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The traits and the thrill of serial killers

motto:

„We are serial killers, your sons, husbands, we are everywhere.” Ted Bundy

1.1. The concept, and the characteristic features of serial killers

A serial killer is a person who murders three or more people over a period of more than 30 days, with a “cooling off” period between each murder, and whose motivation for killing is largely based on psychological gratification (Douglas et al, 2006).

Sexual element is often involved in the killings. Macdonald has set up a triad by which he characterized the childhood of serial killers as potential psychopaths. He highlighted bedwetting, arson and torturing of animals as appalling phenomena (Innes, 2007). According to Edwin H Sutherland, crime can be acquired from our environment, therefore, childhood imprinting is substantial (Korinek, 2010). The murders may have been attempted or completed in a similar fashion and the victims may have had something in common; for example, occupation, ethnicity, appearance, sex, age group, taxi drivers, homelessness, and the social circumstances. Interestingly enough, civilians, wearing red jacket were also targets of one of the serial killers. The intruding, or the method of commitment, can also be similar. They may exhibit varying degrees of mental illness and/or psychopathy, sociopathy, which may contribute to their homicidal behaviour. They were often abused —emotionally, physically and/or sexually —by a family member. There was deficiency in their rearing: some of them were dressed like girls as being boys, neglected, or had sadistic parents (Douglas, 1998). Some of them, were taken into reformatory institution, or orphanage, lacking of parents, or the parent was a prostitute. No wonder, they are dissociative, and have identity disorder. Due to the lack of parental rearing, they have no moral values, because they could not acquire it. They cannot make a distinction between good and bad, do not have guilty conscience, therefore, reward, or punishing is ineffective for them. Subsequently, they will become fraudster, perpetrator or gambler. They were frequently bullied or socially isolated as children or adolescents, or suffered from childhood trauma. Alcoholists and mentally disordered people might have been among their family members. They were abandoned or alone in many cases in their childhood. Childhood trauma may create irreversible changes in the structure of the brain, due to which it begins to think in a diverse way (Farkas, 2015). Most of them eagerly need power, and want to show off, yet, they are incapable of achieving it in a moral way. The more they force their victim in a subordinate position by violence, the better they feel. Those who were abused in their childhood, most of them will take a revenge in their adulthood. For the reason why, some of them are narcissists, they are unable to endure failure, and they think, that they are entitled to revenge. Most of them, do not learn from their experience and mistakes, do not have self-control, and have difficulties to adapt to society (Bottyán, 2015). They are egoistic, intolerant, feel inferiority, have ambivalent feelings, and endure frustration hard. For the reason why, they feel worthless, due to childhood abuse, or

lower social status, they try to compensate the inferiority for committing crime and taking revenge. On the other hand, they may feel superiority, acting like demigod, who can decide on anybody's fate. As they intimidate civilians, and mislead the authorities, the perpetrator feels more power. Sexual perversion can be kept tab during most of the perpetrations. The sight of blood, wounds and the begging of the victim enhance their cruelty and perversion. Most of them need a partner, who is unwilling to have sexual intercourse, and extend the suffer of the victim, to feel euphoria (Leszeneki, 2000). Manipulation, being popular, following the events regarding their crime in the media, good manners and primitive instincts may also characterize them. Instincts like cannibalism, which can derive from sadism, or affection. Tasting flesh, excites them, then subsequently, they feel much worse. Since cannibalism is the worst form of aggression, they think, that if they tasted flesh, they were entitled to anything in life aftermath. They might think, they rejuvenate their bodies, or, they try to identify themselves with the victims (Leszeneki, 2000). Most of them reckon, that law does not apply to them, they live according to their own rules, and, should any unjust event happens to them, they will take a revenge. In most cases, they live double lives, having a family, in order to avoid being caught. Sometimes, they prefer choosing an elder woman, since, they are more independent (Bottyán, 2015). The other side of the coin is, when they feel hatred towards women, deriving from a dominating mother. Sometimes, they project the negative world on women, and they vent their anger by torturing them. Imagination is always substantial in the development of the serial killer. They frequently fantasize on murders, in their childhood. These fantasies focus on power, typical elements and subordination, which characteristic features will subsequently appear in their real crime. Some of them find pleasure in reading about the diverse manifestation of sadism (rape, torture), and are likely to watch pictures with such content.

