

## Serial Killer Research Papers

### Introduction

In psychology, a central debate revolves around whether serial killers are shaped by nature or nurture. "Nature" refers to genetic and hereditary influences, suggesting that some individuals are born with a predisposition to kill (Cherry, 1). In contrast, "nurture" emphasizes environmental factors, such as upbringing and cultural influences, as the driving forces behind such behaviors (Cherry, 1). While some argue that serial killers are innately driven by their instincts, others believe their tendencies result from external influences.

### Introduction

Serial killers commit horrific crimes with precision, often leaving little to no evidence, resembling predators hunting their prey (Cornwell, 2). Research into their psychology increasingly suggests that nurture plays a more significant role than nature in shaping their behaviors (Cornwell, 1). Behavioral, psychological, and cultural factors collectively contribute to their formation.

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### Behavioral Factors

The behavior of serial killers is often rooted in traumatic childhood experiences, including abuse, neglect, or other adverse circumstances. Dysfunctional relationships with parents are particularly influential. For instance, Ed Gein, whose deeply religious mother equated sexuality with sin and death, developed a distorted worldview that later manifested in grotesque acts, such as crafting household items from human remains (Maria, 1).

Childhood abuse frequently emerges as a key factor in the development of violent tendencies (Maria, 1). Some abused children exhibit early signs of cruelty, such as harming animals, a behavior linked to future violence (Pement, 1). However, not all individuals with traumatic childhoods become serial killers. Coping mechanisms, social environments, and upbringing significantly influence how these experiences shape an individual.

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### Personality and Psychological Disorders

Serial killers often display distinctive personality traits and psychological disorders. They frequently exhibit antisocial tendencies, lack of empathy, and poor social skills (GoodTherapy, 1). Many also struggle academically, have low IQs, and face challenges maintaining steady employment (GoodTherapy, 1). Disorders such as antisocial personality disorder (APD), borderline personality disorder (BPD), and schizophrenia are common among serial killers (Pement, 1).

Jeffrey Dahmer, who murdered 17 men between 1978 and 1991, suffered from BPD and struggled with isolation and tension during his formative years (Bio, 1). David Berkowitz, the infamous "Son of Sam," developed schizophrenia after his mother's death and went on to terrorize neighborhoods by targeting women and couples (Bio, 1).

Ted Bundy provides a unique case of nurture's influence. Despite appearing well-adjusted, Bundy, who grew up in a working-class family, suffered from APD and was linked to at least 36 murders (Bio, 1). These examples highlight the interplay between psychological disorders and environmental factors in shaping violent behaviors.

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### Cultural Influences

Cultural and environmental factors also play a significant role in shaping serial killers. Exposure to violence, harmful ideologies, or neglect during formative years often influences their actions (Cornwell, 6). Serial killers frequently target strangers, with over 90% of victims being unknown to them (Maria, 1).

Charles Manson serves as a chilling example of cultural influence. Neglected by his alcoholic and promiscuous mother, Manson turned to crime and later manipulated his followers into committing murders, including the

infamous killing of actress Sharon Tate (Bio, 1). Similarly, Jeffrey Lundgren, a religious extremist, exploited apocalyptic teachings to incite violence among his followers (Bio, 1). These cases demonstrate how cultural influences, combined with charismatic leaders or harmful ideologies, can lead to extreme acts of violence.

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## **Conclusion**

The debate over whether serial killers are products of nature or nurture remains unresolved. However, research suggests that nurture often plays a more significant role. Childhood trauma, psychological disorders, and cultural influences all contribute to shaping violent tendencies. While external factors can encourage destructive behavior, individuals ultimately make their own choices. Parents, society, and environment may push individuals toward dangerous paths, but they do not entirely predetermine one's fate.

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