



## Examining the Societal and Childhood Trauma Influences on Necrophilia in Bundy: An American Icon

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### Abstract

This research paper investigates the societal influence on individuals who develop necrophilic tendencies, using trauma theory as a framework for analysis. Focusing on the movie "Bundy: An American Icon" as a case study, we delve into the depiction of the notorious serial killer, Ted Bundy, and explore how societal factors may have played a role in shaping his deviant behavior. By examining the film's portrayal of Bundy's traumatic experiences and the subsequent development of necrophilic tendencies, this study aims to shed light on the complex interplay between individual psychology, societal influence, and deviant sexual behavior. By critically analyzing the movie and incorporating relevant literature on necrophilia, trauma theory, and sociocultural influences, this research paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the societal influence on necrophiles. Through this exploration, we hope to raise awareness about the complex relationship between individual psychopathology and external factors, highlighting the need for further research, prevention strategies, and intervention techniques to address the societal roots of necrophilic tendencies.

Keywords: necrophilia, societal influence, trauma theory, deviant behavior, Ted Bundy, film analysis, sexual psychopathology.

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### 1. Introduction

*Bundy: An American Icon* is a 2008 crime drama film, directed by Michael Feifer, that tells the story of Ted Bundy, one of the most notorious serial killers in American history. The character of Bundy is played by an American actor, Corin Nemec, who relived the life of Ted Bundy through his role and exposed his crimes, necrophilic instincts, and activities. The film follows Bundy's life, from his charming and seemingly normal exterior to his dark and brutal acts of violence. The movie portrays Bundy's childhood, his relationships, and his modus operandi as a serial killer. It delves into his ability to blend in with society, his charismatic demeanor, and his manipulation of those around him. The film explores Bundy's dark and twisted mind, shedding light on the psychological and emotional complexities that may have contributed to his monstrous actions. *Bundy: An American Icon* also portrays the law enforcement investigations and the challenges faced by the police in trying to capture Bundy. It depicts the impact of Bundy's actions on the victims, their families, and the community, as well as the legal and moral dilemmas surrounding the case. The film presents a disturbing and

chilling account of Bundy's actions, his capture, and subsequent trial. It serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the horrors of serial murder and its devastating consequences on individuals and society.

The human mind is an extremely intricate system that controls all of our thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and experiences. It is made up of many interrelated parts including the conscious and unconscious mind, memory system, sensory system, and many other complex systems that work together to create our subjective experience of reality. Emotions are an essential part of the human mind and play an important role in shaping our thoughts, behaviors, and experiences. Emotions affect our thought patterns, decision-making, and social interactions. Trauma and other negative experiences can majorly impact the processing and regulation of emotions, leading to problems managing and expressing emotions. Trauma can have a profound effect on the human psyche and can lead to a range of psychological and emotional problems. Traumatic experiences can produce lasting changes in the brain, altering how we process and interpret information and our emotional responses to different stimuli. There are many types of trauma, including physical trauma, emotional trauma, sexual trauma, and more. Each type of trauma has a unique effect on the mind and can produce a range of symptoms including anxiety, depression, dissociation, flashbacks, and more. Effective trauma treatment often includes a combination of psychotherapy, medication, and other supportive interventions. Trauma studies explore how identity and memory are affected by trauma. It also focuses on the individual's conception of the external world and the social relationships maintained by him or her or them.

Adolescence trauma is commonplace amongst serial killers, with many of them having experienced some shape of abuse, overlook, or abandonment at some point in their adolescence. It's a far-fetched idea that this early trauma could have a lasting mental impact on a man or woman, leading to a higher probability of violent behavior as an adult. It is theorized that reveling in formative years of trauma can result in a distorted sense of fact within the mind of a serial killer. If they have grown up in an environment wherein, they have been violated, abused, or omitted, they may come to view the world distinctively. They may grow to be desensitized to violence, believing that it is an everyday and suitable manner to respond to conditions. They will also expand a distorted view of justice or morality, believing that their suffering justifies any manner of retribution.

Childhood trauma and isolation are also known to have profound and lasting effects on an individual's psychological development and can contribute to various psychological disorders. Isolation resulting from childhood trauma can perpetuate further isolation in adulthood. Individuals may struggle to form and maintain healthy relationships, leading to continued isolation and a limited support network, which can further contribute to the development or exacerbation of psychological disorders.

