

From Animal Cruelty to Serial Murder: Applying the Graduation Hypothesis

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Abstract: *Although serial murder has been recorded for centuries, limited academic attention has been given to this important topic. Scholars have attempted to examine the causality and motivations behind the rare phenomenon of serial murder. However, scant research exists which delves into the childhood characteristics of serial murderers. Using social learning theory, some of these studies present supporting evidence for a link between childhood animal cruelty and adult aggression toward humans. Based on five case studies of serial murderers, we contribute to the existing literature by exploring the possible link between childhood cruelty toward animals and serial murder with the application of the graduation hypothesis.*

Keywords: *animal cruelty; serial murder; social learning theory; graduation hypothesis; violence*

The phenomenon of serial murder in the United States has drawn much attention during the past 20 years from academicians, criminal investigators, and the media. However, serial murder is by no means a new criminal sensation. Documented cases in the United States date back to the 1800s. During the 1960s, a new sense of urgency began to emerge across the country as cases of serial murder became publicized. The idea of one individual murdering numerous people sent shock waves throughout the country. The first reaction of the general public and the media was that these murderers must be crazy (Dietz, 1986; Lunde, 1976). This mad killer ideology was embraced by the media and put into print as well as played out in television and films. The age of publicized serial murder had begun in the United States.

Although some feel that serial murder is a fascinating occurrence that cannot be universally explained, others seek to find answers to why someone kills numerous people with no apparent motive. However, extensive efforts have been made in developing typologies based on the motives for serial homicide. These motivations include sexual gratification, thrill seeking, visual or auditory hallucinations, power and/or control, the extermination of a group, and the enrichment of life (Fox & Levin, 1999; R. Holmes, 1983; R. Holmes & DeBurger, 1988; Schreiber, 1984).

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Although attention has been paid to the motivations of serial murderers, little has been given to the contributing factors that influence their aggression. In 1961, MacDonald developed a triad of childhood characteristics that could possibly indicate future aggression and even homicidal behavior in individuals. These indicators included persistent bed-wetting past the age of 5, obsession with fire, and cruelty to animals. Although the MacDonald triad has been discussed and debated for decades, limited research has been conducted on its usefulness in explaining aggressive behavior (Geddes, 1977; Hellman & Blackman, 1966; Wax & Haddox, 1974).

Whereas the triad as a whole has not been adequately tested, individual characteristics have received some academic attention. For example, studies have been completed linking childhood animal cruelty to aggressive behavior in adulthood (Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Mead, 1964; Merz-Perez, Heide, & Silverman, 2001; Rigdon & Tapia, 1977; Tapia, 1971; Tingle, Bernard, Robbins, Newman, & Hutchinson, 1986). In 1988, an FBI study revealed that animal cruelty was a possible early warning sign of serial murder (Ressler, Burgess, & Douglas, 1988). However, the suggested connection of animal cruelty to serial murder has been underexamined in research. With respect to the previous research and its focus on animal cruelty and aggression, the purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the possible link between childhood animal cruelty and serial murder by using social learning theory, specifically applying the graduation hypothesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mead (1964) was one of the first researchers to indicate that childhood cruelty to animals may indicate the formation of a spontaneous, assaultive character disorder. She suggested that animal cruelty “could prove a diagnostic sign, and that such children, diagnosed early, could be helped instead of being allowed to embark on a long career of episodic violence and murder” (p. 22). The impact of Mead’s recommendation was evident more than 20 years later when the American Psychiatric Association took note.

In 1987, animal cruelty was added to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—III R (DSM-III R)* as a symptom of conduct disorders and was later kept in the 1994 *DSM-IV* (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, 1994). According to the *DSM-III R* and the *DSM-IV*’s description of conduct disorders, physical violence and harm to humans and animals is common.

The emergence of animal cruelty in the realm of psychological conduct disorders gives some validity to what numerous researchers have been attempting to prove for a number of years. Tapia (1971) was the first to systematically study children who abused animals. The purpose of the study was to gain a greater understanding of those who abused animals. Although Tapia’s sample of 18 animal-abusing children (all boys) was small, the study assisted in the development of a profile of those who were cruel to animals. Tapia and a follow-up study conducted

by Rigdon and Tapia (1977) found that the 18 boys had numerous other antisocial behaviors in conjunction with animal cruelty. These behaviors included temper control problems, bullying, destructive tendencies, and lying. Tapia's and Rigdon and Tapia's initial research laid the foundation for future research in the field.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study on the link between cruelty to animals and later aggression was completed by Kellert and Felthous in 1985. They interviewed 152 criminals and noncriminals and found that aggressive criminals were more likely to be cruel to animals in childhood compared with nonaggressive criminals and noncriminals. Throughout the entire study, 373 acts of violence toward animals were reported by the 152 participants. Of the aggressive criminals, 25% reported at least five cases of childhood animal cruelty compared with less than 6% of the remaining participants.

