

UC Riverside

UCR Honors Capstones 2017-2018

Title

A Literature Review on Female Serial Killing: Examining Gendered Features of the Crime

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6qk0h8xv>

Author

Lax, Faye

Publication Date

2018-04-01

By

A capstone project submitted for
Graduation with University Honors

University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

Dr.
Department of

Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Jr. Chair and Faculty Director, University Honors
Interim Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education

Abstract

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii

Background and significance

Society is fascinated with the serial killer. Stereotypically, the serial killer is a male who lurks in the dark, preys on his victims, and viciously murders them. However, the definition of a serial killer is not limited to the stereotypical image we have of them. The Federal Bureau of Investigation broadly defines a serial killer as a person who conducts “a series of three or more killings, not less than one of which was committed within the United States, having common characteristics such as to suggest the reasonable possibility that the crimes were committed by the same actor or actors” (Serial Murder 2005). Although there are few serial killers compared to other types of violent criminals, there are between 25 and 50 active serial killers in the United State at any given time (Douglas & Olshaker 1996). Some of these serial killers are female. Females accounted for 10% of all serial killers between 2004-2011. However, we know little about female serial killers (Hickey 2013). This study fills gaps in knowledge of serial killing by examining the case of one female serial killer. In particular, it focuses on the role of gender in explaining women’s participation in serial killing, with a special focus on four key aspects of the crime: motivations for the killing, the killing method, knowledge and choice of the victims, and the crime aftermath.

Prior research finds that there are differences between female serial killers and male serial killers. There are few female serial killers relative to other female offenders. Females accounted for 17% of all offenders in 2009 (csosa.gov 2014), while female serial killers accounted for 10% of all serial killers from 2004-2011 (Hickey 2013). Therefore, the research we have on serial killing may not apply to female serial killers. There is also a lot less research on female serial killers than on male serial killers, and even fewer studies compare female serial killers to male serial killers in the same study. More research on female serial killing is needed.

Female serial killers are different than other female violent offenders. The female homicide offender is more likely to be African American in terms of race, has mostly family members as victims, has low educational attainment, comes from a broken home, is a drug and alcohol abuser, tends to kill her victim(s) in a domestic area, and uses a gun as her weapon of choice (Pollock, Mullings, Crouch 2006; Cole, Fisher, Cole 1968; Schwartz 2017). Female sex offenders account for only 5% of sex offenders internationally and have a different profile than the female homicide offender (Cortoni 2008). They tend to be between the ages of 26-32 years, are Caucasian, and have victims between 6-12 years old (77% of them are children) (Wijkman 2010). Two out of three offenders have a male co-offender, and three out of four were victims of abuse themselves (Wijkman 2010). Female serial killers' profile is different from the profiles of both female homicide offenders and female sex offenders. Female serial killers tend to be Caucasian and use poison as their weapon of choice (Hickey 2013). It is clear from prior research that female serial killers are different from other female violent offenders, which highlights the need for research on female serial killers.

Even in the research on female serial killing, there are few studies that compare male and female serial killers. Few studies include both males and females in their samples. Of the 40 articles reviewed for this thesis, less than half used a sample of female serial killers only, and only three studies had both male and female serial killers in their samples (Hickey 1991; Hickey 2013; Gurian 2015). Three literature reviews examined characteristics of female and male serial killers but don't involve comparative samples (Miller 2014; Kauflin 2000; Holmes and Holmes 1998). One study addressed differences between female serial killers who acted alone and female serial killers who acted with a male partner (Gorian 2009). It is difficult to compare results from non-comparative studies because there is inconsistency in the variables examined. This study

will assess the prior research to identify what is different about male serial killers and female serial killers, what is similar, and what's not yet discussed, particularly in regards to the motivations for killing, the killing method, knowledge and choice of the victims, and the crime aftermath.

Motives for serial killing. According to prior research, the motive, or what drives the serial killer to kill, differs between male and female serial killers. The motive of a serial killer is very often categorized according to the Holmes and Holmes typology. In this classification there are four types of serial killers: hedonistic, visionary, missionary, and power and control (Holmes & Holmes 1988). A majority of serial killers are hedonistic. They're often sexually sadistic, get aroused by torturing victims, and usually kill for the thrill of killing. The visionary serial killer tends to be psychotic and hears voices that tell them to kill. The missionary serial killer sees it as his/her mission to kill certain people for a cause. Lastly, the power-and-control killer gains satisfaction by the idea of having full control over their victims. The Holmes and Holmes typology was based on research on male serial killers.