Necrophile and necrophilia are terms frequently used collectively to explain a person who has a bizarre sexual attraction to corpses. Necrophilia is a form of paraphilia that is a bizarre sexual attraction to something out of the doors of the traditional, wholesome sexual relationships that most people engage in. Necrophiles frequently have a sturdy preference to interact in sexual pastimes with corpses, which may be manifested in numerous ways. The

maximum not unusual form of necrophilia is the choice to have sexual intercourse with a corpse. Different styles of necrophilia may additionally include kissing or caressing a corpse, sexually dressing a corpse, and having an emotional date with a corpse. Necrophilia is an intellectual sickness that is considered against the law in many places around the arena. Necrophilic traits can be genetic or acquired depending upon the individual's childhood, parenthood, friend circle, and social life. While necrophilia need not be associated with criminality, many notorious serial killers have been found to be necrophilic. It's essential to observe that necrophilia isn't a sign of mental contamination, however as an alternative a signal of a person's incapacity to shape wholesome sexual relationships and to view death as a herbal part of existence. Necrophiles often have problems dealing with the emotions and mental outcomes that come with dying and can seek solace inside a corpse's physicality. Necrophilia is a highly controversial and stigmatized sexual disorder involving sexual attraction or engagement with corpses. While its historical context and psychological underpinnings offer some insights into its development, necrophilia remains a complex and poorly understood phenomenon.

Necrophilia, derived from the Greek words "nekros" (meaning "dead") and "philia" (meaning "love" or "attraction"), refers to the sexual attraction or activity involving corpses. It is also addressed as necrolagnia, necrocoitus, necrochlesis, and thenatophilia (Aggarwal, 2016). Psychological research suggests that necrophilia often stems from complex psychosexual and emotional factors. Individuals with necrophilic tendencies may experience paraphilic fantasies or engage in postmortem sexual acts due to a range of possible causes, including childhood trauma, social isolation, or distorted sexual development. Necrophilia could also be considered a psychological disorder. Necrophilia has been mentioned in various ancient texts and folklore. In ancient Egypt, for instance, there are accounts of rituals involving sexual acts with corpses as a means of invoking fertility and rebirth. In Greek mythology, the story of the nymph Clytia, who transformed into a sunflower after her love affair with the sun god Helios ended tragically, touches upon necrophilic themes. During the Middle Ages, there were reports of necrophilic acts attributed to individuals believed to be possessed by demons or spirits. The fear of necrophilia often resulted in the implementation of strict burial practices, such as burying corpses facedown or placing heavy objects on top of them to deter potential acts.

## **2. Bundy's Journey to Necrophilia**

Theodore Robert Bundy, also known as Ted Bundy born on November 24, 1946, was an American serial killer who kidnapped, raped, and murdered dozens of young women and girls during the 1970s and possibly earlier. After more than a decade of denials, he confessed to 30 murders committed in seven states between 1974 and 1978. His true victim total is unknown. Ted Bundy engaged in sexual activities with corpses as the victims' dead bodies aroused more pleasure in him than their active, live bodies. In the movie, *Bundy: An American Icon*, Bundy sneaks into a sorority girl's house on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1978, and murders two women named Lisa Levy and Margaret Bowman. He hits their head with a baseball bat. Before killing them he takes a scarf that was lying on Margaret's bed and sniffs the scarf and he keeps sniffing it and is sexually turned on. After murdering them he gets the urge to have

sex with the dead bodies and he tries his level best to control the urge but later gives into his instincts. He unzips his pants and has sex with the dead bodies.

Later in the court, Bundy decides to defend himself in the court for the case where he is accused of the murder of the sorority girls.

*Reporter 1: who's going to be your attorney?*

*Bundy: Well, I'm going to be going with the only man I trust, and that's me.*

*Reporter 1: You're going to be acting as your own lawyer?*

*Bundy: of course, Why wouldn't I? I'm Law school educated and I know my case better than anyone else.*

*Reporter 2: Have you ever physically harmed anyone?*

*Bundy: I have answered many this many times before.*

*Reporter 2: And?*

*Bundy: Again, no. Not in the context of things you are speaking of.*

*Reporter 2: What does that mean? Are you guilty?*

*Bundy: I know that you're going to be paying close attention to the case. In America, we all have the right to self-defense. Okay? And soon I will be defending myself, and the truth will come out.*

The above-mentioned scenes take place when Bundy is interviewed by the reporters before entering the court. This highlights how Bundy was so confident in himself for proving that he is innocent. This shows the absence of guilt and lack of morality within him. Such a condition is aroused due to a normalized vision of violence in childhood. In the next scene, he questions Detective Jennings on the witness stand.