Tingle et al. (1986) completed a more specific study on childhood animal abuse. The study examined the histories of 21 convicted rapists and 43 convicted child molesters to detect instances of animal cruelty. The results revealed that higher levels of behavioral aggression were demonstrated in those that engaged in animal cruelty in childhood. The authors found that 30% of convicted child molesters and 48% of convicted rapists had perpetrated acts of animal cruelty during childhood.

In the most recent study of animal cruelty and its possible link to subsequent violence toward humans, Merz-Perez et al. (2001) interviewed 45 violent and 45 nonviolent offenders incarcerated in a Florida maximum-security prison. They found that violent offenders were significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed acts of animal cruelty as children, especially against pet animals. Furthermore, they discovered that the way in which violent offenders abused animals as children resembled the methods they then used to commit crimes against their human victims. However, this was not the case for nonviolent offenders who committed childhood acts of cruelty to animals.

In accordance with the previous research, one can suggest that being cruel to animals can possibly lead to being cruel to humans. However, is cruelty to animals a significant predictor of future serial murderers? Although a possible link has been suggested, very little academic attention has focused on this connection.

Since the late 1970s, the FBI has considered animal cruelty to be a possible indicator of future serial murder. The FBI documented the connection between cruelty to animals and serial murder following a study of 35 imprisoned serial murderers. The convicted murderers were asked questions regarding their childhood cruelty toward animals. More than half of the serial murderers admitted to hurting or torturing animals as children or adolescents (Humane Society of the United States, 2001).

More than a decade later, Ressler et al. (1988) completed another study examining the link between animal cruelty and serial murder. They completed a study on various behavioral characteristics of 36 sexual murderers, with all but 7 being serial murderers. The study encompassed the largest number of serial murderers researched to date. The focus of the study was to provide detailed qualitative char-

acteristics as well as to test specific quantitative variables of the men in the sample. Of the 36 men, 28 were tested for certain childhood characteristics in conjunction with the available data. The authors discovered that a substantial number of the 28 convicted serial murderers in the study had engaged in animal cruelty. Of the offenders, 36% had perpetrated animal cruelty as children, 46% were cruel to animals as adolescents, and 36% continued their abusive nature toward animals as adults.

It seems to be a common assumption among law enforcement officials that animal cruelty often leads to violence against humans. The early studies by the FBI support this assumption. Nonetheless, very few studies have examined this possible link. Fortunately, theoretical support exists for the link between animal cruelty and later aggression toward humans.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Few theorists have explained murder with the use of social learning theory. However, Dollard and Miller's (1950) theory of social learning is an exception. According to this perspective, every individual is socialized to seek affection and approval from those they love. When that approval is met, both parties feel satisfied with the outcome. However, if a successful resolution is not made by the acting parties, frustration is produced for those seeking approval and satisfaction. The frustrated individuals transfer anger to people who cannot retaliate. In the case of serial murderers, the individuals who first cause the frustration hold a certain degree of control that inhibits them from retaliating against them (Hale, 1993). Therefore, the frustrated individuals vent their anger on weaker creatures.

Amsel's (1958) frustration theory helps to adequately understand the scope of the frustration experienced by these potential killers. Under the frustration theory, individuals who suffer a form of humiliation later associate certain situations with the humiliation. The original humiliation generates what is called a frustration response. In turn, the situations associated with the humiliation also produce anticipatory frustration responses. Those responses motivate individuals to avoid potentially humiliating situations, even to the point of violence. The individuals act prematurely in anticipation of a perceived humiliating situation.

An important aspect of the frustration and humiliation response theories is the manner in which the aggressors restore their dignity. As Dollard and Miller (1950) pointed out, many humiliated individuals take out their frustration on weaker creatures, including animals. This display of aggression is a method of venting and restoring confidence within themselves. Although the source of the humiliation may still be present in the individuals' lives, the aggressive behavior toward animals continues, in turn increasing the likelihood of graduating to humans to fulfill their need for retribution.

The graduation hypothesis, although still a hypothesis, ultimately affects the way people view animal cruelty. Under the graduation hypothesis, animal abusers

later progress, or graduate, to more serious forms of violence against humans (Arluke & Levin, 1999). According to Ascione and Lockwood (2001), the graduation (escalation) hypothesis proposes “that the presence of cruelty to animals at one developmental period predicts interpersonal violence at a later developmental period” (p. 40).