From neurophysiological aspect, brain damage, the abnormality of brain waves and the dysfunction of brain work can be revealed in most cases. There is disharmony in the structure of their psyche, therefore their reactions are pathological (Adler et al, 2002). As a creative survivor, they can improve a technique of managing to escape from the physical and mental abuse, by not attaching certain functions in the brain (Bottyán, 2015).

The **motivation** for serial killing is usually based on psychological gratification. Most of the killings involve sexual contact with the victim, but the FBI states that motives for serial murder include **anger, thrill, financial gain, and attention seeking**.

1.2. The core classification

Serial killers can be clustered in diverse groups, one of which is the **Organized one**, whose characteristic features are the following:

- Single, white males are the perpetrators
- Employment difficulties
- Unstable family history
- Often abandoned by their fathers and raised by their mothers
- Criminal, psychiatric and alcoholic histories
- Abuse histories
- High rates of suicide attempts
- Interested in voyeurism, fetishism and sadomasochistic pornography

- Have a history of inappropriate bed wetting
- Fascinated with fires
- Sadistic activity/torturing small animals
- Above average intelligence
- Methodological
- Lure victims, sometimes by pretext, inspire confidence, adapt well
- Maintain control over the crime scene
- Follow their crimes in the media
- Usually socially adequate, sometimes having a spouse and children
- Thoroughly elaborated crime
- Vanish the incriminating evidence
- When being captured, the acquaintances characterize them, as being peaceful
- Exert not to be caught, mislead the authorities, and incriminate someone else (fake suicide note)
- Not always act in the heat of the moment
- React appropriately in unexpected situation
- Improves his method of perpetration
- Keeps some of the personal properties of the victim as a trophy, in order to recall the phases of the commitment

Ted Bundy was said to have applied a pseudo plaster on his arm, so that women might help him with his parcels, while he struck them down by a crowbar, then sped off. Most of them are aware of judicial sciences, and as a result, it is easier for them to vanish the burdening evidence, for instance, by tying a weight to the victim, and sink them. They follow the news in the media, and they are very proud of what they did, as if it had been an enormous task to fulfil. They try to divert the attention, and incriminate someone else, as *Harold Shipman*, an English G.P. did. For the reason why he diagnosed natural death, he murdered at least 250 (presumably more than 400) elderly patients from 1971 to 1998.

The traits of the **disorganized** ones are as follows:

- Low IQ
- Impulsive
- Murder when the opportunity arises
- Rarely dispose of the body, usually leaving the body where they found it.
- Introverted, lack of friends, withdrawn, lonely, little interest in hobbies and social interactions
- Lack of premeditation
- Do not specialize in a certain victim type
- Pounce on the victim, without any warning
- After the death of the victim, they make rituals (maiming, cannibalism, necrophilia)
- They are in motion all the time, therefore they easily avoid being captured
- Seem weird and odd to acquaintances
- Not aware of the consequences of the murder, sometimes, they have murky memories about the victims
- Sexually perverted
- Feel anxiety during the crime
- Make mistakes during the perpetration
- Deform the corpses

In some cases the organized features turn into disorganized ones, as the number of the murders increases. In the beginning, they act cautiously, yet, as soon as their compulsive behaviour overcomes them, they become careless and impulsive.

1.3. What motivates serial killers?

According to **motivations**, five types of serial killers can be differentiated, which are as follows:

The **visionary** serial killers suffer from psychotic breaks with reality, sometimes believing they are another person or are compelled to murder by entities such as the Devil or God. Hallucinations, visions and fictions can characterize this type. *Herbert Mullin* for instance, killed 13 people after having heard voices, which said that he could solely prevent an earthquake in California, if he murdered people. *Ed Gain* ate the body of 12 women, who resembled his mother, moreover, he made furnishings and dresses from the skin of the victims.

The **mission-oriented** killers typically justify their acts as "ridding the world" of a certain type of person perceived as undesirable, such as homosexuals, prostitutes, mentally disordered, or people of different ethnicity or religion; however, they are generally not psychotic. They think, that they act for the sake of a noble purpose, since, with the help of murdering „futile“ persons, they contribute to the progress of the society. The classical examples for this type, are *Gary Ridgway*, *Aileen Wuornos* and *Jack the Ripper*. *Wuornos* was a prostitute, and she killed her clients. Generally these murders are not sexual oriented.