*Bundy: Describe for me, in detail, what you saw when you walked into the room of Lisa Levy and Margaret Bowman. In detail.*

*Jennings: Well, I walked down the hall to an officer standing at a door, and when I got to the door, I could see that the officer had tears welling up in his eyes. So I knew it must be a gruesome sight beyond the door.*

...

*And when I stepped inside the room, I was shocked by the most gruesome heinous sight I'd ever seen. When I stepped inside the room, I saw Miss Levy's bed first. Her bed was closest to the window. Her arms and legs were twisted in strange positions. Her white sheets were almost entirely red, from the blood that had seeped from her head and from between her legs. Where her weight was heaviest on the mattress, the blood had pooled and dripped into a puddle on the ground. And then I looked left to Margaret Bowman's bed. Miss Bowman's body was lying in a prone position, with her head upside down resting backward over the bed. I leaned into Miss Bowman's face, and I saw what appeared to be multiple major contusions to her skull, her eye sockets, and jaw. She was a mess.*

The above description of the whole scenario by Jennings justifies that Bundy has done necrophilic acts on the dead bodies. The description of Lisa Levy's dead body throws light on the cruel acts that he has done. Since the two areas which were severely wounded and blood bathed are the skull and pubic area, it is clear that the skull was smashed by the baseball bat

as presented in the movie and one can easily understand that the rest of the injuries were caused by his carnal desires.

The social interactions that one makes in school are also key factors for developing positive, emotional, and mental well-being by reducing feelings of loneliness, stress, and anxiety. Engaging in social activities allows students to share experiences, express themselves, and receive social support from their peers, promoting a sense of belonging and overall happiness which in the case of Ted Bundy was absent.

### **3. Bundy's Upbringing, Societal Roles and Consequences**

Bundy's troubled childhood and upbringing played a role in shaping his behavior. It is believed that he experienced feelings of abandonment, abuse, and rejection, and there were questions regarding his paternity. Bundy displayed narcissistic traits and had a strong desire for control and power. His crimes allowed him to exert dominance over his victims and satisfy his own desires for control and manipulation. His approach was opportunistic, targeting vulnerable individuals in isolated environments and using swift abduction techniques to minimize the chances of intervention. Psychological control was a crucial aspect, as Bundy instilled fear, exerted dominance, and employed sadistic acts to establish his authority which is key highlights of the movie *Bundy: An American Icon*. Understanding Bundy's approach to women provides valuable insight into the tactics employed by manipulative individuals and emphasizes the importance of recognizing signs of manipulation and exercising caution in personal interactions.

Ted Bundy also had a rough childhood with an unhappy family. His life was mostly surrounded by his mother and his grandfather who was a drunkard. His maternal grandfather Samuel Cowell and maternal grandmother Eleanor Cowell raised him without revealing to him for a long time that Louise Cowell was his biological mother and that his fatherhood was unknown. Bundy struggled with unhappy parentage throughout his life and later came to know that his paternity was a secret and that all his loved ones have always been lying to him. His life looked like a huge scam to him and thus his trust for every human being faded away. His rage for women could have begun due to the traumatizing truth that his parenthood was always kept away from him by his mother.

Bundy felt neglected and disconnected from his mother since he had always thought that Louise Cowell was his elder sister. Bundy's stepfather John Bundy was a hospital cook who played a profound role in raising Bundy during his early days. He was not much close to him either and had spent all his facing extreme consequences of not being raised properly. Later, Bundy started attracting young women with his charm and style who were brutally murdered and raped by him. Bundy once loved a woman with all his heart who left him for his dominating behavior and assertive nature. He was abandoned by her due to such violent mannerisms and a lack of patience. This might have added to his fear of facing strong, bold women who are outspoken and capable enough to dominate or order Bundy. It can also lead to the idea that Bundy's hatred for women escalated after this due to his preference to look at women after their deaths. A dead woman's body became his source of pleasure due to his ability to manipulate, hurt or love the corpse as per his wish. This would provide a sense of authority to him.