More recently, a typology of female serial killers has been developed. The Kelleher typology includes black widows, the angel of death, the sexual predator, and those who kill for revenge and profit (Kelleher and Kelleher 1988). The black widow killer kills multiple spouses, partners, or other family members. The angel of death kills people who are in her care for some form of medical attention. The sexual predator kills others in clear acts of sexual homicide. The revenge killer kills out of hate or jealousy. The profit killer kills for profit or in the course of committing another crime (Kelleher and Kelleher 1988). Male serial killers' motives tend to be sex, power, and control (Myers, Husted, Safarik, O'Toole 2006; Beasley 2004; Dietz, Hazelwood, Warren 1990; Kelley 1995), while female serial killers' motives tend to be money.

One study found that some female serial killers also kill for emotional benefits and feel a tension release after the murder (Keeney and Heide, 1994).

Serial killers have also been categorized in terms of their organization, yielding two types: the organized offender and the disorganized offender (Ressler and Burgess 1985). The organized offender is of average or above-average intelligence, has poor work performance, is socially adept and usually living with a partner, has an angry state of mind prior to the murder and admits to being calm and relaxed after the crime. The disorganized offender, on the other hand, is likely to be of below average intelligence, in a confused and distressed state of mind at the time of the murder, socially inadequate, and sexually incompetent (Ressler and Burgess, 1985). According to this typology, because the male serial killer tends to be motivated by sex or power and control, they often fall under the disorganized category. Female serial killers, on the other hand, tend to be organized killers, who leave little to no evidence, which perhaps explains why they tend to have longer criminal careers.

The problem with the prior studies of female serial killers' motives is that they have inconsistent results. For instance, in a case study of a female serial killer, it was found that the motive was to save face in response to a humiliating situation (Ostrosky-Solís et al. 2008), while other studies show the primary motive to be profit (Harrison et al. 2015). In a study with 64 female serial killers (Harrison 2015), the researchers attempted to classify the motive of female serial killers by the Holmes and Holmes typology but found that some motives weren't included in the typology. When using the Holmes and Holmes (2010) classification, they found that a majority killed for hedonistic purposes. However, there were other motivations as well. For instance, 7.9% of female serial killers murdered for revenge, 4.8% murdered to protect their reputation or interests (i.e., were a maintenance killer); and 11.1% murdered due to unspecified

mental illness (Harrison et al. 2015). Another issue is that unlike understanding the motive for male serial killers, studies on money as motive do not examine the crime aftermath. So we understand little about why money was a motive. What were they going to do, or did they do, with the money?

Studies that actually compare men and women find other motives as well. Hickey (2013) found that although a majority of female serial killers kill for monetary gain, some also kill for control, enjoyment, and sex -- motives that are typically associated with male serial killers according to some typologies. Gorian (2009) found that women are usually motivated by purpose-oriented goals, such as monetary gain, but female serial killers who act with a male partner tend to kill for pleasure-oriented goals, such as sexual sadism.

Research on motives operationalize the variable motive differently for men and women, preventing comparisons across studies. For instance, a majority of male serial killers kill for hedonistic reasons, primarily sexual gratification (Beasley 2014; Miller 2014; Linkowski and Leistedt, 2011; Myers et al. 2006; Kelly 1995; Ressler 1998). However, in one study with a sample of 64 female serial killers, they found that majority of female serial killers killed for hedonistic reasons, including profit (Harrison et al. 2015). Another study discussed how 74% of female serial killers are motivated by profit because it is a “behavioral artifact of those who desire to control their victims after death by seizing their property” (Vronsky 2007). Thus, the motive in some cases is perhaps better understood as power and control. I believe that the issue is that the language isn’t the same for females and males in the literature on motive. The ‘hedonistic’ classification can mean killing for lust, thrill and gain. However, in the literature on male serial killers, it usually refers to killing for sexual reasons, while in the research on female serial killers, it refers to profit.

Knowledge and choice of victims. Prior research on gender differences between serial killers finds that male serial killers generally do not personally know their victims (Langevin et al. 1988; Linkowski and Leistedt 2011; Kelley 1995; Gurian 2015). Female serial killers, on the other hand, personally know their victims (Harrison 2015; Keeney and Heide, 1994; Miller, 2014; Harrison et al. Hickey 1991; Gurian 2015). While male serial killers tend to choose victims who are same-race adult women across geographic areas, female serial killers tend to choose both men and women, adults and kids, and people who are usually in only one geographic area. For female serial killers, race is not related to victim choice (Kelly, 1995; Beasley, 2014; Miller, 2014; James and Proulx, 2016, Harrison et al 2015; Keeney and Heide, 1994; Gorian, 2009; Schurman-Kauflin, 2000). However, the solo female serial killer is different than the partnered female serial killer (i.e., a woman with a male partner in crime). Gorian (2009) found that solo female serial killers kill both sexes and adults, and mostly family members, while partnered serial killers kill females only and adult or teen strangers.