It has been proposed that many serial murderers begin killing vulnerable animals as a method of responding to humiliation and to show their power and domination. These killers may eventually graduate to humans when animals no longer meet their needs. According to Arluke and Lockwood (1997) and the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (NAHEE) (2001), cruelty to animals allows children either to become desensitized to heartless violence or to learn to enjoy the feelings of administering pain and suffering. This may ultimately fuel their desire to graduate to human violence.

METHODOLOGY

Due to the nature of serial murder research, a case study analysis will be used for this study. According to Yin (1994), “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). When studying serial murder, it is extremely difficult to do quantitative research. Quantitative research, including surveys and face-to-face interviews with questionnaires, requires first-hand interaction between the sample and the researcher. Many of the serial murderers in question are deceased and therefore unavailable for questioning. Case studies enable researchers to study participants through literature and therefore identify common themes or characteristics (Yin, 1994).

When conducting research through case studies, there are five essential components. The first component is the study’s questions. These questions address the “how” and “why” of the subject matter. According to Yin (1994), the first step of the study should be clearly stating the nature of the questions. The second component is stating propositions, if applicable. Through propositions, researchers can direct the appropriate attention to certain areas of the study. The third component is the unit of analysis. To avoid misconceptions and mistakes in analyzing the data, the unit of analysis should be clearly defined. It is essential to specify if a case is measured on an individual level or on a group level. The fourth component is linking the data to the established propositions. Researchers can detect themes or patterns between cases that support the proposition. The fifth and final component to a case study is the criteria for interpreting a study’s findings. Yin pointed out that there are no set guidelines for interpreting data, making this aspect of case studies the most unpredictable because interpretations are subjective.

For the purpose of this study, five serial murderers were identified as having engaged in childhood animal cruelty. The cases selected were largely chosen

because of the amount of information available on the serial murderers in question. However, this is by no means an exhaustive list of serial killers who have committed childhood animal cruelty. In fact, of the 354 cases of serial murder that we examined, 75 were known to have committed cruelty toward animals. Thus, more than 21% of serial killers were identified as engaging in animal cruelty.

There are numerous explanations offered in the serial murder literature that attempt to explain the hows and whys of victimization. The objective of this study is to explore the link between animal cruelty in childhood and serial murder under the theoretical backbone of the graduation hypothesis. To adequately explore the dynamics of the graduation hypothesis, a detailed descriptive framework for compiling the case studies must be developed. One method of forming an appropriate framework is through repeated observations. It is important to reiterate that the purpose of this study is exploratory in nature and not intended to explain the behavior in question.

RESULTS

CASE STUDY 1

Carroll Edward Cole was born in Sioux City, Iowa, on May 9, 1938. Carroll was the third of five children born to LaVerne and Vesta Cole. A life-altering event in young Carroll's life occurred in 1943 when his father was called to service in World War II. As soon as LaVerne had left for overseas, Vesta put a dress on 5-year-old Carroll and took him to a strange apartment where young Carroll observed his mother having sexual relations with another man (Newton, 1994). This experience confused Carroll, leaving him fearful of his mother.

Following Carroll's first experience with his mother and her lover, Vesta ordered Carroll to keep the events secret. She threatened to beat Carroll if he told anyone what he had witnessed. Although Carroll never told his father or anyone else of his mother's secret relationship, Vesta became very cruel toward him. She would punish him for no apparent reason, often humiliating him in front of others. She would allow her secret friends to physically punish him. A particular "special" punishment that Vesta put her son through had a profound effect on him. She forced Carroll to dress up like a girl and serve her and her friends coffee. This act embarrassed and humiliated the young boy and forced him into a state of seclusion. Devastated and angered by his mother's actions, Carroll found peace alone under the family house in a small, dark crawl space. It was there he began to develop his extreme hatred for not only his mother but also women in general (Newton, 1994).

Things did not get any better for Carroll following his father's return from the service. The secret that Carroll and his mother kept caused him to live in fear of her. Carroll also began to develop a lack of respect for his father for not being a

“man.” Carroll viewed his father as weak for not seeing what his mother was doing (Newton, 1994).

Carroll’s first experience with death came at age 8. While playing with some playmates, a young girl sat on him and smothered him with her genitals. Frightened, Carroll was relieved to hear the voice of his mother approaching. However, although she removed the girl from on top of Carroll, she proceeded to beat the young boy for no reason. Vesta repeatedly struck her son with open hands that knocked him off his feet, only to be stopped by the voices of her sister and brother-in-law in the distance. Carroll then ran to his secret hiding place beneath the house. There, he was completely safe and alone other than for the family’s puppy that had followed him (Newton, 1994).

