Serial Sexual Murderers and Prostitutes as Their Victims: Difficulty Profiling Perpetrators and Victim Vulnerability as Illustrated by the Green River Case

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Gary Ridgway, the Green River killer, is the most prolific serial killer in U.S. history, preying upon the most vulnerable of victims: prostitutes. This paper examines the difficulty experienced by law enforcement officials when trying to develop the profile of a serial sexual murderer, as illustrated by the Green River case. The lives and experiences of prostitutes are examined to establish their level of susceptibility to crime while also exploring the customers who frequent them. A summary of current research on criminal profiling is analyzed in conjunction to the Green River case with the goal of obtaining an understanding of the drives and motivations behind these crimes. In addition, the forensic and ethical implications of the case are discussed. [Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention 7:77–89 (2007)]

Serial sexual murderers are a cultural enigma, engaging in activities that the average human being could never fathom. However, in recent years, this select group of the population has become a phenomenon, not only to researchers and law enforcement officials but also to the general public. This is clearly illustrated by the growing popularity of television shows such as Law and Order and CSI (Crime Scene Investigation), which highlight homicide and sex crimes.

Prostitution as a career is practiced in large and small cities throughout the United States and the world. Prostitutes, much like serial sexual murderers, represent a group that is not easily understood by society at large. Most people believe that prostitutes deserve the crimes that are perpetrated against them and that it does not matter when a prostitute is hurt or killed; they are invisible, a facet of society that is not afforded the same basic rights granted to all people.

In the early 1980s, an area of highway referred to as “The Strip” in Washington state near King County International Airport became the focal point of a series of serial sexual homicides like none ever seen before in human history. It was here that one man was responsible for the horrific fusion of his world of serial sexual murder and the underground world of prostitution. This man was Gary Leon Ridgway, the Green River killer. In this paper, we will explore the difficulties faced by law enforcement and researchers...
when attempting to profile the perpetrators of serial sexual crimes. Additionally, prostitutes and their vulnerability to crime victimization will be discussed. These quandaries will be applied to the Green River case, highlighting Gary Ridgeway, his psychological profile, and his selection of prostitutes for his transgressions.

**Gary Ridgway: Life and Crimes**

**Gary Leon Ridgway**

It is never possible to wholly forgive and forget a serial sexual killer’s crimes, but it is crucial to study the lives of these killers so as to gain some sort of insight into their reasons for killing so viciously. Moreover, the life events and history of a serial sexual murderer like Gary Ridgway assist law enforcement officials and profilers to better understand with whom they are dealing. No past, however gruesome and cruel, will ever justify the crimes committed by Ridgway and the like. Nonetheless, a look into a killer’s past is critical for the success of future investigations and profiles. The following timeline of Gary Ridgway’s life and crimes is documented through interview sequences recorded within *Defending Gary: Unraveling the Mind of the Green River Killer*, by Prothero (2006), and *Chasing the Devil: My Twenty-Year Quest to Capture the Green River Killer*, by Reichert (2004).

Gary Leon Ridgway was born February 18, 1949, in Utah and raised in Seattle, WA. His mother, Mary Ridgway, dominated the household with her brazenness and odd forms of childrearing. Ridgway’s father, Tom, was a meek man who never stood up to his wife. There are tales of Mary Ridgway breaking plates over her husband’s head with no reaction from Tom Ridgway other than to get up and leave the room. In Ridgway’s history, it seems that his father does not play a central role except in that he never stood up to women and he introduced the idea of necrophilia to his son. He worked in a mortuary when Ridgway was a young boy. He would often come home and tell stories of a coworker who enjoyed engaging in necrophilia at the mortuary.

In time, this story would become the subject of Ridgway’s teenage sexual fantasies. He loved the idea of “having sex with someone who is dead because you wouldn’t get caught. No feelings. She wouldn’t feel it” (Reichert, 2004, p. 274).