The prior research on gender differences in knowledge and choice of victims is limited. In the research that exists on the topic, the studies only discuss the results that characterize the majority of serial killers. For example, in a sample of 64 female serial killers, 92.2% killed victims to whom they were related. However, the others killed victims they did not know (Harrison et al. 2015). In a case study of a 48-year-old female serial killer accused of killing 12 elderly women, the victims were not people whom she knew (Ostrosky-Solís et al. 2008).

Methods of serial killing. Prior research on serial killers' method of killing discusses how male serial killers, relative to female serial killers, tend to kill with more violent methods, such as strangulation and stabbing (Ressler 1998; Gurian 2009; Beasley 2014; Warren, Hazelwood, Dietz 1996). Their methods tend to be related to motive -- that is, as discussed above, for sex and

power and control. One study found that sex killers (i.e., someone who kills with an intention of having sex with the victim, whether alive or dead) killed their victims by strangulation more often than non-sex killers (Langevin, 1988). This result supports the notion that the method is related to the motive. A study comparing serial sex killers and non-serial sex killers found that the former were more likely than the latter to have strangled their victims, consistent with the notion that strangulation in serial murder is often a sexual method of killing (James and Proulx, 2016). Ressler (1998) explained that serial killers get personal satisfaction from the fact that the death is at their hands and use the knife as if it were a replacement for male genitals.

Female serial killers tend to kill by less violent methods, such as poisoning or asphyxiation (Gurian 2009; Keeney and Heide, 1994; Hickey 1991; Hickey 2013; Schurman-Kauflin 2000; Miller 2014; Wilson and Hilton, 1998; Harrison et al. 2015). However, studies that have examined female serial killers with male partners-in-crime found mixed methods of killing. For instance, Gurian (2009) found that 83.3% of female serial killers with a male partner used a combination of methods on their victims, and Gurian (2015) found similar results.

Why do females often use poison as their weapon? Do they prefer to be less violent, are they inherently less violent, or do they, relative to males, have easier access to poison because of the professions they tend to be in? In other words, is their method of choice preferential or situational? The answers to these questions are not yet known. The relation of method to motive in female serial killing has not yet been examined. Prior research has examined the possible correlation between method and victim choice and knowledge, and there seems to be a relation between them. Vronsky (2007) suggested that females have a preference for helpless victims (e.g., the elderly, the sick, etc.) and, therefore, can use less violent methods, such as poison,

asphyxiation, and drugs. Thus, it is not that they wouldn't use violence but rather, that it is unnecessary given their victim selection.

The aftermath of serial killing. The crime aftermath is the behavior of a serial killer once the victims are dead. Prior research shows that male serial killers may have sex with the victims, modify the bodies, collect body parts or victims' personal belongings as trophies, visit victims' remains, leave a signature on victims' body, or become involved in the criminal investigation of the crime. Ted Bundy, for instance, a notorious serial killer, murdered 33 victims, and several of them were sexually mutilated and sodomized. He sometimes kept his victims' bodies for days and pampered them, giving them showers and performing makeovers. He carefully chose the victim disposal sites and enjoyed taunting law enforcement during the investigation. Jeffrey Dahmer, another notorious serial killer, used tools to dismember his victims' bodies. The body parts of 11 different victims were found in his freezer and refrigerator (Kelley, 1995). He is one of many male serial killers who were involved in similar acts in the aftermath of their killings. Male serial killers' aftermath tends to be sexually motivated, exhibiting a correlation between motive and aftermath.

Little research examines female serial killers' crime aftermath, even when examining gender differences. Only one study of female serial killers examined the crime aftermath. It cited attendance at the victims' funerals as common and attributed this behavior to the fact that many victims of female serial killers, unlike those of male serial killers, are family members (Keeney and Heide, 1994). No study has examined the relation of female serial killers' aftermath to their motive.

Theorizing gender effects. As the foregoing sections show, there is some evidence of gender differences, but gender differences have not been consistently explored. To guide explorations of

gender, it is important to consider how theories of crime incorporate the role of gender. While few theories focus on the role of gender, some theories explain why society tends not to expect women to commit crime. These, however, do not explain crime per se (Steffensmeier and Allan 1996; Gilbert 2002; Scott and Flemming 2014).

Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) look at how stereotypes of femininity are defined by weakness and submissiveness which aren't compatible with crime generally or violent crime specifically. They argued that women's "moral culture" restrains women from criminal activity and that even when women are motivated to engage in crime (e.g., they need to make money), they engage in certain crimes (e.g., sex work) over others. Other scholars have documented how "male violent offending does not elicit the same "shock value" as when females carry out similar acts" (Scott & Fleming 2014). These theories argue that cultural ideologies influence the public's views on female offenders.