The **hedonistic** type of serial killer seeks thrills and derives pleasure from killing, seeing people as expendable means to this goal. After being captured, *Yang Xinhai* characterized this feeling:” When I killed someone, I felt sexual satisfaction, which inspired me for more murders. I ignored, whether they deserved life or not, I didn’t worry about it at all”.

The **power-oriented** type’s objective is to gain and exert power over their victim. Many power- or control-motivated killers sexually abuse their victims, but they differ from hedonistic killers in that rape is not motivated by lust but as simply another form of dominating the victim. The aptitude of this type, can be originated from childhood humiliation, since, the perpetrator may feel weak and incapable. They often attach the previous bad experience to the present situation, therefore, they apply the cruel maltreatment on their victims.

Most of the **profit oriented** types are not considered as mass murders, since, they kill for properties, and it is mostly the profit making which inspires them, rather than psychological constraint. *Marcel Petiot* for instance, killed 63 people during the Nazi regime, by luring them to provide „shelter“ and smuggle them through the border to escape from the regime. He misappropriated the victims’ values as well, but, for the reason why the amount of the properties was extremely high, he was considered to be a psychopath too.

John Haigh lured his victims into his workshop, where he struck them down by an axe, dismembered them, and vanished the incriminating evidence by acid. He kept on corresponding with the victims parents, and requested money in the name of the dead person for profit making. When he ran out of money, he killed again. His eager helpfulness and some teeth which couldn’t be dissolved, revealed him. Sometimes he preserved some properties

from his victims, and from curiosity he tasted his victim's blood, and while the acid were dissolving the body parts, he was enjoying his tea in the nearby teahouse.

1.4. Women serial killers in Hungary

Interestingly enough, at the beginning of 1900, many mysterious murders happened in Hungarian villages, and the committers were subsequently infamous for their arsenic poisoning. There were women who wanted to get rid of their „good for nothing” husbands, the unwanted child, or contributed to poison the too old, mentally disordered or handicapped relative of families, provided they required it. 162 cases were revealed in connection with poisoning, yet, around 1000 victims could have been poisoned in reality, in Tiszazug village. Most of the victims were infants, whom their parents wanted to get rid of, due to the birth control of that time. Firstly, a midwife began to extract arsenic from a sticky paper meant to kill flies. The „reputation” of the poison spread, and its application was an open secret in the closed village community. The poison killed the infants immediately, while, in case of adults, more dosage had to be mixed on more occasions into meal, in order to achieve the same impact. Only in 1929, the arsenic murders were revealed, when more and more corpses were exhumed. Since arsenic dissolves slowly, it could easily be disclosed in the organism even years later. After clearing up 162 cases, the further exhumations were suspended, as it got more awkward, moreover, the foreign press began to inquire as well. The murders were solely committed by women – mothers, wives, women relatives, midwives –. 30 women were taken into custody, some of which were executed, and the rest, committed suicide in the prison. The midwife, who supplied the region with poison, also committed suicide by her own poison.

Women, did not only murder by arsenic, but by nicotine as well, as *Papp Erzsébet* did. She soaked nicotine leaves and extracted poison from it. Nicotine weakens muscles, intervenes in circulation, and causes cardiac insufficiency and the paralysis of respiratory system. After making an attempt on a five year old child, and realized the efficiency of the fatal poison, she made her alcoholic, aggressive husband drink the liquid. Subsequently, she poisoned her friend and her second husband as well.

2. Cases, and the most notorious ones

Dr. Henry Howard Holmes, was one of the first documented serial killers in the US. Holmes opened a hotel which was the location of many of his murders. Holmes was put on trial for the murder of the Pitezel children and confessed 30 murders in Chicago, Indianapolis and six attempted murders.