Aside from his parents’ dysfunctional relationship and his father’s outrageous work stories, Gary Ridgway’s childhood was full of other problems. Ridgway was a chronic bed-wetter in his early years. When this happened, his mother would berate him in front of his brothers and stand him up in the shower to give him a cold bath while paying special attention to his “dirtiest” parts, that is, his genitals. Often, Mary Ridgway did these ritualistic cleansings while barely clothed herself.

Mary Ridgway submitted her son to other horrific talks and events. She has been described as dressing in a sexually provocative way while working in the men’s section of a local department store. She would often tell her son stories of how when she measured men for their suits they would get aroused. She would discuss this with her young son while specifically mentioning such details as the smell of her customer’s genital area. Eventually, as Gary Ridgway grew into adolescence, he began to fantasize about having violent sex with his mother. He claimed he wanted to scar her for life by slitting her throat with a kitchen knife so as to relieve his frustrations at never being able to please her. Ridgway felt inadequate due to low academic performance. Ridgway was a poor student who earned a D average. His mother often spoke of putting him in a state institution for the mentally retarded, but she never fulfilled this threat. Instead, Ridgway eventually graduated from high school at the age of 20.

His teenage years were filled with other warning signs of problems brewing within Ridgway’s psyche. He began killing animals,
setting fires, and obsessing over true crime stories. After Ridgway was caught for the Green River killings, he alludes to the fact that he might have killed before. He claimed he was unsure of whether or not he did it, but he has vivid recollections of drowning a boy in a particular lake. Interestingly, public records of that year show two young boys as having drowned in that lake. Another memory takes place when he was 16 years old and he stabbed a young boy in the woods after school one day. Thankfully, Ridgway’s young victim survived the attack, though, oddly enough, Ridgway was never arrested for this offense.

As Gary Ridgway grew up, he began stalking many women in his neighborhood who had previously rejected him. Eventually he married Claudia Kraig and enlisted in the Navy. Ridgway claims that it was during his time in the Navy that his obsession with prostitutes began. After returning from the Navy, Ridgway learned his wife had cheated on him, so he promptly divorced her. Soon after, he remarried a woman named Marcia Winslow who, in time, would become his first choking victim. She later reported that Ridgway enjoyed sexual bondage and taking her to secluded places, like the banks of the Green River, to have sex outdoors. He had a son with Marcia Winslow, Matthew. Ultimately, his marriage to Marcia Winslow would end in divorce. Ridgway was ordered to pay her child support. He was so outraged at this that he contemplated killing her, although he never did.

After divorcing his second wife, Ridgway began soliciting prostitutes more frequently. He developed a growing hatred toward the prostitutes he visited. He felt a rage that eventually manifested in murder when he felt that the prostitutes regarded him with disgust and disdain. In time, Ridgway stopped being able to have sex with a living person so he would rape the still warm corpses of his victims. If he felt the urge, he would go back to his victims, brush off any maggots, and have sex with them again. In his later killings, he would purposely dispose of the bodies farther from his home so as to avoid engaging in necrophilia. Ridgway claims he became disgusted with his own fantasies. It was during this time that Ridgway met and married Judith Lynch. He would commit most of his murders while married to her.

**The Green River Killings**

The Green River case baffled King’s County residents and law enforcement officials for over two decades. When Gary Ridgway was caught and ultimately confessed to his crimes, he was unable to give a precise timeline, victim names, or even the exact number of women he had killed in his 22-year murder spree. Although his plea deal forced him to return to the scenes of many of his crimes, he was not capable of remembering the details of his murders. The King’s County Sheriff’s Office was able to piece together events that occurred in relation to the Green River killings so as to provide a timeline of sorts for the case.

