

For my project, I looked into how abandonment during childhood can play a role in growing up to be a serial killer. There are many factors that go into the psychology behind it but, this was one that stuck out to me the most. I thought I could portray that abandonment while Atlanta in some sort feels empty. Using the space as a metaphor for the emptiness they felt as children, I made a film to show abandonment and neglect can lead to violent behavior. Throughout the film, you will see a girl (played by me) walking around town obviously questioning where everyone is and is unable to find that clarity. By the end, it is noticeable she gets violent and uneasy. I picked this topic because more and more children are being abandoned every year and that number keeps going up. At such a young age, you need that security to feel wanted and loved. If someone goes about living alone, it may cause anger and ferocity as an adult. Now, this is only one factor of the progressing stages of being a serial killer, but it is one that can be solved.

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Abandoned and Curious

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For centuries, psychologists have questioned the ethics and morals of a human being's passion to kill. Serial killing can be defined as "one of a series of murders, typically having similar characteristics, that are committed by the same person." Serial killing differs greatly from self defense, war, or even causal murder. This is because of psychological practices that date as far back as the Stone Age (Vronsky 32). I wanted to investigate: what causes someone to become a serial killer? And, what is the relationship between the making of a serial killer and their personal history with abuse and abandonment?

The term "serial killer" did not become relevant until around 1978 and 1980 when it started popping up in newspapers and the media (Vronsky 12). It gave a definition for those who committed killings in a pattern or in a particular way with every victim. The murders would do a series of killings with a similar routine. That is how investigators were able to spot patterns and get ahead of the killer. A big question amongst many is how does this routine begin? What is giving them the satisfaction to keep going? "Psychology alone does not explain the existence of serial killers. Many premodern serial-killing cases were circumstantial 'crimes of necessity...' Motive was survival or material gain from someone or something" (Vronsky 73). In the early eras, the focus was much more on survival. But it has shifted more towards "personal gain, power, and personal satisfaction" (Vronsky 75). Now, in the US, there are multiple states that have produced the most serial killers including Alaska, Florida, Nevada and California (crimecapsule.com). They come from all over but one commonality in many serial killers is that they come from backgrounds of abandonment/abuse.

For many serial killers, the act of killing fills a hole from misgivings in their childhood. Abandonment, lack of social cues, mental illness, or simply feelings on loneliness can lead someone to becoming a serial killer (Vronsky 33). Vronsky states in his book, 'Sons of Cain' that "...they find it in themselves as an array of deeply embedded primitive instincts which humans are all endowed with at birth but are supposed to be taught in childhood by healthy familial upbringing and positive societal norms to suppress" (Vronsky 44). Serial killers are "unmade" when we were children by those healthy practices by good parenting and stable environments and "sheer luck" of not getting exposed to trauma. This explains that grievances in childhood can be a large factor in the personal motivation of a serial killer.

One example is Jeffery Dahmer who grew up with parents that were constantly fighting. His parents left him as a teenager where he became an early alcoholic. His social awkwardness left him with little to no friends. He struggled as a teen because he refused to accept that he was a gay man. His drinking ended up getting him kicked out of the army. Abandoned by life itself, he wanted to feel loved. This gave him motive to start getting that satisfaction off the drunk men at gay night clubs (Dahmer Inside). Filling the void with clueless victims, his addictive behavior turned violent and horrific.

Another example of abandonment leading to a violent killer was Ed Kemper or the "Co-Ed Killer." Kemper grew up with an alcoholic mother whom he despised because of the constant verbal and physical abuse. He was forced to live in the basement after she made claims

that he would hurt his sisters one day (Biography.com). Because he wasn't taught basic morals and the difference between good and bad, he began to fantasize about killing his mother. He was constantly moving around to live with different family members and began to grow tired of the routine. He eventually killed his grandparents "to see what it felt like." The continuous blame and abuse led him to becoming a serial killer. He wanted to treat his victims the same as what he would do to his mother. Later on, he ended up killing his mother after the trauma she had put him through as a child.

While most serial killers are men, women with histories of abandonment have also been serial killers. There are other factors that could play a role in childhood such as socioeconomic status, gender roles, or mental health as a whole. Aileen Wuornos is the most well known serial killer because of her deeply troubling childhood. Her father killed himself in jail after being charged with child molestation and her mother abandoned her at the age of four. In her early teens, she turned to prostitution after dropping out of school. She started posing as a hitchhiker and would shoot her victims point blank. She would say it was self defense for the men assaulting her yet, the pattern was evident. Very easily her grudge against men could be a result of the trauma of being a young, abandoned prostitute and she turned to aggression to get profit and revenge (Britannica).

There are many aspects of becoming a serial killer. This connection between abandonment and serial killer highlights only one factor of their psychology but research has shown it is a strong part of their behavior. It is impossible to rationalize this act of fully understanding the psychology of a serial killer.

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