Several theories attempt to explain women's participation in crime, specifically highlighting how females account for a lower percentage of criminals. These theories include Agnew's General Strain Theory (Broidy and Agnew 1997) which points to types of strain and the reaction to that strain as the explanation to the gender gap in crime. The power-control theory by John Hagen points to the family structure and differences in parental controls exercised on boys versus girls (Hagen et al. 1987). It argues that boys get more involved in crime than girls because there is less control placed on them than there is on girls. Travis Hirschi's social bond theory looks at how a crime is committed when a bond is broken because norms and bonds is what creates order (James 2007). Feminist criminology is a bit different from the aforementioned theories as it argues that less attention is paid to females who commit crime because they tend to be involved in crimes that are less of a concern to public safety (Chesney-Lind 2006). Freud's theory of

crime is a psychological theory that looks at the differences in individual behavior that would explain why one person commits crime while another does not (Essays, UK. 2013). The Liberation Hypothesis explains that if women had equal opportunity to commit crime, they would (Simon 1975). However, these theories focus on whether and why women participate in crime. They do not focus on how women participate in crime, particularly in regards to the four variables in this study, or on how women's participation differs from men. Even more so, these theories focus very little on the crime of serial killing.

Case study

The present study is a case study of Dana Sue Gray, a serial killer convicted of killing two elderly women and of attempted murder of another elderly woman. It examines her motivation, knowledge and choice of victim, method of killing, and crime aftermath in light of what is known about gender in serial killing. Gray was sentenced to life without parole and is serving her sentence at Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla, CA. She killed her victims in Temecula area, CA in 1994. She was caught by police after her third victim survived and escaped.

As a child, Gray acted out by stealing money and often got detention in school. She joined a group of students who would throw animals down from a roof. Her mother died of cancer when she was 14 years old which may have influenced her career choice. She became a labor and delivery nurse at Inland Valley Regional Medical Center. She was an attractive, fit, and blonde athlete who surfed and golfed. She often took part in such activities with her boyfriends. She eventually married a man with secure finances from Temecula. Eventually, her husband lost his job, and Gray had to work more than ever. She partied on the days that she had off from work. She then had a miscarriage and numbed the loss by using medications from her job as a

nurse. Soon, gray's marriage failed when she and her husband got into serious debt. They lost their home to foreclosure. When she divorced, she moved into a home with another man, a boyfriend, and his five-year-old son. On November 24, 1993, she was fired from the hospital where she worked for misappropriating the prescription drug Demerol and other opiate painkillers.

In February of 1994, she was supposed to meet her estranged husband who had contacted her to meet. However, he didn't show up to the meeting. A few days later, an 86-year-old woman, the mother-in-law of Gray's father's wife, was murdered. This victim died from knife wounds in the chest and neck. She was found 2 days later in her home in Canyon Lake, California. Detectives found no evidence of forced entry to the victim's home, suggesting that the victim knew her killer. Only a sneaker print left from the perpetrator was left as evidence. Many sources attribute this crime to Gray (Bradihill 2002; Bovsun 2014; Amazon), but there was never enough evidence to convict Gray for this crime.

The three crimes for which Gray was convicted occurred next. Two weeks after the incident with the 86-year-old woman, Gray murdered a 66-year-old woman, also in Canyon Lake. Gray approached the woman at her home, saying she was seeking a book to help her with her drinking problem. The victim allowed Gray into her home, and Gray unplugged the phone cord and strangled the woman with it. She then stole two credit cards from the woman and went on a shopping spree.

Within another few days, Gray attempted to murder another person, a 57-year-old woman, this time in Lake Elsinore, CA. Gray attacked the woman in her antique shop in Temecula after coming in to the shop and claiming to want to buy a particular picture frame for a picture of her dead mother. She used a phone cord to strangle the victim, as the victim begged for her life, and

offering her money. Gray, however, claimed she was not doing it for the money. Yet still, she stole \$25 from the shop and went on shopping spree. This victim survived the attack.

A few days later, Gray murdered an 87-year-old woman in Sun City California. Gray followed the woman home from the bank and approached the woman in her yard, asking for directions. The woman invited Gray into her home to look at a map. Gray strangled the victim. An hour after the murder, Gray used the victim's credit card in a shopping spree. She spent so much money that the victims' families received alerts from the credit card company and subsequently notified the authorities. Detectives obtained descriptions of Gray from the stores that were the site of her shopping spree. They were able to identify Gray and went to pick her up at her home to arrest her. At her home, they found the purchases Gray made with the victims' money as well as a shoe matching the shoe print found at the first victim's scene.

During the police interrogation, Gray claimed that she found the credit cards and kept the them because she had an overwhelming urge to shop. Although she did not confess to any of the murders at this point, she was charged and convicted. On her appeal, Gray pleaded insanity. However, professionals found that she was not insane and was aware of the acts that she committed. She then changed her plea from insanity to guilty of robbery and murder of two women and attempted murder of a third woman. By pleading guilty, Gray avoided the death penalty. She has been in prison since the trial.