In July 1982, the first Green River body was found by children playing near Kent; the body was later identified as Wendy Lee Coffield. During August 13–15, 1982, four more young female bodies were found along and in the Green River in King’s County, WA. The bodies were all believed to be prostitutes who work along the SeaTac strip. The following day, on August 16, 1982, the Green River Task Force was formed. On April 30, 1983, the boyfriend of a missing prostitute, Marie Malvar, followed a pickup truck connected with her disappearance. The truck was coined the “famous green pickup truck.” Ridgway’s prized truck was eventually identified as this famous green pickup truck. By April 2, 1984, the King’s County Sheriff’s Office linked at least 20 deaths to the Green River killer. While the body count continued to rise, Ridgway contacted the Green
River Task Force under the guise of wanting to assist and offer information. In May 1984, he was given a polygraph and passed. The police continued to follow leads and interview suspects as the death toll reached 42 in December of 1984. Three years later, in April of 1987, Ridgway’s home was searched and samples of bodily fluids were taken from Ridgway, but the evidence was not enough to arrest him.

By 1991, the Green River Task Force had spent $15 million, pursued 30,000 tips, and logged 9,000 pieces of evidence. Despite all this, the task force did not have a suspect. In 1999, new DNA testing was able to identify the remains of a 1986 victim found near the Green River. The evolution of DNA testing allowed officials to test the other evidence. In the fall of 2001, Ridgway was arrested for the murders of four of the Green River killings through DNA evidence. Even though the DNA tests strongly tied Ridgway to these killings, he pled not guilty. Three more victims were linked to Ridgway through additional analysis. Once again, Ridgway entered a plea of not guilty.

Ultimately, Ridgway made a deal with officials: he agreed to provide information on more killings if the prosecution would agree to not pursue the death penalty. He pled guilty to 48 counts of first-degree murder and aided authorities in retrieving the remains. Even though Ridgway escaped the death penalty in the state of Washington, the possibility looms of a trial in another state where the death penalty will once again be on the table. Currently, there are no plans for a trial of this sort, but the King’s Country Sheriff’s Office maintains that Ridgway is withholding information on more murders and they will eventually get the truth.

Prostitutes: Silent Crime Victims

Prostitution is illegal throughout the United States, with the exception of certain counties within Nevada. Society at large typically looks down on prostitution as a profession, seeing it as immoral. As a result of these negative attitudes toward prostitution and those who engage in it, prostitutes are often seen as deserving of what they get; they are an invisible group, often abused and mistreated without ever receiving any form of help. Folaron and Williamson (2001) state that societal attitudes suggest that prostitutes are unrapeable, that they deserve the violence inflicted upon them, and that no harm is done when they are hurt or killed. Furthermore, they are usually marginalized women not afforded the same protections or even value as other human beings.

Society at large does not realize that most prostitutes enter into the business because they feel as though they have no choice. Monto (2004) confirms this through his discussion of the consent of prostitution as mediated by the following: dire financial circumstances, drug addiction, fear of violence from partner or pimp, or the trafficking of women and children into the United States for the purpose of prostitution. Those women brought into prostitution as a result of trafficking are separated from the social networks that could facilitate their escape. Moreover, he states a significant portion of prostitutes report having been victims of physical or sexual abuse prior to entering the profession. Many come from abusive households in which living on the street and selling sex is better than living in constant fear. Often, many begin working as young teens, as young as 12 or 15 years. They may feel as though it is the only way they will be able to support themselves or a child. For some, the lifestyle is glamorized at first, and they are sucked into a viscous cycle of turning tricks. Folaron and Williamson (2003) interviewed 21 women who spent anywhere from 3 months to 13 years as prostitutes. They found that in the learning phase the rewarding and beneficial aspects of the lifestyle are prominent, and many reported it was actually empowering
and addicting. Furthermore, they found that the depression that often resulted from violent encounters led to drug abuse. Self-medicating through drug addition became a driving force that perpetuated their participation in prostitution; their sex work was financing their drug habit. Although engaging in a taboo activity, prostitutes are not asking to be beaten, raped, or stolen from. In spite of their chosen profession, they are still human beings who can be violated and mistreated.