Jack the ripper was one of the most notorious serial killers, who murdered 5 women, mainly prostitutes, in 1888. He murdered his victims with special cruelty, by removing the inner organs with the preciseness of a surgeon, no wonder, butchers, and doctors were also suspected. Forensics claimed, that he was left handed, an expert in anatomy, who could remove the organs with a special expertise. While music was on, he put the 5 th victim's organs around her, on her bed. He committed the murders on such scenes, to form a cross on the map. He murdered between 11 pm-4 am. On September 30th, he was interrupted, while slitting the throat of one of his victims, therefore, he did not maim her. When the lady was

found, she was holding grapes and sweets in her hands. Having been interrupted during his murder, he struck again within 45 minutes. He cut one of his victim's kidney, and sent it to the police, claiming, he fried and ate the other one. On this eventful night, when policemen stood at every corner of the slums, the murderer managed to slip away stealthily. The public was outraged, and was full of fears during this Victorian period of London. Under the pseudonym of Jack the Ripper, he wrote his first letter to the police in red ink – by the blood of his victim—mocking them, by not being capable of capturing him. He was right, he had never been caught, yet, his identity might have been revealed in 2014, with the help of DNA sample. A 23 year old Polish immigrant barber, was said to have committed the atrocities, according to DNA analysis, extracted from a silk shawl, as a forensic evidence, allegedly found in the crime scene. Dr. Louhelainen managed to extract 7 incomplete fragments of DNA, and tried to match their sequences with the DNA from the living descendants. He insists on his revelation, while others are still sceptical about the result.

John Wayne Gacy, Jr. also known as the *Killer Clown*, was an American serial killer and rapist who was convicted of the sexual assault and murder of a minimum of 33 teenage boys and young men in a series of killings committed between 1972 and 1978 in Chicago, Illinois. He spent 14 years on death row before he was executed by lethal injection at Statesville Correctional Center on May 10, 1994. Gacy became known as the "Killer Clown" due to his charitable services at fundraising events, parades and children's parties where he would dress as "Pogo the Clown", a character he devised himself. Though he had 2 wives, he had suppressed homosexuality, therefore he regularly beat his wives. No one would have thought, that he was a serial killer, since, he employed and supported young unskilled workers, entertained kids on parties and in hospitals, donated money for the democratic party, once was elected the „man of the year”, praised by the White House, and even met the wife of president Carter. He was also the member of the local catholic society. He lured his victims into his car by marijuana, narcotized them by chloroform, and tied them onto his bed. He brutally beat, tortured, raped and strangled his 33 victims. Subsequently, he buried all the corpses in his garden. In a phone interview shortly before his execution, he told a Knight-Tribune reporter, "There's been 11 hardback books on me, 31 paperbacks, two screenplays, one movie, one off-Broadway play, five songs, and over 5,000 articles. What can I say about it?" But of course, he quickly protested, "I have no ego for any of this garbage." Just after midnight on May 10, 1994, Gacy was executed by lethal injection.

Theodore Robert „Ted” Bundy was an American serial killer, kidnapper, rapist, and necrophile who assaulted and murdered numerous young women and girls during the 1970s and possibly earlier. After more than a decade of denials, he confessed shortly before his execution 30 homicides committed in seven states between 1974 and 1978; the true total remains unknown, and could be much higher.

Bundy became a suspect in a progressively longer list of unsolved homicides in multiple states. Facing murder charges in Colorado, he engineered two dramatic escapes and committed further assaults, including three murders, before his ultimate recapture in Florida in 1978. He received three death sentences in two separate trials for the Florida homicides.

Bundy was regarded as handsome and charismatic by his young female victims, traits he exploited to win their trust. Ted Bundy died in the electric chair at Raiford Prison in Florida, on January 24, 1989. a biographer described him as "a sadistic sociopath who took pleasure from another human's pain and the control he had over his victims, to the point of death, and even after.”

The *Zodiac Killer* was a serial killer who operated in northern California in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The killer's identity remains unknown. The Zodiac murdered victims in Benicia, Vallejo, Lake Berryessa, and San Francisco between December 1968 and October 1969. Four men and three women between the ages of 16 and 29 were targeted. Although the Zodiac

claimed 37 murders in letters to the newspapers, investigators agree on only seven confirmed victims, two of whom survived. The killer originated the name "Zodiac" in a series of taunting letters sent to the local Bay Area press. These letters included four cryptograms. His riddle was revealed by a couple, in which he claimed, that he enjoyed killing, and his victims would be his slaves in paradise.

