

Ted Bundy: Upbringing and Unraveling - A Study of Motivation

Even more than 20 years after his execution, is still one of the most interesting and least understood serial killers of our era. In fact, he confessed responsibility to at least 36 murders but many experts believe he can likely be considered responsible for more than 100 separate disappearances of young women. All of his victims met a specific type, and his crime mode of operandi was consistent, but much of his childhood was quite average, and he did not meet the social stereotypes for a killer of his kind. However, there are several unique links between his childhood, and the troubled life he later lived, which can be used to understand the murders he committed, or how and why he killed.

Ted Bundy's Childhood

Ted Bundy was born at a home for unwed mothers in Vermont, to then-22 year old Eleanor Cowell. She made mixed claims about his paternity, but the exact identity of his father was never known. There were even rumors which circulated insinuating that his grandfather Samuel Cowell was actually his biological father, and that his birth was the result of incestuous rape (Michaud & Aynesworth 56). However, the truth was never revealed, and it was a point of great emotional trouble for Bundy in his later life, at least (Michaud & Aynesworth 330).

For the first six years of his life, Bundy was raised by his maternal grandparents, who presented his mother to him as his sister, and who hoped to raise him as an adopted orphan, and not as a biological member of their family, in order to save him from the social stigma of being a bastard (Kendall 41). It was not until he was much older, likely a college student, that he discovered the truth of his paternity, and that Eleanor was his mother not his sister (Kendall 41). In interviews, Bundy verbalized a resentment toward Eleanor for withholding the truth from him, and allowing him to discover it for himself, rather than presenting it to him in a more acceptable way (Rule 51).

His grandfather, Samuel Cowell was, according to Bundy's aunt and Cowell's other daughter, a terribly violent man. He abused and tortured neighborhood animals, beat his children, and generally acted both vulgar and violently (Michaud & Aynesworth 330). Bundy, however, appears to remember his grandfather very differently. Ann Rule recalls an interview with Bundy in which he specifically said that he "respected, and "clung to" his grandfather (Rule 9).

His grandfather also kept an assorted collection of pornography in the greenhouse, which Bundy began looking at while still in preschool (Dotson 1). These pornographic images included rape fantasies, and other truly disturbing images.

In contrast, his grandmother was, according to Ted, "timid, and obedient." However, this did not make her a strong role model for Ted, rather she contributed to the instability of the home environment. She suffered from extreme bouts of depression, often verging on hysteria and had to be admitted for electroconvulsive therapy on multiple occasions (Nelson 154).

As a result, Bundy's living situation in his early life was extremely alarming, ultimately leading Eleanor to flee with young Ted, and join family living in Washington, in order to provide a safer more stable life for both she and Bundy. It was there that she met and married the man who would ultimately adopt and act as a father figure to Red, Mr. John Bundy (Michaud & Aynesworth 57).

From this point forward he lived a relatively normal middle-class lifestyle. Though there are reports that he never truly bonded with his adopted father, he was well provided for, and included in activities intended for his younger half-siblings. He was very successful and popular in middle and junior high,

but began struggling socially as he entered high school. These awkward years did not last long however, and as a college student he was grossly successful, establishing himself as both a law student, and a blossoming politician (Rule 13).

Unfortunately, it was also at college that Bundy experienced true heartbreak. He fell in love with a collegiate peer who was, by all reports, wealthy, classy, and in a circle of strong influence. Ultimately, she broke off the relationship because she believed Bundy lacked both maturity and ambition. Later, during his crime sprees, all of Bundy's known murder victims would look strikingly physically similar to this love interest (Michaud & Aynesworth 161).

Ted Bundy's Method

Ted Bundy is especially interesting, when one considers his methods, because he did not follow a signature pattern the way the many serial killers do. He killed over a broad range of territories, and used a variety of methods to dispose of bodies, but certain elements of his crime always remains the same.

All of the Bundy's victims were young women many of whom were abducted from university sites and had brown hair that was longer than shoulder length and which was parted down the center. He often lured his victims to his car using a simple charisma. He spoke of their own danger and offered to accompany them to their car, he pretended to have an injury or an emergency you need assistance, or he's simply drew them near his car through conversation. In the end their willingness to trust this clean cut and apparently harmless man almost always ended in their death.