In recent years, much research has been conducted into the lives of prostitutes. It is clear that most have an abuse history, monetary concerns, and drug addiction. It appears the early abuse histories of prostitutes often pave the way for the acceptance of abuse and violence from customers as well as pimps and intimate partners. Downe, Gorkoff, Nixon, Tutty, and Ursel (2002) found that once involved in prostitution, women continued to experience extreme violence and abuse, perceiving it as normal or expected. Moreover, early childhood violence coupled with continued violence by customers, pimps, and partners resulted in numbness and desensitization to the current violent environment. More than half of the 47 prostitutes in the sample reported stabs, cuts, rapes, strangulation, beatings, kidnappings, stalking, being held at gunpoint, and being tortured as some of their violent encounters. This study also documented that the girls described high rates of violence perpetrated against them by their pimps and intimate partners. Specifically, half of the 47 women reported violence or threats from their pimps and 22 women had been physically, sexually, verbally, and financially abused by their intimate partners. Similarly, Folaron and Williamson (2001), Monto (2004), and Sanders (2004) found that most women within their samples had experienced customer-related violence regularly.

Research has also been done to examine not only the past and current experiences of prostitutes but also whether they are willing to turn to others such as doctors or mental health clinicians in order to treat addiction, to treat physical and emotional injury, or to report crimes committed against them. It is quite apparent from numerous studies that prostitutes rarely reach for the help that they need. According to Dalla, Kennedy, Xia (2003) and Downe et al. (2002), prostitutes were reluctant to utilize protective services such as the police due to bad experiences with the cops such as being harassed by them or feeling the cops believed they deserved the violence against them. Furthermore, these two studies as well as studies by Folaron and Williamson (2001, 2003) found that either prostitutes typically did not report bodily traumas or drug addiction or they disguised their lifestyles in the presence of health and social service professionals. The main reason cited for this was fear of incarceration and/or removal of their children.

When considering the high level of violence against prostitutes paired with their reluctance of seeking medical care or pursuing the police when a crime is perpetrated against them, it is no surprise that prostitutes are at high risk for being victims of crime. Moreover, they are also in a unique position for becoming victims due to the intimacy involved in their work. There are few women who willingly enter the car of a stranger and engage in activities that put them in a vulnerable position. According to Bell, Busch, Hotaling, and Monto (2002), “Prostituted women are extremely vulnerable to violence because of the secrecy and illegal nature of their work. They are among the few women in society who voluntarily get into cars with unfamiliar men, and as a result, they are prime targets of serial killers” (p. 1094). Monto (2004) also stated that prostitutes are disproportionately represented among female murder victims.

Studies indicate that prostitutes implement protective measures that they believe are effective when differentiating violent and nonviolent
customers. There has been documentation that the dangerous date profile, belief in god, choice of location, negotiation technique, use of intuition, and help from other prostitutes are all methods utilized by women in order to keep themselves safe. In their sample, Downe et al. (2002) documented that protective factors such as staying sober, using instincts, staying in pairs, and carrying weapons were used by many of the women. Similarly, Folaron and Williamson (2001) documented the use of the dangerous date profile as a protective factor. This profile described the following customer: young and new to area, acting like he wants an honest exchange, quietness, insistence on choice of location (usually remote), and a lack of sexual desire for the sexual encounter; his intent is to inflict pain. In addition to the use of the dangerous date profile, the women in the study used these other protective factors: instinct to screen out dangerous customers, checking for danger within the vehicle, reliance on god to protect them, using familiar date spots, regular customers, warning other prostitutes, and developing escape tactics. The researchers in this study found that these techniques were largely ineffective in protecting the women from abuse and violence by customers.