While under the house, Carroll thought about his experience and became extremely angry. This anger was released through intense sobbing. While sobbing, he held the little puppy in his grasp and relived the situation with his mother. As the frustration built, he began to strangle the puppy until it was eventually dead. At first, Carroll was surprised and even sad to a point that he had killed the animal. However, the emotions that Carroll felt following the death of the puppy were much more powerful than remorse. Carroll felt as if he had strangled his mother and all the others who had harassed him (Newton, 1994).

Later the same day, Carroll went out with some friends to the harbor to swim. On the way, one of the boys in the group began to harass Carroll about his “sissy” name. Much to his playmates surprise, Carroll responded for the first time with physical retaliation. He landed a series of punches that knocked the boy down. A few minutes later, while away from the other boys, Carroll jumped on top of the boy and held him under the water until he was dead, leaving the body in the bottom of the harbor (Newton, 1994).

It is unknown when Carroll killed his first human victim as an adult; even he is not certain. Carroll’s first victims were married women that he picked up at bars. Carroll chose these women in response to his mother’s actions. He would lure them to a secluded location where he would strangle them to death, just as he did the animals. Sometimes Carroll would have sex with the women prior to murdering them, whereas other times he would wait to have sex with their bodies after killing them (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Newton, 1994).

Carroll was eventually charged with a total of 16 murders across numerous states. It is important to note that the number of murders was calculated based on the number of bodies discovered. The true number of Carroll’s victims will perhaps never be known. On December 6, 1985, Carroll Edward Cole was executed by lethal injection in Carson City, Nevada (Newton, 1994).

CASE STUDY 2

Jeffery Lionel Dahmer was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on May 6, 1960. He was the first of two sons born to Lionel and Joyce Dahmer. In 1966, Lionel

Dahmer accepted a job in Bath, Ohio, and uprooted his family for the second time in a few years. The repeated moves may have led to Jeffery's inability to make or want to make friends. Jeffery moved for the final time in 1968, when his father purchased a house with substantial land in a secluded forested area of Bath. This move would prove to be a crucial event in the 8-year-old's life (Norris, 1992a).

While living in relative isolation from other children his age, Jeffery began to engage in other forms of entertainment. At the age of 10, he began to experiment with the bodies of dead animals. At first, Jeffery would only ride his bike around the neighborhood with a plastic bag, collect road kill and other dead animals, and dissect them. However, as he got older and more intrigued by these creatures, he began to catch and kill animals for examination. Jeffery would remove the skin of the animals, soak their bones in acid, and mount their heads on stakes behind his house. As it was discovered later, this gruesome behavior would be replicated with humans in his small apartment in Milwaukee (Baumann, 1991; Coston & Protz, 1998; Davis, 1991; Egger, 1998; Ellroy, 1991; Fox & Levin, 1994; Hickey, 1997; S. Holmes & Holmes, 2002; Martingale, 1993; Newton, 1990; Norris, 1992a; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

As Jeffery got older, the nature of life in his immediate family drastically changed. His mother and father began to argue progressively more, making an already uncomfortable home even worse for young Jeffery. As a method of coping with the friction within his family, Jeffery turned to alcohol. By 14, Jeffery had developed an alcoholic dependency. Coupling the use of alcohol with his fascination for dead animals, Jeffery progressed to the next logical step in his macabre hobby. He turned his attention to humans (Norris, 1992a; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

In June 1978, 2 weeks after his high school graduation, Jeffery picked up a hitchhiker in the vicinity of his home. After having a few drinks, Jeffery hit the man in the head with a barbell and then strangled him to death when he attempted to leave. Following the murder, Jeffery dismantled the body as he had done dozens of times before with animals. When his experimentation was complete, he disposed of the body (Norris, 1992a; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

In the fall of 1978, Jeffery entered Ohio State University but did not return for the second half of his freshman year. The following month, he enlisted in the Army in an attempt to rejoin society. However, he continued to abuse alcohol. After serving 3 years, he was discharged from the army for his alcohol addiction. Following his exit from the armed forces, Jeffery moved around before settling in Wisconsin to live with his paternal grandmother (Norris, 1992a).

