

Research Report

Ted Bundy Serial Murders

An Analysis Based on Classical Criminological Theory

Mehmet Cuce

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Instructor: Isabel Arriagada

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The Serial Killings of Ted Bundy

On February 1, 1974, 21-year old Washington University undergraduate Lynda Ann Healy, is abducted, raped and killed by Ted Bundy. This murder marks the first official victim to Ted Bundy's killing spree. The homicide, sexual assault and abduction of young women during the 1970's was rare but concerns grew as homicide rates found steady growth. The homicide rate doubled from the early 1960s to the late 1970s, increasing from 4.6 per 100,000 U.S. residents in 1962 to 9.7 per 100,000 by 1979 (FBI, 2011). A majority of women who have fallen victim to these types of crimes were between the ages of 25-40, and generally under the context of marital or relationship issues. The typical offenders of these crimes were men who typically faced mental health issues, relationships or sexual frustration. In the case of Ted Bundy, he didn't fall into many of these demographics. This was highlighted in his preference for younger women between the ages of 12-25, and the methods in which he would commit the crimes. Most of his victims were women he had no connection to, often luring them by impersonating law enforcement or faking injuries, then abducting them. The random nature of his crimes lead to him becoming one of the most infamous serial killers in modern history. When discussing the crimes of Ted Bundy, It's important to understand the events that took place which lead to his eventual capture. These events help us better understand the motivations behind his actions and his mindset.

After the murder of Lynda Ann Healy took place, several other women would fall victim to Bundy over the course of a year. A pattern in the circumstances in which they

disappeared would start to emerge, leading investigators to grow suspicious. This growing suspicion eventually led to him being caught with tools such as crowbar, handcuffs, a ski mask and pantyhose with eyeholes cut in it. Initially it was thought that these were tools of burglary but they were actually linked to an attempted abduction that had occurred in 1974(Gowen et al. 2019). Bundy had impersonated a police officer in order to gain the trust of 18 year old Carol DaRonch, however after the attempted abduction, Carol had managed to escape and reported the incident to the police. With the arrest of Bundy, investigators were able to charge him with the attempted abduction of DaRonch. As his case went on however, investigators were also able to tie Bundy to the murder of Caryn Campbell. On June 7, 1977, After being charged with murder, Bundy was faced with another hearing where he would be given special privileges, as he chose to represent himself in court. One of the privileges was visiting the court library, where he would find an opportunity to escape. He managed to slip through the window, where he was injured and eventually led to a six day manhunt. After his recapture, he would be put back in Jail, where he would plan a second escape. In December of 1977, he had found an opportunity and used the ceiling of his cell to escape. By the time officials noticed his disappearance, he had already gone to Florida, where he would continue his spree. With Bundy now being free for almost a month and half, he would go on to kill two more women and injure 2 more at Florida State University. Using a car that he stole he would then go on to kill his final victim, 12-year-old Kimberly Leach (FSA, 2024). Bundy was finally arrested on February 15, 1978, after police identified the stolen car and tied it to him. He was tried and found

guilty of the murder of the three women he killed. Prior to his execution, he admitted to killing 30 women. He was sentenced to death, and was executed on January 24, 1989.

Classical School of Criminology

To the crime of the serial killings of Ted Bundy, I plan to apply to the tenants of the Classical School of Criminology. The Classical School of Criminology is one of the earliest approaches to understanding crime itself, it came to be around the 18th century and shaped how we understand criminology. It was founded by Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham, and revolves around the idea that all individuals base their actions based on the potential for pleasure and/or pain. According to Beccaria, crime occurs when the potential for pleasure or benefits outweighs the potential for pain or cost. If punishment is severe, certain and swift, a rational individual will weigh potential gains and losses before engaging in illegal activity and will be discouraged from breaking the law if the loss is greater than the gain. (Abramovaite, J., 2022) So in order to prevent crime, society must deliver on punishment that is equal to that of the offence.

Classical School of Criminology, is under the assumption that all people possess free will and engage in rational decision making. So crime is not necessarily tied to morality, mental illness or purely environmental factors but rather a conscious decision. Beccaria states that crime needs to be deterred rather than punished, in the sense that punishment is administered for retribution. Crime should be punished enough so that it prevents it from happening in the future, but not so much that it causes injustice.

Similarly, Bentham's idea that people seek to maximize pleasure and minimize pain acts

as a pillar to choice based deterrence.