When considering the vulnerability of prostitutes, it is also important to examine their customers. Studies have been conducted focusing on the males that frequently use prostitutes, their attitudes toward women, and how this affects their potential for being violent. Bell et al. (2002) found that men with lower education, who think of sex less often, who watch pornography more frequently, who feel guilty about sex, who are sexually conservative, who started seeking prostitutes at a younger age, who broke up with a partner the previous year, or who were physically hurt as a child by an adult for no reason were more likely to endorse power and control factors with prostitutes. It has also been uncovered that although most customers, also know as johns, do not seem to be violent, they may recognize their own behavior as aggressive. Bell et al. discussed that violent johns may not identify their behavior toward prostitutes as violent; these customers seem to undervalue the impact their choices have on the women. Moreover, some men surveyed in various studies seem to have negative feelings toward women. Many men state their reasoning for using prostitutes is to let out their aggressive feelings toward women. Monto (2004) discussed that some men seek sex with prostitutes because they feel that it gives them greater control during the sexual encounter. Furthermore, he stated that some customers who are perpetrators of physical and sexual violence use prostitutes to reinforce male privilege, either to punish women who do not accept their subordinate status in our society or as an attempt to reassert a bruised or challenged sense of masculinity. This is a clear illustration that the profession of prostitution can be used by customers to marginalize women.

Gary Ridgeway, the Green River killer, clearly used encounters with prostitutes to release his aggression against women. He enjoyed the control he had during the encounter and the murder; he was reinforcing his own male privilege that he could never express with his overbearing mother whom he was unable to please; the punishment of his victims compensated for his bruised manhood. Gary fit the profile of the violent john as found by Bell et al. (2002): he had a low education, felt guilty about sex and was even disgusted by his own fantasies, sought prostitutes at a young age (in his 20s while in the military), and was hurt as a child by his mother.

When Gary solicited prostitutes, he did not appear to fit the dangerous date profile as described by the prostitutes in the research; if his victims used this profile as a protective factor, Gary seemed to fall into the safe date category. He was a local spotted regularly on the strip by those working there, he was quiet, and he
seemed like an honest family man using the pictures of his son while negotiating with the women. In addition, Folaron and Williamson (2001) identified that women believed that if a man was going to attack it would be moments after the arrival at the date spot, prior to any sexual activity. This also could have made them more trusting of Gary during the encounters because he did not attack and kill them until after they engaged in sexual activity.

What the Research Says About Serial Sexual Killer Motivations

Boer, Drugge, Earle, Porter, and Woodworth (2003) define sexual homicide as “one that includes sexual activity before, during, or after commission of the crime” (p. 459). Serial sexual killers, although a topic preferably avoided by the general public, have been studied by researchers worldwide in hopes of providing criminal profilers with helpful generalizations to aid in the capture of these offenders. Although the data are sometimes conflicting and not always applicable to every criminal, it provides a framework that law enforcement officials can pull from in order to more quickly identify and capture offenders. The studies discussed in this section all seek to provide clues into who a serial sexual killer is and how he or she developed into that person.

All too often, television and movies portray criminals as crazed lunatics with no rhyme or reason for their killings. Admittedly, there are murderers who society cannot understand, but science is relentless in seeking to unravel their mysteries and make sense of their crimes in hopes of aiding future investigations. Common theories as to why serial sexual killers do what they do involve childhood and mental illness. Although some studies have shown that a number of serial sexual killers do in fact suffer from chronic mental illness or have been victims of child abuse, these characteristics are not reliable enough to become generalizable. The subsequent studies have determined certain factors in development that are more prevalent for serial sexual killers.

A study done by Gray, Hassan, MacCulloch, and Watt (2003) examined the results of a previous study done by Burgess, Hartman, Ressler, Douglas, and McCormack (1986) in terms of the experiential and behavioral factors found to be of etiological validity in regard to the development of sexual serial killers. The study by Burgess et al. examined 36 sexual murderers and identified a list of 11 experiential and 13 behavioral indicators of etiological relevance to their developmental stages. The 11 experiential factors are as follows: daydreaming, social isolation, enuresis, nightmares, poor body image, sleep problems, phobias, accident proneness, headaches, eating problems, and convulsions. The 13 behavioral indicators are as follows: compulsive masturbation, chronic lying, rebelliousness, destroying property, fire setting, stealing, cruelty to children, temper tantrums, assaultiveness to adults, running away, animal cruelty, destroying possessions, and self-mutilation. However, a limitation of this study identified by its authors was the lack of a control group.