Analysis of the case of Dana Sue Gray

In this section, using data on the two murders and one attempted murder for which Gray was convicted and the third murder for which she was not tried, I analyze the specific case of Dana Sue Gray to highlight limitations to prior research and to understand how the participant is different from and/or similar to male and female serial killers as described in prior research, in

terms of her killing method, her motivation and crime aftermath, and her knowledge and choice of victims. Does Gray's gender play a role in these aspects of serial killing? The details of this serial killer's case tend to be different from those of other female serial killers featured in prior research, in all the variables being looked at, even if just slightly. Gray is similar to female serial killers as she was a nurse and targeted victims that could not defend themselves. However, she is more different from them than similar to them. She is also similar to, rather than different from, male serial killers in some respects.

Prior research examining female serial killers' motivation for their crimes find that they are motivated by profit. Based on that, we would expect Gray to have been motivated by profit as well. In an interview with a psychologist, Gray said that her motivation was profit related, and she did steal credit cards from her victims. However, a closer look at the details of her case suggests a different motivation (Braidhill 2002: 287). The events that led up to her first victim's murder include that she was fired from her job, lost her home, got divorced, started using drugs, and was stood up by her ex-husband. Could it be that those events led to immense anger which, in turn, led to the killing of Victim One? If so, this would fall under the power and control typology, a typical motive for male serial killers. Dr. Kirby, a psychologist who analyzed Gray's case, argued that if she wanted the money, there were other much less violent ways to obtain that, and that her end goal was the act of physically struggling with her victims, potentially obtaining, as male serial killers do, a personal connection with the victims (Braidhill 2002: 2). In an interview with another psychologist Dr. Rogers, Gray claimed that the first victim kept berating her about Gray's marriage. Gray said, "She kept on and on about Tom... and I lost it. She pushed that final button" (Braidhill 2002: 282). The monetary profit in the form of the stolen credit cards in Gray's case may just have been a bonus rather than the motivation. Perhaps if

researchers looked more into the details of specific cases, they would find that the presence of monetary gain does not always indicate motive.

In regards to knowledge and choice of victims, the typical female serial killer would kill both children and adults of any gender or race, people who are typically family members or people they know, and people in one single location. Gray's victims consisted of elderly females, two of whom she knew and two of whom she did not know. All were located in southern California, but in different cities. Gray's knowledge and choice of victims seems more like characteristics of a male serial killer. It is very rare for a female serial killer to choose victims that she doesn't know and to move from place to place, as opposed to having her victims be from the same place. It is unknown whether Gray carefully chose her victims beforehand or if she made a decision to kill in the moment. Females tend to be classified as organized killers who plan their crimes in advance and know their victims ahead of time. In Gray's case, however, she didn't personally know all of her victims beforehand.

According to prior research, females tend to kill victims they know, often people, such as medical patients, who are weak and vulnerable. The killers tend to use their feminine roles, such as caregiver, to gain access to victims. While Gray was a nurse for many years, none of her victims were her patients. Why would she target unknown women as opposed to people she knew and to whom had access? Was the process of finding her victims enjoyable for her? If so, that would further be a characteristic typically associated with male serial killers according to prior research.

Gray targeted frail old women. In an interview with Gray, a psychologist asked Gray what she was thinking when she was losing control and strangling her victims. Gray responded, "that I was making my mother shut up...It just built up - the continuing condescending attitude.

‘You are worthless. You failed. I told you so’” (Braidhill 2002: 283). The mother was a source of Gray’s anger. Many male serial killers target victims who look like someone they know, someone that hurt them. For instance, Ed Kemper, the “Co-ed Killer,” killed multiple women before ultimately killing his own mother. Killing victims who were old and frail may have reminded Gray of her sick mother who reportedly always put her down. Thus, the killing may have been a form of displaced anger and her victim selection reflects aspects of male serial killing.

Dana Sue Gray’s case is also unusual in regards to the weapon she used to kill her victims. Prior research on methods for female serial killers shows that the most common method of killing is poison. Gray’s method was strangulation which is much more common for male serial killers. Strangulation is a hands-on method where a killer can watch and feel life leaving a victim’s body. As Ressler (1998) discusses, it gives the killer personal satisfaction that the death is at their hands. According to Hickey (1997), 35% of female serial killers use poison only, and 45% use poison in combination with some other means of killing, while only 5% of males use poisons to kill. Gray’s weapon of choice corresponds more with the male serial killer profile.

As discussed above, male serial killers (especially those motivated by sex), tend to involve themselves in mutilation, rape, and/or necrophilia etc. after the actual killing of their victims. However, prior research on female serial killers tends not to examine the crime aftermath. Gray’s crime aftermath involved stealing credit cards from her victims and going on shopping sprees. What was the reason for shopping after killing her victims? Is the shopping, as Vronsky (2007) discusses, a way of further controlling the victims even after they’re dead? If so, wouldn’t her motivation to kill actually be control (a supposedly male motivation) rather than profit (a supposedly female motivation), and the profit is just a means to feel that control?