A strength of the Classical School is in its role in the modern criminal justice system. It plays a role in the foundations of sentencing, proportionate punishment and legal guidelines. Its role in due process, equal treatment under the law and standardized penalties are extremely important in modern criminal justice. While it does have its strengths, there are some flaws associated with the Classical school. A common criticism is that it oversimplifies people's behavior and ignores social, psychological and biological factors that could affect a person's judgment. Certain individuals who lack the ability to independently rationalize their decisions might not follow or even understand the deterrent effect. Something else worth noting is how there is a lack of certainty regarding punishment, some people simply don't get caught. It's important to consider real world factors, and it presents a genuine issue when discussing criminal theory.

Application of the Classical School to the Crimes of Ted Bundy

When analyzing Ted Bundy's behavior through the perspective of the Classical School, many core components of theory become applicable. Bundy exemplifies the idea of rational thought, and makes very calculated moves, weighing his risk vs reward while planning his crimes.

Bundy's crimes generally involved planning ahead and deception. He would fake being injured by wearing slings or casts to create a false sense of security, where would then

ask women to help him in order to lure them into his trap. His impersonation of law enforcement was utilized to gain trust from victims. These acts were premeditated, had intention and a purpose, which shows a high level of rational thinking. Bundy understood when and where to take his victims in order to reduce risks, places such as parks, parking lots and campuses. These behaviors align with Classical thought, where a criminal will calculate the potential for gain against the pain of punishment.

The way he evaded law enforcement by changing his location, altering his looks or even escaping from jail, prove that Bundy was assessing and managing the risk of getting punished. He understood that there was a limit to law enforcement and took advantage of those limits, by doing so it also proves there was a failure to apply a swift and certain punishment which reduces the deterrent effect. Bundy saw killing as a benefit that would outway the costs of it.

However this application of Classical thought does have an issue. While Bundy did display premeditated behavior, he also displayed characteristics of psychopathy and narcissism. There is an argument to be made about the effects that these traits might have on an individual's ability to make rational decisions and reduce the perception of punishment, which can undermine the belief of free will and rationality. Furthermore, Bundy did escalate his crimes by engaging in necrophilic acts and visiting the scenes of his crimes which can suggest that he may have been mentally disturbed to a point where rationality can no longer apply.

Despite possible criticisms, many of Bundy's behaviors exhibit traits that would align within the Classical School. He was meticulous in his actions, understood the risks involved, and adapted to his environment to avoid punishment. As Beccaria explains, law should be designed to deter rational actors, and in the case of Bundy, the lack of early deterrence might have emboldened him.

In conclusion, while some Ted Bundy's characteristics might not align perfectly with the Classical School, many of the core beliefs still remain applicable. It helps display how calculated decision making and weak deterrents may have enabled one of the most notorious serial killers.

Reflection

Studying and applying the Classical School of Criminology to a real case such as Ted Bundy's had greatly deepened my understanding of both criminal behavior and the challenges faced by the criminal justice system. I found the Classical School useful in explaining aspects of Bundy's decision-making, particularly in explaining his methodology, strategies, manipulative tactics, and aversion to law enforcement. The theory's focus on rationality and deterrence helps frame Bundy not as a chaotic or impulsive person but as someone who planned their crimes meticulously while understanding and minimizing the risk of punishment. This helps give me some on how legal systems aim to prevent crime and what happens when those deterrent systems fail.

That said, the process of writing this report highlighted some of the issues associated with applying just a single theory to real-life cases. The main issue is that all crime is unique in its own way, with different motivations and purposes behind it. This difference in motivation tends to defy some of the boundaries set by these theories. Bundy's psychological traits and compulsive behaviors at times seemed to go against purely rational explanations, suggesting the need to consider interdisciplinary theories, including psychological or biosocial models as well. While the Classical School offers valuable insights into deterrence and punishment, it may oversimplify the motivations behind particularly violent or pathological crimes.

One challenge I encountered during this project was finding the right balance between academic theory and the disturbing details of the real case. It was emotionally difficult to write objectively about the suffering of victims while focusing on the analysis. Another challenge was ensuring I stayed within the word limits while addressing all required components of each section. However, this constraint also helped me write more clearly and stay focused.

Studying criminological theory has given me a broader toolkit for analyzing crime. Before this course, I viewed criminality as one dimensional, lacking any depth besides good and bad. Now, I understand how the many different theories regarding the criminal mind can guide both the analysis of crime and the development of more effective policies. Overall, this assignment has not only improved my understanding of

crime and criminal behavior but also sharpened my critical thinking and ethical awareness when approaching crime.

Sources

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