As a follow-up to Burgess et al. (1986), Gray, Hassan, and MacCulloch (2003) used a control group of 50 nonoffending individuals and 50 sexual murderers to test the same 11 experiential and 13 behavioral indicators. This study resulted in conflicting findings. Gray et al. found 3 of the 11 experiential factors in the control group’s reported childhood experiences: daydreaming, accident proneness, and headaches. One of the 11 factors prevalent in the sexual murderer group during childhood was convulsions. The remaining childhood experiential factors did not vary statistically between the control and sexual murderer group in the Gray et al. study. This research also reported three indicators to be more prevalent in the
healthy group during adolescence (poor body image, sleep problems, and headaches). The sexual murderer group reported a higher level of enuresis and convulsions during adolescence, and the remaining experiential factors did not vary statistically between groups during adolescence (Gray et al., 2003). The study found that in adulthood only three indicators were significantly more prevalent in the control group: daydreaming, poor body image, and sleep problems. None of the experiential indicators were found to be more prevalent in adulthood for the murderer group. As with the other developmental stages, the remaining experiential factors did not vary significantly.

Also within this study, the results of the 13 behavioral indicators were as conflicting as the experiential indicator results. In childhood, only two behavioral indicators were more prevalent in the sexual murderer sample: compulsive masturbation and fire setting. The control group did not demonstrate a high prevalence for any of the 13 behavioral indicators. Interestingly, during adolescence, the sexual murderer group reported a high level of 9 of the 13 behavioral indicators: compulsive masturbation, chronic lying, property destruction, fire setting, stealing, cruelty to animals, assaultiveness to adults, cruelty to children, and running away. Gray et al. (2003) report that 6 of the 13 behavioral indicators were more prevalent in the sexual murderer adult sample: compulsive masturbation, chronic lying, property destruction, fire setting, stealing, cruelty to children, assaultiveness to adults, and animal cruelty. These two studies have helped researchers and law enforcement officials in creating more detailed profiles for sexual murderers by probing into potential experiential and behavioral indicators sorted into developmental prevalence.

A study by Jackson, Lee, Pattison and Ward (2002) sought to identify potential developmental risk factors for sex offenders. Jackson et al. used a subject pool of 64 sex offenders and 33 non-sex offender criminals in their study. Subjects from both groups participated in a clinical interview and were given a battery of psychological tests and surveys including Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, Parental Bonding Instrument, Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale II, Youth Self Report, Sexual Abuse Scale, and Physical Abuse Scale. Jackson et al. found that risk factors for paraphilias include childhood emotional abuse, family dysfunction, childhood behavior problems, and childhood sexual abuse. The study also determined risk factors for pedophilia, exhibitionism, rape, or multiple paraphilia to be childhood emotional abuse and family dysfunction.

The previous studies have looked at factors occurring during development that might have an influence on the formation of a serial sexual killer, conversely the ensuing studies look at psychopathology in relation to the personal attributes of a serial sexual killer. Boer et al. (2003) used 18 psychopathic and 22 nonpsychopathic offenders to examine the relationship between sexual killer, psychopathology, and the sadistic behavior during the crime. The results produced from the study concluded that psychopathic offenders committed significantly more gratuitous and sadistic crimes than the nonpsychopathic group. The study also determined that the victims were “female strangers, with no apparent influence of psychopathy on victim choice” (Boer et al., 2003, p. 459).

A study with similar aims sought to determine sexual functioning, psychopathology, psychopathic personality characteristics, criminality, sexual arousal, and DSM diagnosis by looking at 48 sexual killers in comparison to 50 incest offenders (Bradford, Firestone, Greenberg, and Larose, 1998). Bradford et al. (1998) used the following instruments to measure for the preceding factors: Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory (DSFI), Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory, Psychopathy Checklist—Revised, Michigan
Alcoholism Screening Test, sexual arousal (measured by Farrell Instruments), DSM. Some of the results were in slight disagreement with each other based on the instrument used. The findings from the DSFI concluded that homicidal sex offenders have less psychopathology and function better sexually than the control group. The Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory determined that the homicidal sex offender group “are less willing or likely to use physical violence, are less irritable, are more trusting of others, feel less free floating guilt, and are generally less hostile” than the incest offender group (Bradford et al., 1998, p. 549). When compared to the incest group, the homicidal sex offender group exhibited psychopathic personality traits, criminality, higher arousal levels when assaultive acts toward children and pedophilic stimuli were used, and higher amounts of antisocial personality disorders, atypical paraphilias, sexual sadism, and substance abuse.