Alternatively, perhaps taking the money is a form of release after the murder, similar to the release male serial killers experience when they engage in sexual acts with their victims after they kill them? As a third option, the products acquired through shopping may have served as trophies, much like the trophies collected from the victims of male serial killers. If any of these options are true, the case of Gray resembles male serial killers more than female serial killers.

Discussion and future research

The case of Dana Sue Gray is of interest because her serial killing of 3 victims exhibits some characteristics that conform to the typical profile of female serial killers and other characteristics that conform to the profile of the typical male serial killer. These findings suggest that perhaps gender may not be the sole or primary determinant of the four crime features that were the focus of this analysis: motivation, killing method, motivation, knowledge and choice of the victims, and the crime aftermath of serial killers.

One explanation of these findings is that Gray was acting masculine on purpose (i.e., to manipulate the suspect pool) to avoid getting caught. However, there is no evidence that Gray knew the differences between male and female serial killers or that she made an effort to disguise her crime by capitalizing on the gender differences. If this explanation were true, there would be reason to continue believing that gender has a role in serial killing.

An alternative explanation is that gender does not have a role in serial killing. In this case, discrepancies in prior research and between prior research and Gray's case may be attributable to misinterpretations by scholars of crime features. Scholars of serial killing may have interpreted aspects of the crime as gendered when, in fact, they were not. An example of misinterpretation in the analysis is the post-killing shopping in Gray's case. The scholars interpreted the shopping as evidence of a profit motive, but they failed to consider alternative

meanings, such as it being a crime aftermath involving a form of release (the thrill of purchasing) or a trophy of her crimes (i.e., her purchases as trophies). Some women may kill for profit and engage in shopping to realize that profit. However, Gray's case suggests that not all shopping is necessarily for profit. Thus, scholars need to be able to explain the exceptions they find to the expected gendered patterns. Otherwise, they cannot claim that gender explains the pattern.

Scholars' gendered interpretations of the aspects of serial killer may reflect their own gender biases. Scholars may have reinforced gender stereotypes by looking for stereotypical features in women's serial killing. Patricia Pearson (1998) discusses why there seems to be less fear tied to female serial killers as opposed to male serial killers. Eric Hickey (1991) found that male serial killers tend to be referred to as "the ripper", "the night stalker", "the strangler" etc. while female serial killers have been named "giggling grandma," "beautiful blonde," etc. This presentation fosters curiosity about, rather than fear of, female serial killers, in contrast to the dread and fear of male serial killers. We as a society only formally recognized female serial killers in 1992, when Aileen Wuornos was arrested for shooting seven men. She was proclaimed America's first female serial killer (Clark County Prosecuting Attorney), but we knew that there were female serial killers prior to that date. However, her profile showed aggression, anger, frenzy, used a gun as her weapon, and preyed on strangers, -- that is, it was a stereotypically male serial killer profile (Arrigo and Griffin 2004). Prior research paints the female serial killer as someone whom we don't need to fear -- that is, it paints her as a woman. However, the case of Gray suggests that aspects of serial killing that have been viewed as gendered may not, in fact, be gendered. Dana Sue Gray exhibited stereotypically male serial killing characteristics in regards to her motivation, killing method, knowledge and choice of the victims, and the crime aftermath.

These findings don't so much contradict prior theory as highlight the need for theory to explain how serial killing occurs -- that is, in terms of the four aspects of crime addressed here. Existing theories of gender look at why and whether women engage in serial killing. There is a need for research that HOW women kill serially relative to men, once they join the ranks of serial killers. The evidence here shows that that gender does not effectively explain how serial killing is executed by women. Thus, theories explaining aspects of serial killing will need to include factors other than gender. Furthermore, existing theories should be reconsidered in terms of their ability to explain women's participation in serial killing in particular.

One methodological strategy for avoiding gender biases in interpretation of aspects of serial killing is to pay greater attention to the exceptions to the proposed gendered patterns. So many cases that don't fit the majority findings have not been explored in depth by scholars. By failing to examine in detail and explain the exceptions to the gendered patterns, the patterns themselves become questionable. One particular study shows the importance of this point. With a sample of 64 female serial killers, the study found that only 50% killed their victims with poison. The other 50% used other methods, including asphyxiation, shooting, stabbing, blunt force, drowning and neglect, all of which are not typically female methods (Harrison et al. 2015). Yet, the authors did not explain this deviation from the expected gender pattern. It is clear that gender does not adequately explains these exceptions, but more theoretical development is needed to explain female serial killers' methods and choices.