In 1987, he killed the first of his 16 victims during a 4-year murder rampage. This act of murder made Jeffery feel good and motivated him to kill again. The majority of the murders involved extreme mutilation of the bodies, just as he had done with the animals. He would rape the victims either prior to or after killing them. Jeffery would also remove the skin and meat from the bodies, clean the bones with acid, and eat the meat. Furthermore, he would deflesh his victims in a large boiler, thus disposing of the remains that he did not want (Palermo, 1994). It

was evident he had begun to live out his early fantasies of experimentation with animals (Davis, 1991; Norris, 1992a; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

On July 22, 1991, Jeffery's killing cycle ended when police entered his apartment and arrested him. On February 17, 1992, Jeffery Lionel Dahmer was found guilty of 15 counts of first-degree murder. A few months later, Jeffery received another life sentence in Ohio when he was charged with the murder of his first victim. Jeffery Dahmer remained in prison until he was killed by another inmate on November 28, 1994 (Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

CASE STUDY 3

Edmund Emil Kemper III was born in Santa Cruz, California, in 1948. He was the unfortunate product of a broken and abusive home. At the age of 9, Edmund's parents divorced, leaving him to live with his mother (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Martingale, 1993). She was very domineering toward Edmund. If he did not live up to her expectations, she would punish him in unusual ways. She would lock him in the basement for long periods of time as a method of discipline (Newton, 1990). These acts left Edmund with a sense of personal inadequacy and a timid and resentful nature toward others. As Edmund grew older, he developed a deep-seated hatred toward his mother. In fact, Edmund began to fantasize about killing her.

Edmund began to display signs of demented fantasies. For example, Edmund took the family's cat and buried it up to its neck; he then cut off its head to return it to his bedroom as a trophy (Coston & Protz, 1998; Ellroy, 1991; Fox & Levin, 1994; Hickey, 1997; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Levin & Fox, 1985; Lockwood & Hodge, 1986; Martingale, 1993; Newton, 1990; Schechter & Everitt, 1996). Shortly after Edmund's mother discovered the cat was gone, she got another one. Giving into his deranged urges, Edmund proceeded to hack the new pet into pieces with his machete. After the cat was in several pieces, he returned the bloody appendages to his bedroom closet; they were later found by his mother. The discovery of the dead cat in Edmund's closet along with his pretending to be asphyxiated in the gas chamber led his mother to brand him a "weirdo" (Levin & Fox, 1985; Newton, 1990; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

At age 13, Edmund went to live with his paternal grandparents on a ranch in rural California. Concerned that Edmund's sadistic behavior with the family cats was a sign of his true aggression, his mother warned her ex-husband that his parents could be in danger. Edmund's life with his grandparents was much like his experience as a young child in his home. He would get into frequent arguments and altercations with his grandparents, especially his grandmother. Following an argument in 1963, Edmund shot his grandmother in the back of the head, took a knife from the kitchen, and mutilated her body. When his grandfather returned home, Edmund met him on the porch with the same gun and shot him to death, leaving the body in the yard. After killing his grandparents, Edmund called his mother to inform her of his actions and then called the sheriff to confess. The 15-

year-old told police that he simply wondered what it would feel like to kill his grandparents (Lane & Gregg, 1992; Levin & Fox, 1985; Newton, 1990; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

Edmund would spend the next few years in a mental institution being counseled for his actions and desires. At the age of 21, he was released and declared "cured." Following his release, Edmund went back to live with his mother. The next 2 years of his life would consist of frequent and violent arguments with his mother. As a result, he became more hostile and violent toward others and began to harbor murderous fantasies once again (Levin & Fox, 1985; Newton, 1990).

On May 7, 1972, 23-year-old Edmund could not control his murderous urges. On that day, Edmund picked up two female college students hitchhiking to Fresno State University. Edmund drove them to an isolated canyon, stabbed them to death with his large hunting knife he named "The General," returned to his room with the bodies where he took pictures of his trophies, decapitated and dissected the bodies, and proceeded to have sex with various organs. During the following year, Edmund would kill six more female victims, with each murder growing more brutal and demented (Levin & Fox, 1985; Newton, 1990; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

On Easter Sunday, 1973, Edmund fulfilled his longtime murderous desire. As he relived the years of torment at the hands of his mother, he finally got the courage to kill her. Edmund crushed his mother's skull with a mallet while she slept. After she died, he mutilated her body and decapitated her head. He then proceeded to masturbate in his mother's mouth. Following his mother's death, Edmund invited her best friend over and subsequently killed her (Levin & Fox, 1985; Newton, 1990; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

Edmund was charged with eight counts of murder. At the end of his trial in April 1973, he was found guilty on all charges. He was sentenced to life in prison, with the possibility of parole. Edmund filed for parole in 1980 and was denied (Newton, 1990). To this day, Edmund Kemper remains in a California prison (Lane & Gregg, 1992).