The final study reviewed in this section does not fall into the category of psychopathology or developmental indicators. Beech, Fisher, and Ward (2005) attempted to reveal which of five preselected theories most sexual murderers ascribe to. The study was done using interviews with 28 sexual murderers. The five preselected theories were as follows: dangerousness of world, male sex drive is uncontrollable, entitlement, women as sexual beings, and women as unknowable.

Each of these theories was defined extensively. Dangerousness of world is defined as believing the world is dangerous and full of abusive self-serving individuals, and therefore, it is necessary to fight and assert dominance. Male sex drive as uncontrollable is the idea that men’s sexual energy is unmanageable and women only serve to exacerbate this problem. Entitlement was defined as the belief that some people are more superior and deserving than others because of class, gender, or other factor. Women as sex objects is the perception that women serve only one purpose and that is to “meet the sexual needs of men” (Beech et al., 2005, p. 1369). The final theory, women are unknowable, is outlined as women being entirely indecipherable.

Beech et al. (2005) concluded that the 48 subjects could be divided into two groups based on the presence or absence of the two most commonly occurring implicit theories: dangerousness of world, found in 79%, and male sex drive is uncontrollable, found in 71%. Entitlement was present in 43%, women as sexual beings was present in 32%, and women as unknowable was found in 18% of the subject group. Although these results are very important, perhaps the most interesting outcome of this study was that no new theories were uncovered.

Even though movies and television try to paint serial sexual killers as unfathomable monsters, the preceding studies show that there is much we do know and that there are assumptions we can safely make. Criminologists and forensic profilers must sift through the results of these and many more studies while combining their knowledge in order to draw up a helpful profile. Gary Ridgway, the Green River killer, was a man who eluded identification for 22 years regardless of the accuracies and inaccuracies in his initial profile. After reviewing the case and the original profile by John Douglas, this paper will analyze the information contained in the profile and compare it to what we now know about Gary Ridgway.

Comparing Ridgway’s Initial Profile, Known History, and the Data

What is now known about Ridgway and what was assumed during the investigation combined with what the research implies are deserving of a thorough examination. By comparing these three elements, important
knowledge for future cases can be garnered. During the investigation, the King’s County Sheriff’s Office eventually used John Douglas’s help in creating a preliminary profile of the Green River killer. John Douglas is a famous profiler for the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI’s) Behavioral Science Unit. His initial profile believed the Green River killer to be meticulous (because of the way he weighed down the bodies with rocks), impulsive (because the killer neglected to bring tools and thus had to improvise ligatures), an avid outdoorsman (because he was familiar with the Green River), hateful of prostitutes and all women, unable to hold a job, and incapable of getting close to other people. The initial profile also believed the killer would be drawn to the investigation.

Much of Douglas’s profile was correct. Ridgway was impulsive in his killings, and he killed prostitutes indiscriminately. Although not an avid outdoorsman, he was indeed familiar with the Green River because he enjoyed taking one of his wives, Marcia Winslow, there to have sex. As officials later learned, Ridgway was undeniably hateful of prostitutes and most women. Finally, Ridgway was very much drawn to the investigation. He even offered to help the task force in 1984 and took a polygraph test. Douglas was incorrect in regard to Ridgway’s relational abilities because he had a close relationship with his last wife, Judith Lynch. Furthermore, Ridgway was employed at the truck painting company for a number of years.