Ed Gain's mother was a bigoted and dominating mother, who disdained men, especially her alcoholic husband. She wanted to deprive his sons of their sexual desires, and considered all women immoral, therefore, they moved to a farm isolated, to avoid the immorality of the town. She did not let her sons make friend with the classmates either. As he could not assimilate, he was shy and felt astray. He did not know, how to treat his feminine aptitude, although he disdained women, he respected and looked up to them. Ed adored her mother, and when she died, he made a sanctuary of her room. He began to read about anatomy and Nazi doctors, moreover visited cemeteries at night. He wasn't aware of his sexual identity, and began to murder, and exhume freshly buried women bodies to strip off their skin, and create a „blanket" for a rocking chair, lamp, dustbin, bowls from skull, masks, and belt from nipples. He wore the skin as dresses and mask, using lipstick as well. As he was regarded a non-compos mentis according to experts, he was taken to lunatic asylum.

The Soviet Hannibal, *Andrej Romanovics Csikatilo*, killed 52 victims by knife, hand and teeth. He cut all of his victims' eyes, because he thought, that the picture of the murderer, is burnt in the eyes, therefore, he cut them. Although he had a wife and two children, the only objective of his was, to have sexual gratification, when he had sexual intercourse with the deads, as he was impotent. He maimed his victims, cooked the genitals, and ate them. In this era, no one would have thought, that in the Soviet Union, anyone could have committed such a crime. Only a foreigner could have been the perpetrator, as they thought. The investigator who was indulged in the case, got nervous breakdown twice, as he was hindered by the authorities. During the trial, Csikatilo was put in a cage, so that the victims' relatives could not harm him. He interrupted the whole trial by waving his obscene newspapers, and singing.

The monster of the Andes, *Pedro Lopez* raped more than 400 girls, and killed them in Colombia, Peru and Equador. He himself was the victim of paedophilia, therefore he decided to take a revenge. Killing was his mission. He had to kill 3-4 girls a week otherwise nervous breakdown dominated him. Sometimes he dug them out, and played with them. He loved their virginity, and child soul. He never regretted what he did. He spent some years in a prison, but the state did not have money for more trials, therefore, he was released at the Colombian border.

Albert Fish (the Brooklyn vampire) was taken to orphanage by his mother, after his father's death. He was treated by sadistic methods, and he had to watch while the other orphans were whipped. Little by little, he began to enjoy watching this sadistic procedure, moreover, he started to torture himself, by swallowing needles and burning rope. His auditive hallucinations began in 1917, which also characterized his family, and reckoned, that he acted for an Apostol's suggestion. Most of his victims were mentally disordered and afro Americans, who „wouldn't have been missing for anyone"-as he claimed. He seemed a decent elderly man, when he asked the Budd family to let their 12 year old daughter, Grace to a birthday party. Grace was never seen again, since Fish murdered, and ate her, within 9 days. 6 years later,

when he confessed his sin in a letter having been sent to the family, he was captured. He assessed the number of his victims as 100, but only 10 were proved to be committed by him.

Jeffrey Dahmer, the Milwaukee cannibal grew up increasingly withdrawn and uncommunicative in his teenager life, showing little interest in any hobbies or social interactions. He had alcohol histories, and when his parents divorced, he was left alone in his parents' house at the age of 18, when he killed first. 9 years passed before he killed again, and by the summer of 1991, Dahmer murdered one person each week. As he failed to cuff his last victim's hands, he managed to escape, and reported the violence of Dahmer to the police. They found 7 drilled skulls, boiled and varnished, photos of inner organs, and dismembered body parts in acid or defrost. He was charged with 17 murders, necrophilia and cannibalism.

Gary Ridgway, the Green River murderer was killing women, mainly prostitutes, run aways and drug addicts, over 17 years, after raping them. Showing no remorse, he threw most of his victims into the Green river. After his third marriage, only in 2001, he was arrested due to DNA tests. He was not executed after he had killed 49 women, since he turned state evidence, by showing the hidden victims to the police. Ridgway was said to be the most „productive” serial killer of the US.

No one is said to be born a monster according to experts. Childhood trauma, upbringing and the environmental circumstances contribute to a great extent to become a serial killer. As a consequence, all of us are responsible for how we treat our companions.

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