CASE STUDY 4

Henry Lee Lucas was born in Blacksburg, Virginia, on August 23, 1936. He was the youngest of nine children born into a dysfunctional family. Viola, Henry's mother, was an extremely abusive mother and wife, often physically punishing both her husband and young Henry. However, the abuse did not stop at physical beatings. She would often force them to watch her have sex with other men. The death of his father a few years later further fueled the hatred of women his mother had ignited (Cox, 1991; Ellroy, 1991; Fox & Levin, 1994; Newton, 1990; Norris, 1988, 1991, 1992b).

With his father out of the picture, Henry began to take the full brunt of Viola's abuse. It was a well-known fact that Viola did not like Henry, and she took every available opportunity to humiliate him. Besides the extreme physical beatings he

received, she also took every step possible to embarrass the young child. In 1943, when Henry started school, she forced him to go to school in a dress and no shoes. When a sympathetic teacher gave Henry some shoes, his mother beat him for accepting the gift (Cox, 1991; Ellroy, 1991; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Newton, 1990; Norris, 1988, 1991, 1992b).

When Henry was 10 years old, his life took a drastic change. He was introduced to bestiality. Bernie, Viola's live-in lover, taught little Henry how to have sex with animals. One day while out in the mountains, Bernie stabbed a calf in the neck and then had sex with the dying animal. When he was done, he gave Henry the opportunity to do the same. Henry enjoyed the feeling (Cox, 1991; Newton, 1990; Norris, 1991, 1992b).

At age 13, Bernie arranged for Henry to have his first sexual experience with a woman. The 20-year-old woman allowed Henry to have sex with her until he was ready to orgasm. Just prior to ejaculation, she forced him to stop and then laughed about it with Bernie. This experience greatly upset Henry, leading to his further distrust of women (Cox, 1991). Thereafter, Henry focused his sexual attention toward animals. He found that killing animals for sex was relatively easy. Although Henry had learned this behavior with calves, he chose to kill cats and dogs for convenience (Egger, 1998; S. Holmes & Holmes, 2002; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Newton, 1990; Norris, 1988, 1992b; Schechter & Everitt, 1996).

Although Henry originally killed animals solely for sex, he began to enjoy the act of killing just as much as the sexual experience. This fascination would change his life forever. Henry began to catch small animals and skin them alive for fun. What had begun as a means for sexual gratification had graduated to motiveless murder. With each torturous murder, Henry became more obsessed with death. At age 15, Henry decided to approach a 17-year-old girl for sex. When she refused his advancement, Henry strangled her and buried her body in the woods. This act was the first in a series of murders, including his mother's, that would span more than three decades (Cox, 1991; Newton, 1990; Norris, 1988).

On May 9, 1983, Henry was arrested for gun possession. He proceeded to confess and outline dozens of murders he had committed alone as well as with Otis Toole. Henry admitted to viciously stabbing and mutilating women all over the country. Lucas' frequent mobility made it very difficult for law enforcement officials to not only catch him but also keep track of all his murders. Although the true number of victims is not quite known, law enforcement officials claim to have evidence that proves Henry Lee Lucas to be the murderer of at least 69 victims (Cox, 1991; Ellroy, 1991; Lane & Gregg, 1992; Newton, 1990).

Henry received six life sentence terms, two 75-year sentences, and a 60-year sentence in various states as well as the death sentence in Texas. However, due to his conflicting stories of murder, the death sentence date was delayed for years. It was finally commuted to life in prison, and Henry Lee Lucas now resides in a Texas prison where he will live for the remainder of his life (Ellroy, 1991; Norris, 1988).

CASE STUDY 5

Arthur Shawcross was born in 1945 in Maine. His early childhood was engulfed in parental conflict and physical abuse. The constant arguments with and torment of Arthur by his parents caused him to feel a sense of familial rejection. His mother's actions caused him to feel as if she hated him, which in turn frustrated him as a small child and throughout adolescence (Fox & Levin, 1994). Outside his home, Arthur claimed to have been sexually molested by various girls in the neighborhood (Norris, 1992b).

As Arthur got older, he had fantasies about different sexual episodes. Although the thought of oral sex with women flooded his mind, Arthur would engage in his first homosexual experience at 11. After being helped out of a swamp by another boy, the two removed their clothes to swim and eventually touched each other's genitals and had oral sex. Arthur's need for orgasms had begun to control him. After the initial session of touching and oral sex, the two periodically met for further relations. During one of these visits, the boys discovered that sheep had organs similar to a woman. The two took turns having sex with the animal, surprised at how good it felt (Norris, 1992b).

