

## Dark Minds: Into The Mind of a Serial Killer

Despite the fact that serial killers literally murder people, I think that scariest thing about them is that we don't actually know much about how their minds work. It is clear that they all have a mental disorder that stops them from feeling mercy for living things, but we still aren't sure what exactly causes them to develop it. There are many reasons to believe that past trauma and family issues can lead psychopaths to commit crimes, but it is not likely the cause of the disorder itself. And although there are multiple killers like Charles Manson who had childhood neglect and abuse, there are also many like Jeff Dahmer, and Dennis Rader who had normal childhoods, with no trauma and supportive families. With all this considered, it is very hard to pinpoint what exactly causes psychopathy and sociopathy.

Are all serial killers and murderers psychopaths? While many famous serial killers are psychopaths such as the late Ted Bundy, and John Wayne Gacy. But there are many other serial killers that psychologists believe were sociopaths, such as Jack the Ripper, and "Charlie Chop-Off" because of their notoriously spontaneous and violent murders. Although crimes committed by sociopaths are known to be violent and gruesome, they are nothing compared to those committed by psychotics. Psychopaths and sociopaths both have a personality disorder, one that is more difficult to treat than a psychotic disease.

Psychosis is the complete loss of one's sense of reality, they can be similar to psychopaths when it comes to blunted emotions but they differ from psychopaths when it comes to overall sense of reality. Psychopaths are meticulous and manipulative but they do not suffer from hallucinations or delusions. They do not hear voices, or see things that are not there.

Opposed to this are psychotics such as serial killer Coral Eugene Watts, who strangled several women because he claimed to see evil in their eyes. Belle Sorenson Guinness, who murdered her *husbands* because she thought men were evil. There is also Richard Trenton Chase, who drank and bathed in his victims blood because he thought he had to do this in order to prevent Nazis from turning his blood into powder using poison. There are many ideas as to what scientifically causes psychotic diseases (ex. Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia). One concept is that the glutamate system is dysregulated. The overstimulation causes manic phases, delusions and hallucinations.

In most cases, during childhood, serial killers start with antisocial personality disorder. Antisocial personality disorder typically depends more on environment and a bit of genetics. For instance, if a parent has antisocial personality disorder the child is at risk. When studying adopted children of people with this disease, it shows that overall environment can factor in to whether or not they will develop antisocial personality disorder as well. Children who have conduct disorder or attention-deficit/hyperactivity before age 10 are also at risk of developing antisocial personality disorder as adults, ultimately leading to psychopathy or sociopathy if continued.

There are various differences between all three mental disorders and how they commit their murders. Psychopaths are notoriously very calculated and careful; they are clean and have extensive plans on how to get away with their crimes. Sociopaths, who are often lead to crimes due to violent outbursts are often quite violent, messy, and much more spontaneous. And psychotic murderers that are typically quite vicious, with a fantastical element to them which usually has something to do with their hallucinations. The way psychopaths and sociopaths

commit their crimes (assuming they commit crimes at all), usually stem from how one develops the disorder.

First, psychopathy is usually thought to be caused by “nature” (genetics) while sociopathy is thought to be caused by “nurture” (environment growing up). These are drastic differences that ultimately change their behavior towards others and the outside world. Psychopathy is linked with a physiological defect that causes severe underdevelopment in the portion of the brain that regulates impulse control and emotions. Sociopathy is very different because it is thought to be something you develop rather than something you are born with. Because they are not born with it, sociopaths are able to feel empathy in certain situations and with certain people. When it comes to psychopaths their murderous thoughts they are apart of their identity, with sociopaths they are almost like two separate personalities; the “normal” and the killer. Many of the world’s population of sociopaths are hiding in plain sight, they have normal jobs, and normal lives, but on the inside they may experience impulsive thoughts and feelings that are violent.

Even though we *still* do not know much about serial killers minds, using what we *do* know we can learn a lot about how other people's minds work. For example, we can learn more about how childhood experience affects the adult mind, or the reasoning as to why serial killers commit murder in the first place. And we can still learn more in the future, currently psychologists are hard at work to find out even more about psychopaths and sociopaths so they can help them if they find them falling into violent tendencies.



“Cereal’ killer” image by Patrick Hindman

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