After abducting his victims Bundy would take them to a secluded location where he could rape them, and bludgeon them to death using blunt objects like tree limbs or other clubs. Only late and his psychopathic careers tenure did his crimes lose their sense of organization ultimately culminating in strangulation rather than death by blunt force trauma.

While his killings began in Washington where he was living at the time they followed him from state to state. When he began law school at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City he left the string of bodies in his wake. However when suspicion began to fall on him, he moved to a new hunting ground eventually killing in a variety of states including Idaho Colorado and Florida. It was in Florida where his career met its final end. Here he kills 2 sorority sisters and their sorority house and the 12 year old girl in his van. He was convicted of all three killings and sentenced to death and all three cases ultimately resulting in his execution in 1989.

Perhaps his greatest strength as a killer was his ability to blend in. He was especially smart, soon after women began to disappear reports of a man named "Ted" driving a VW bug circulated the area and multiple individuals, including Bundy's girlfriend of the time, reported to police the suspicion that he was involved with the women's disappearance. However, because of his ability to blend in, operate in a socially appropriate way, and because of his sterling reputation he was able to go undetected while murdering nearly 100 women. In multiple states, but it was reported as a suspect however the temp was ignored, allowing him to continue to kill in a single area long after the presence of a serial killer found the attention of the local media and police.

The Nexus between Upbringing and Unraveling

There are a multitude of relationships between Bundy's erratic upbringing and the ultimate modality of his crimes. His clear raised towards women, his physical violence, his pornographic obsessions, and even his physical preference for victim type, can all be explained by his biography.

First, Bundy had a clear struggle against women. This is likely defined by his anger at his mother, for withholding information about his paternity from him. Also, born from confusion over the nature of his relationship with his mother, who he equally referred to as his mother and his sister later in life.

Finally, anger over rejection, especially related to a break up with his collegiate girlfriend, spilled over into murderous blood shed specifically target in women who he perceived to be like this for a lover.

Secondly, I'll look into Bundy's childhood, could explain a predisposition toward mental disease and psychosis. It is known that his grandmother routinely underwent therapy for severe depression and it was likewise reported that his grandfather, who may have also been his biological father, heard voices and flew into violent rages (Nelson 154). This alone might have been enough to push Bundy over the edge, providing him with the genetic material necessary to generate the psychotic desires that drove his later murderous behavior.

Additionally, the foundation for Bundy's physical violence can be drawn from his childhood. Bundy literally beat his victims to death following the pattern of corporeal violence or punishment which he endured as a child at the hands of his grandfather. In one interview Bundy specifically recalled his grandfather pushing his aunt down the stairs as punishment for oversleeping (Michaud & Aynesworth 330).

He likewise self-identified with his grandfather and his grandfather's behavior stating that both "identified with" and "respected" his grandfather despite the fact that He was both a bully and a bigot (Rule 9). In fact, there is reason to believe that his relationship with his grandfather, is perhaps the only strong male relationship he formed in his lifetime, giving his grandfather's violence undo-influence on his developmental image of what it is to be a man.

Finally, Bundy's propensity to rape women can be directly tied to the violent pornographic images which she began yelling at only the age of 4. Bundy himself credited his addiction to pornography as leading him down the path to eventual murder. In his final interview with Dobson, he reported that he saw it as a natural progression, in addiction, to look for a harder and harder fix, and eventually, that lead from looking at violent images, to carrying out the acts he fantasized about, which were presented in those images including violent rape and murder (Dobson, 1).

For decades, Bundy's crime spree has fascinated those in law, and those studying criminal psychology, in part because he was so very successful at leading what appeared to be a normal life while carrying out increasingly violent and increasingly frequent acts against women. He was overlooked by investigators time and again, while failing to cover his tracks, and leaving a clear trail of evidence, if police only looked closely.

Today, he is given credit for more than 100 murders and some of his known victim's remains were never identified, and the question persists, what drove Bundy to homicidal mania. A look into his childhood reveals a clear pattern for both violence and psychosis, from a very young age, which can be tied to his methodology as a killer, and used to better understand the criminality of this man.

Works Cited:

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