Arthur's early childhood experiences led him to feel that the only way to have sex was by violating someone else's dignity. Because he was still a relatively small child, he turned to farm animals to dominate and achieve sexual gratification. In the act of sexually violating animals, Arthur began to enjoy torturing them in other ways too. Simply having sex with the animals was not enough; he had to beat them, even to the point of death (Norris, 1992b).

In 1967, Arthur was drafted to fight in Vietnam, which would be another turning point in his life. While in Vietnam, many things changed in Arthur's life. As a soldier in a foreign conflict, he possessed powers he had never had. Unfortunately, Arthur quickly began to abuse these privileges and developed a reputation for being cruel and violent to Vietnamese peasants. During one event in particular, Shawcross tortured and killed two Viet Cong women for supposedly hiding ammunition (Norris, 1992b).

After returning from Vietnam, Arthur began his 1-year-and-nine-month killing rampage around New York. As he had done previously with animals, he sexually assaulted victims and then mutilated their bodies. Arthur's killing spree came to an end on January 3, 1990, after a police helicopter followed him back to the scene of a crime. He was arrested and charged with 11 murders. Arthur Shawcross currently resides in a New York prison where he was sentenced to 250 years without the possibility of parole (Norris, 1992b).

DISCUSSION

In the case of numerous serial murderers, episodes of prolonged humiliation have been shown to exist during their childhood (Hale, 1993; Hickey, 1997). As

discussed earlier, this humiliation can eventually transform into frustration for the individuals. With many serial murderers, the source of humiliation and frustration is from one or both of their parents (Ellis & Gullo, 1971; Hale, 1993; Hazelwood & Douglas, 1980; Lunde, 1976; Ressler et al., 1988; Willie, 1975). Therefore, it is very difficult for them to gain retribution for the humiliation. After a substantial amount of humiliation and frustration, the children seek other means of venting their frustration to regain their dignity and sense of self (Amsel, 1958; Hale, 1993).

The five serial murderers in this study turned to animals to vent their anger. The persons who caused the frustration were seen as too powerful to hurt, so they chose animals because they were viewed as weak and vulnerable. The torture and ultimate death of the animals made the killers feel as if they had gained some retribution for their pain and suffering. Thus, within the framework of the graduation hypothesis, children who are cruel to animals may then graduate to aggressive behaviors toward humans. After a series of aggressive acts toward animals, the individuals gradually increase the amount of destruction to fully gain the satisfaction of venting their frustration. Therefore, they eventually graduate from violence against animals to violence against humans. In the case of some serial murderers, abusing and torturing animals as children is a precursory activity for future violence against humans.

Carroll Edward Cole, for example, was humiliated by his mother from a very early age. The humiliation stemmed from his mother's punishment. After an extensive amount of humiliation, Carroll became frustrated with his inability to gain retribution toward his mother and therefore transferred his anger to animals. After an embarrassing beating from his mother, Carroll strangled a puppy to death. The act made him feel good and powerful. This act gave Carroll back a portion of his dignity and power that his mother had taken away during the years. From that point, he became more aggressive toward anyone who humiliated him, even to the point of death.

Carroll graduated from a puppy to a boy and then on to adult women when he was older. Before killing the puppy, Carroll had never shown signs of being aggressive. The initial act of strangling the puppy gave Carroll not only the idea of killing people but also the courage to vent on humans. Years later, Carroll stated that

the real thought of revenge and strangling my mother—any woman—came to me right there, while I was sitting in a tree [after the death of the puppy]. The act of strangulation as a method of killing was born after, and because of, choking that pup [underneath the house]. It was the most horrifying way of killing someone I could think of, later taking a different turn and becoming a sick obsession. (Newton, 1994, pp. 64-65)

Jeffery Dahmer was raised in a family in which he felt he was the least favorite child. This led to a sense of frustration with his family and others. To deal with his

frustration, Jeffery immersed himself in his pathological pursuits, including collecting and dissecting dead animals.

This seemingly innocent childhood activity quickly developed into torturous behavior toward animals. Jeffery began to catch small animals and skin them alive, mutilate the bodies, and dissect them. Following his parents' divorce, the 18-year-old increased his sadistic behavior and eventually killed a male hitchhiker. As he did with animals, Jeffery mutilated, dissected, and then disposed of the body.

As an adult, Jeffery increased his deadly behavior toward suspected homosexual men. He captured and killed the men through a variety of ways. Before or after their death, he would mutilate the bodies as he had done to animals as a child. The bodies were dismembered and stored in barrels and refrigerating units. It appears he learned the behavior as a child with animals and then simply applied what he had learned to humans.

