

Louise Vinton: The Killer Amongst Us.

“Lucifer dwells in us all.” The last words of Richard Ramirez, an American serial killer, rapist and burglar.

Inside us all is the capability of being a killer!

Everyday life is shaped by crime, just as crime is shaped by everyday life.

What do I mean by this?

Factors that make a murderer, be it environmental or psychological, are all provided through everyday experiences.

The ‘Nature versus Nurture Debate’ is one that I am sure you will know of. Nature being psychology and DNA; nurture being the way in which you are brought up.

When reading about influences of crime, to me the most striking factors that make up a serial killer are Genetics, Family and Psychology.

So, firstly, genetics. I watched a fascinating TED talk by Jim Fallon, and he explained his research into the mind of a killer. He analysed the brains of psychopathic killers, for example Ted Bundy.

Here are some images of pet scans carried out by Jim Fallon, and they show a major pattern; every killers’ brain that he researched had damage to the orbitofrontal cortex; this is the part of the brain just above the eye which controls emotions, memory and decision-making.

Fallon suggests that serial killers lack the ability to manage their emotions; therefore, leading them to kill.

Also explained by Jim Fallon is the MAOA gene. You may have seen this named recently in an episode of Riverdale, as the ‘serial killer gene’.

Well, it is in fact the gene that causes violence and aggression and it is found in everyone, although stronger in men.

Jim Fallon found that serial killers actually have a defect of the MAOA gene which leads to someone being overly abusive.

The MAOA gene is found in the X chromosome. So, think back to GCSE biology, Females have two X chromosomes, so if one contains this defect, it is almost always going to be cancelled out by the other normal X chromosome.

However, if a man has this defect it will not be cancelled out as men carry an X and a Y chromosome.

This is the reason that women are extremely unlikely to become a serial killer. In fact, only 16% of serial killers are women.

Jim Fallon researched DNA of serial killers, as well as his own family members. He found that some of his family possessed this defect too and it led him to question why his family are not displaying characteristics that a serial killer would.

This leads me onto the second factor, the Family. What effect does someone's upbringing have on their behaviour?

I want to look at the serial killer case of John Scripps; I find his case particularly interesting and it really helps to explain sociological factors affecting behaviour.

Scripps' father had committed suicide, and John was the one to find him at home with his head in the gas oven.

Aynesworth is a criminologist who explains that almost all serial killers will have undergone some kind of childhood trauma, like John Scripps. This trauma festers away and becomes a fantasy of getting revenge.

The traumatic events that these people undergo are highly likely to cause or resurface mental illness, bringing me onto my final point, of psychology.

Psychopathy is a personality disorder, like schizophrenia. It is almost always permanent as it is a chemical and genetic defect in the brain.

A psychopath has a complete lack of empathy and this is almost the sole reason a serial killer is able to kill masses without feeling remorse.

Ted Bundy was a known psychopath, and these pictures (taken at various trials) show a complete lack of remorse as he laughs on multiple occasions.

So, the Nature versus Nurture debate. It is not a question of which one solely influences criminal behaviour. Instead, modern research makes it clear to us that both Nature (psychology and DNA) and Nurture (our family and upbringing) are interlinked factors which determine the killer amongst us.

Thank you for listening.