Since society is organized using several social institutions which include family, academics, government, economy, and religion, these institutions serve as the backbone for social interactions, societal roles, and responsibilities. Society's rules, values, and viewpoints towards death, sex, and unconventional deportment can influence the way necrophiles discern and respond to their fantasies. In the case of Bundy, childhood experiences had left a remarkable influence on his future and thus he found himself to be in a position of having betrayed by his own people. His life choices, the pretense of love for the women he loved, and his envy for their beautiful family lives arose as a result of his suppressed anger, frustration, sadness, and grief that was hidden within him due to the scars inflicted upon his mind by his own mother. Bundy's childhood was filled with deception and hence this could have made him choose to deceive women throughout his life. Bundy would bury his victims' bodies and take them out after a while often engaging in sexual activities. Also, there are several interviews where Bundy confessed his sexual activities with women after their murders. He would engage in sexual activities with their beheaded corpses.

Bundy can be considered a person who never had a proper social life or a valuable relationship. Their trauma consumed most parts of their lives thus leaving them as human beings with no basic sense of morality, ethics, love, and compassion. Both of them showed early signs of violence which were ignored by their elders. Bundy as a child, used to hide knives under his aunt's bedsheet and giggle which were not considered much threatening by her. She would ignore it considering it as the mischief of a small kid. Such ignorance on the part of the elders cannot be neglected while considering the case of Bundy.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Necrophilic murders, which involve the desecration and violation of deceased individuals, are highly disturbing and illegal acts. Necrophilia must be prevented for several reasons, including ethical, legal, and public health considerations. It is all about engaging in sexual acts with a dead individual who cannot provide consent. It violates the fundamental principle of consent, as a deceased person cannot give or withhold permission. Respecting the autonomy and dignity of individuals, even after death, is essential. It is considered a criminal offense in several jurisdictions due to its ethical and moral implications. Engaging in sexual acts with corpses can lead to significant public health risks, including the transmission of infections and diseases. It can also contribute to the desecration of bodies and interfere with the proper handling and respectful treatment of the deceased.

Preventing such heinous crimes requires a combination of legal, societal, and educational measures. Here are some possible steps society can take to address this issue:

**Strengthen and enforce laws:** Ensure that laws regarding the desecration and sexual abuse of corpses are clear, comprehensive, and enforced rigorously. Penalties should be severe to deter potential offenders. Law enforcement agencies should receive adequate training to identify and investigate necrophilic crimes effectively.

**Public awareness campaigns:** Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate people about the gravity of necrophilic acts and the legal consequences associated with them. These campaigns can include media campaigns, educational programs in schools, and community workshops to foster a culture of respect for the deceased. Most of youngsters are more

occupied with their phones and are uninterested in happenings around the world. This may result in a decline in knowledge about crimes and criminal punishments around them. Thus they may fall prey to such criminal murders. Hence it is important to spread awareness regarding such gruesome murders.

**Improved security and surveillance:** Implement stringent security measures in morgues, funeral homes, and cemeteries. Install surveillance systems to monitor these locations and deter potential offenders. Regular inspections and audits should be conducted to ensure compliance with security protocols. Installation of security cameras and street lights in secluded areas can avoid most of the cases of abduction which happen at night.

**Sensitize healthcare professionals:** Provide comprehensive training to healthcare professionals, including morticians, coroners, and other personnel who come into contact with deceased individuals. This training should emphasize the ethical treatment of the deceased and the importance of reporting any suspicious activities.

**Strengthen background checks:** Implement rigorous background checks for individuals working in sensitive positions, such as morticians, funeral home employees, and cemetery staff. Thorough screening processes can help identify any red flags or prior criminal behavior.

**Support for grieving families:** Provide counseling services and support to grieving families who have lost loved ones. This can help mitigate the emotional impact of such crimes and provide a supportive environment for those affected.

**Collaboration between law enforcement and the funeral industry:** Encourage cooperation and information sharing between law enforcement agencies and the funeral industry. Establish protocols for reporting suspicious activities or behavior observed during funeral arrangements, embalming processes, or other interactions with the deceased.

**Research and data collection:** Invest in research and data collection to better understand the prevalence and nature of necrophilic crimes. This information can help identify patterns, risk factors, and effective prevention strategies.

In conclusion, the research paper reflects on the impact of society on necrophiles, using the case of Ted Bundy as an example, emphasizing the significant role of societal factors in shaping the behaviors and actions of necrophiles. Societal norms, values, and attitudes towards death, sex, and deviant behavior, as well as societal reactions to necrophilia, mental health resources, and the legal system's response, all play a crucial role in influencing the behaviors and actions of necrophiles.

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