Limitations

This literature review and case study has some limitations. It examined only a single, deviant case. It would be beneficial to study more female serial killers and to conduct comparative studies with samples also involving male serial killers. In addition, to analyze the

single case, the investigator relied only on secondary sources. Although the investigator sought an interview with Gray, the CA State Institutional Review Board did not grant it. There is also a need to revisit prior research first, to analyze the cases in those studies that were deviant and second, to determine whether alternate, less gender biased meanings could be inferred from the case features. Future research should also seek to bring uniformity to the language used to serial killing typologies. There is also a lack of consistency in the language across the literature yielding a necessity in applying consistent language throughout.

References

- Aamodt, M. G. (2016, September 4). Serial killer statistics. Retrieved from [http://maamodt.asp.radford.edu/serial killer information center/project description.htm](http://maamodt.asp.radford.edu/serial%20killer%20information%20center/project%20description.htm)
- Arrigo, Bruce A. and Ayanna Griffin. 2004. "Serial Murder and the Case of Aileen Wuornos: Attachment Theory, Psychopathy, and Predatory Aggression." *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 22(3):375–93.
- Amazon. 2015. Diabolical Women. A&E Television Series. Season 1: episode 3.
- Anon. 20AD. "1 Statistics on Women in the Justice System." *csosa.gov*. Retrieved (<https://www.csosa.gov/newsmedia/factsheets/statistics-on-women-offenders-2014.pdf>).
- Bandura, Albert. 1971. "Social Learning Theory." Retrieved (http://www.asecib.ase.ro/mps/Bandura_SocialLearningTheory.pdf).
- Beasley, James O. 2004. "Serial Murder in America: Case Studies of Seven Offenders." *Behavioral Sciences and the La* 22:394–415.
- Bovsun, Mara. 2014. "Justice Story: Serial Killer Dana Sue Gray Offed Elderly Women so She Could Shop with Their Credit Cards." *NEW YORK DAILY NEWS*, May 31.
- Braidhill, Kathy. 2002. *To Die For*. St. Martin's Paperbacks.
- Broidy, Lisa and Robert Agnew. 1997. "Gender and Crime: A General Strain Theory Perspective." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 34(3):275–306.
- Chriss, James J. 2007. "The functions of the Social Bond." *Sociological Quarterly* 48(4), 689-712. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2007.00097.x

Clark County Prosecuting Attorney. Aileen Carol Wuornos #805. Clarkprosecutor.org
(<http://www.clarkprosecutor.org/html/death/US/wuornos805.htm>).

Cole, K. E., Gary Fisher, and Shirley S. Cole. 1968. "Women Who Kill: A Sociopsychological Study."
Retrieved (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/489676>)

Combs, Brian. 2010. "Victims of Dana Sue Gray." *Victims of Dana Sue Gray | The Serial Killers Podcast*. Retrieved (<http://serialkillers.briancombs.net/1240/victims-of-dana-sue-gray/>).

Criminology Wiki. "Power-Control Theory." Retrieved (http://criminology.wikia.com/wiki/Power-Control_Theory).

Dandridge, Andrija T. 2007. "The Inner Workings of Female Serial Killers." *Florida Metropolitan University Online*.

Dietz, Park Elliott, Robert R. Hazelwood, and Janet Warren. 1990. "The Sexually Sadistic Criminal and His Offenses." *Bull Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 18(2).

Douglas, John E., Mark Olshaker. 1996. *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*.

Essays, UK. 2013. Freud and Eysenck's Theories of Crime. Retrieved from
<http://www.ukessays.com/essays/criminology/freud-eysenck-crime.php?vref=1>

Gurian, Elizabeth A. 2016. "Reframing Serial Murder Within Empirical Research." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 61(5):544–60.

Gurian, Elizabeth A. 2009. "Female Serial Murderers: Directions for Future Research on a Hidden Population." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 55(1):27–42.

Gurian, Elizabeth A. 2017. "Reframing Serial Murder Within Empirical Research: Offending and Adjudication Patterns of Male, Female, and Partnered Serial Killers." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 61(5).

Hagen, John, John Simpson, and A. R. Gillis. 1987. "Class in the Household: A Power-Control Theory of Gender and Delinquency." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(4).

Hagen John. 2006. "A Power-Control Theory of Gender and Delinquency". Pp. 254-262 in *Criminological Theory, Past to Present*, edited by Francis T. Cullen and Robert Agnew. Roxbury Park.

Harrison, Marissa . 2015. "The Psychological Difference Between Male and Female Serial Killers." Retrieved (<http://scitechconnect.elsevier.com/psychological-difference-serial-killers/>).

Hickey, E. 1996. *Serial murderers and their victims*. (2nd ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Hickey, Eric W. 2013. *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Hinch, Ronald and Crysyl Hepburn. 1998. "Researching Serial Murder: Methodological and Definitional Problems."

Holmes, Ronald M. and Stephen T. Holmes. 1998. "Contemporary Perspectives on Serial Murder". SAGE.

