	NY	Los Angeles Times
Jacks, Banita	DC	Washington Informer
Jackson, Vickie Dawn	TX	Beaumont Enterprise
Johnson, Martha Ann	GA	The Atlanta Constitution
Jones, Genee	TX	USA Today
Kalina, Michele	PA	McClatchy – Tribune Business News
LaBarre, Sheila K.	NH	Boston Globe
Lyles, Anjette	GA	The Atlanta Constitution
Lumbrera, Diana	TX	Los Angeles Times
Martin, Rhonda Bell	AL	The Washington Times Herald
Matajke, Dorothy Jean	AR	Orlando Sentinel
McCarthy, Kimberly	TX	Fort Worth Star
Lagayle	NC	Greensboro News Record
Moore, Blanche Taylor	PA	New York Times
Noe, Marie	NY	Press & Sun-Bulletin
Odell, Dianne	TX	Dallas Morning News
Oliver, Emma	TX	Daily News
Peete, Louise	CA	Los Angeles Times
Puente, Dorothea	IL	New York Times
Quinn, Jane	GA	Daily News
Rachals, Terri	MD	New York Times

Robaczynski, Mary Rose	MA	The Daily Sentinel
Saenz, Kimberly Clark	IL	Chicago Tribune
Savage, Gail	NY	New York Times
Sherman, Lydia	NE	The Bismark Tribune
Sorenson, Della	PA	The Grand Rapids Press
Spencer, Diane Louise	IL	St. Petersburg Times
Terrell, Bobbie Sue	MD	The Sun; Baltimore, MD
Thompson, Coleen M.	NY	Times Union
Tinning, Marybeth	MA	McClatchy – Tribune Business News
Toppan, Jane	MO	Sheboygan Press
Trueblood, Lydia	AR	New York Times
Tuggle, Debra Sue	IL	New York Times
Vermilyea, Lousie	AL	Montgomery Advertiser
Ward, Natashay	PA	St. Paul Daily Globe
Whiteling, Sarah Jane	PA	New York Late Edition
Williamson, Stella	OH	New York Daily Times
Wise, Martha Hasel	MD	The Sun; Baltimore, MD
Woods, Martha	MI	Orlando Sentinel
Wuornos, Carol Aileen		

APPENDIX C:
Institutional Review Board Exemption Form

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

Graduate Student Research Response Form

Project Title: Why do women become serial killers?

Name: Ms. Morgan Cassady

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Bobbie Ticknor

Department: Criminal Justice

Please indicate the academic purpose of the proposed research:

E-mail: mcassady@valdosta.edu

Doctoral Dissertation

Master's Thesis

Other:

Telephone: (229) 456-0923

You answered "NO" to all of the questions on the IRB Oversight Screening Form; therefore, your research *is not* subject to IRB oversight.

1. YES NO Will you utilize *existing identifiable private* information about living individuals? "Existing" information is data that were previously collected for some other purpose, either by the researcher or, more commonly, by another party. "Identifiable" means that the identities of the individuals can be ascertained by the researcher by name, code number, pattern of answers, or in some other way, regardless of whether or not the researcher needs to know the identities of the individuals for the proposed research project. "Private" information includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place or information provided for specific purposes that the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (e.g., a medical record or student record).

Note: If you are using data that: (1) are publicly available; (2) were collected from individuals anonymously (i.e., no identifying information was included when the data were first collected); (3) will be de-identified before being given to the researcher, (i.e., the owner of the data will strip identifying information so that the researcher cannot ascertain the identities of individuals); or (4) do not include any private information about the individuals, regardless of whether or not the identities of the individuals can be ascertained, your response to Question 1 should be NO.

2. YES NO Will you *interact* with individuals to obtain data? "Interaction" includes communication or interpersonal contact between the researcher and the research participant, such as testing, surveying, interviewing, or conducting a focus group. It does not include observation of public behavior when the researcher does not participate in the activities being observed.

3. YES NO Will you *intervene* with individuals to obtain data? "Intervention" includes manipulation of the individual or his/her environment for research purposes, as well as using physical procedures (e.g., measuring body composition, using a
-

Elizabeth W. Olphie

03/13/2017

Thank you for submitting an IRB

application.

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator

Date

Please direct questions to