Edmund Kemper, like Carroll Cole, was raised in an abusive home. The source of the abuse came solely from his mother. She would berate Edmund for no reason at all. Consequently, as Edmund grew older, he became frustrated and developed a deep-seated hatred for her. Because he felt he could not retaliate against his mother, Edmund vented his anger on the family cats. Decapitating and mutilating cats made Edmund feel powerful and in control of his life instead of under the control of his mother. As months elapsed, Edmund became increasingly violent. After being sent to live with his grandparents, he killed and then mutilated his grandmother's body with a large kitchen knife following an argument. He then proceeded to kill his grandfather.

After years of psychological therapy in an institution, Edmund appeared to be cured. However, when humiliation from his mother resurfaced, he began to pick up female hitchhikers and kill them. He would mutilate their bodies just as he had with the cats and his grandmother years earlier. Edmund's year-long killing spree of at least eight victims ended after he killed his mother. Once the source of the humiliation and frustration was gone, Edmund did not need to kill again.

Henry Lee Lucas, like numerous other serial murderers, was raised in an extremely abusive home. Henry's mother would mentally and physically abuse him, often drastically humiliating him. His first experience with sex was with a dead calf that his mother's live-in lover had stabbed. Henry loved the feeling and consequently became addicted to sex. When every attempt at sex with a girl failed at an early age, Henry became more frustrated and resorted to killing animals so he could have sex with them. The more Henry killed animals for sex, the more he enjoyed the act of killing. Eventually, Henry enjoyed killing animals more than having sex with them. He began to skin live animals simply for fun. These murderous acts influenced Henry's torture and murder of humans as an adult. The majority of his victims were women, including the source of his lifelong frustration, his mother.

Arthur Shawcross grew up in a very abusive home where his parents constantly argued. These actions caused him to feel as if they did not want him. Arthur's

mother acted as if she hated him, which in turn greatly frustrated him. He felt that there was nothing he could do to please his mother. As he grew older, this frustration carried over into relationships with girls. Arthur eventually engaged in sexual encounters with another boy, then discovered the use of animals for sex. The two boys had sex with a sheep and were amazed at how good it felt. The experience led Arthur to turn to animals for sex instead of women, who frustrated him. As he engaged in bestiality more often, Arthur began to beat the animals during sex, eventually killing a number of them. He found that he enjoyed the sex more when he beat the animals.

As Arthur grew older, he had consensual sex with women and even married numerous times. However, Arthur's desire to kill was still present. Following a tour of duty in Vietnam where Arthur admitted to torturing and raping a number of Viet Cong women, he claimed several victims in the United States. Arthur sexually assaulted his victims, killed them, and mutilated their bodies.

As the previous cases show, a possible link between childhood cruelty to animals and later serial murder exists. Each serial murderer in this study seemed to transfer the frustration they received from their mothers or other adults toward weaker animals. The abusive behavior continued until the men eventually turned their attention to humans. Inevitably, killing animals may have allowed these men to graduate to killing humans. If killing animals made them feel good, the next logical step for further gratification was humans. It is interesting that these five serial killers who engaged in childhood animal cruelty used the same method of killing on their human victims as they had done on their animal victims, a finding similar to the study by Merz-Perez et al. (2001).

CONCLUSION

Although the possible link between childhood animal cruelty and serial murder was investigated in this study, limitations exist in conducting serial murder research. First, it is often difficult to gain substantial information on various serial murderers. The most sensational serial murderers receive the bulk of attention from the media and academia. As the need for serial murder research expands, the amount of literature directed at various aspects of serial murder will as well. In turn, not only the amount of literature but also the quality of the research will increase.

The other limitation of this study was the design itself. Case study analysis designs are limited in their very nature. When conducting serial murder research, it is all but impossible to do quantitative research because most serial killers are incarcerated or deceased. By using a qualitative research method, only certain patterns that exist between the various cases can be detected. Although childhood animal cruelty can be shown to exist in the cases studied, it is impossible to say that all or a certain percentage of serial murderers are cruel to animals as children.

Although serial murderers have been killing for hundreds of years, very little academic attention has focused on the childhood characteristics of these murderers. The bulk of the literature focuses on definitions and adult motivations of serial murder, practically excluding childhood characteristics. The goal of this study was to explore the possible link between childhood animal cruelty and serial murder by applying the graduation hypothesis rather than to suggest that all serial murderers kill animals as children. Because this link has not been extensively studied by academicians, it is an important area of concern. Detection of a possible link in childhood characteristics of serial murderers could prove to be an early warning sign for law enforcement officials. Therefore, it is suggested that future research be conducted regarding the link.

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