Holmes, S. T., Hickey, E., & Holmes, R. M. 1991. "Female Serial Murderesses: The Unnoticed Terror." *Contemporary Perspectives on Serial Murder* 7(4), 59-70. doi:10.4135/9781452220642.n4

Holmes, Stephen T., Eric Hickey, and Ronald M. Holmes. 1991. "Female Serial Murderesses: Constructing Differentiating Typologies." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 7(4). Retrieved (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/104398629100700405>).

James, Jonathon and Jean Proulx. 2016. "The modus operandi of serial and nonserial sexual murderers: A systematic review." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 31:200–218.

Keeney, B. T., & Heide, K. M. (1994). Gender Differences in Serial Murderers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 9(3), 383-398. doi:10.1177/088626094009003007

Keeney, B., Heide, K. (1995) Serial murder: a more inclusive definition. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 39, 299–306.

Kelley, Alvin. 1995. "Profiles of Serial killers." Retrieved (<https://shsu-ir.tdl.org/shsu-ir/bitstream/handle/20.500.11875/228/0251.pdf?sequence=1>).

Langevin, R., M. H. Ben-Aron, and P. Wright. 1988. "The Sex Killer." *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 1(2):263–301.

Leistedt, Samuel and P. Linkowski. n.d. "The serial murder: a few theoretical perspectives."

Mckenzie, Constance. 1995. "A Study of Serial Murder." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 39(1):3–10.

Meda Chesney-Lind. 2006. "A Feminist Theory of Female Delinquency". Pp. 367-374 in *Criminological Theory, Past to Present*, edited by Francis T. Cullen and Robert Agnew. Roxbury Park.

Miller, Laurence. 2014. "Serial killers: I. Subtypes, patterns, and motives Author links open overlay panel." *Serial killers: I. Subtypes, patterns, and motives Author links open overlay panel* 19(1):1–11.

Myers, Wade C., David S. Husted, Mark D. Safarik, and Mary E. O'Toole. 2006. "Motivation Behind Serial Sexual Homicide: Is It Sex, Power, and Control, or Anger?." *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 51(4):900–907. Retrieved (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/Abstract.aspx?id=236738>).

Myers, Wade C., David S. Husted, Mark D. Safarik, and Mary E. O'Toole. 2006. "Motivation Behind Serial Sexual Homicide: Is It Sex, Power, and Control, or Anger? ." *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 51(4):900–907. Retrieved (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/publications/Abstract.aspx?id=236738>).

Ostrosky-Solís, Feggy, Alicia Vélez-García, Daniel Santana-Vargas, Martha Pérez, and Alfredo Ardila. 2008. "A Middle-Aged Female Serial Killer." *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 53(5):1223–30.

Pearson, Patricia. 1998. *When she was bad: how and why women get away with murder*. Estados Unidos: Penguin Books.

Pollock, Joycelyn M., Janet L. Mullings and Ben M. Crouch. 2006. "Violent Women: Findings from the Texas Women Inmates Study". *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 21 (4): 485-502. Doi: [10.1177/0886260505285722](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260505285722).

Ressler, Robert K. 1998. *I Have Lived in the Monster: Inside the Minds of the World's Most Notorious Serial Killers*. St. Martin's True Crime Library.

Schurman-Kauflin, Deborah. 2000. *The new predator--Women who kill: profiles of female serial killers*. New York: Algora Pub.

Scott, Hannah. 2008. "The 'Gentler Sex': Patterns in Female Serial Murder." *Humana Press* 179–96.

Serial Murder. (2010, May 21). Retrieved November 21, 2017, from <https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/serial-murder>

Simon, Rita J. 1975. "Women and Crime." *Encyclopedia of Criminological Theory*. Retrieved (<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412959193.n233>).

Steffensmeier, Darrell and Emilie Allan. 1996. "Gender and Crime: Toward a Gendered Theory of Female Offending." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22(1):459–87.

Travis Hirschi. 2006. "Social Bond Theory". Pp. 219-228 in *Criminological Theory, Past to Present*, edited by Francis T. Cullen and Robert Agnew. Roxbury Park.

Vronsky, Peter. 2007. *Female Serial Killers: How and Why Women Become Monsters*. Penguin.

Weis, Joseph G. 1976. "Liberation and Crime: The Invention of the New Female Criminal." *Crime and Social Justice* 6:17–27. Retrieved (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29765988>).

Wijkman, Miriam, Catrien Bijleveld, and Jan Hendriks. 2010. "Women Don't Do Such Things! Characteristics of Female Sex Offenders and Offender Types." *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 22(2). Retrieved (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1079063210363826>).

Wilson, Wayne and Tonya Hilton. 1998. "Modus Operandi of Female Serial Killers." *Stephen F. Austin State University* 82:495–98.