Using the data from serial sexual murderers, Ridgway’s life and his case can be analyzed more carefully. He experienced enuresis during childhood, which according to Burgess et al. (1986) is prevalent in childhood experiences of sexual murderers. Ridgway exhibited four of the behavioral indicators prevalent for serial sexual murderers during childhood and adolescence illustrated in the same study by Burgess et al.: fire setting, cruelty to children, assaultiveness to adults, and animal cruelty. Some of Ridgway’s behavioral factors are also reflected in the follow-up study by Gray et al. (2003) as being prevalent in the sexual murderer group: fire setting; cruelty to children, cruelty to animals, and assaultiveness toward adults in adolescence; and cruelty to children, cruelty to animals, and assaultiveness toward adults in adulthood. Moreover, further assumptions and correlations can be made when applying the data to Ridgway’s life. For example, a correlation can be assumed between Ridgway’s paraphilic tendencies and his childhood emotional abuse by his mother, family dysfunction, and childhood sexual abuse by his mother according to the study by Jackson et al. (2002).

Additionally, another assumption can be made based on the Beech et al. (2005) study and Ridgway’s beliefs about women and, more specifically, prostitutes. Beech et al. found that five theories applied to their subject pool of 28 sexual murders. Ridgway’s life history points to the possible subscription to the theories of entitlement, women as sexual beings, dangerousness of world, and male sex drive is uncontrollable. Ridgway’s mother had a lot to do with his beliefs toward women and sex. It is possible that he believed the world to be full of abusive individuals, like his mother, so he found it necessary to assert his dominance, thus subscribing to the dangerousness of world theory. His mother also might have given him the idea that women serve only to meet the sexual needs of men and that men’s sex drive is unmanageable and exacerbated by women when she told him stories of the men at work and by dressing provocatively. The final theory that is potentially applicable to Ridgway is entitlement, or the idea that some people are superior and more deserving than others. Because of Ridgway’s past wherein he was so poorly treated by his mother, he might look at himself as deserving the right to harm women because one harmed him so intensely.
The studies by Boer et al. (2003) and Bradford et al. (1998) point to psychopathology as a possible factor in the motives of sexual offenders. Although no known official diagnosis has ever been declared for Ridgway, his attitude, life history, and crimes all point to antisocial personality disorder. According to Boer et al., psychopathic offenders had higher levels of gratuitous and sadistic violence. Ridgway’s crimes were undoubtedly gratuitous and sadistic. Bradford et al. (1998) reported that the homicidal sex offender group displayed more psychopathic personality traits, atypical paraphilias, and antisocial personality disorders. Ridgway participated in necrophilia, which is considered an atypical paraphilia, and demonstrated aspects of antisocial personality disorder.

In conclusion, Ridgway’s crimes are unpardonable and undecipherable; nonetheless, it is the work of researchers and profilers to attempt to delineate potential reasons or causes that lead killers like Ridgway to their crimes. The above studies have sought to unravel the mysteries of a serial sexual killer in one way or another. It is apparent that Ridgway does not fall cleanly into one category. He was sexually and emotionally abused as a child, took part in deviant acts as an adolescent, and then grew up to kill innocent unfamiliar women. Society will never truly understand individuals like Ridgway, but by learning more about them, prevention and earlier intervention are hopeful possibilities.

Forensic Implications

The Green River case has far-reaching implications for the science of forensics. First, methods used by the investigators served as a model for crime investigative strategies and evidence collection and data coding. The investigation of the case began in 1982, beginning the long and arduous evidence process of collecting evidence from over 50 sets of human remains over the course of nearly two decades. The Green River Task Force started out simply collecting what they could from the crime scenes, coding the evidence, and filing each piece by hand. Over the years, the investigative team became more and more proficient at collecting remains from bodies submerged in water, those that were buried, and those that were left out where plants and shrubs had grown around the bodies. The team became experts in evidence collection, so much so that the members of the Green River Task Force traveled the country providing training on evidence collection. In addition to the evidence collection, the team also became skilled in coding data. When the case began, evidence was coded by hand, resulting in warehouses filled with items. As time went on, the county acquired the computer system utilized by the FBI for coding the evidence. This became a critical component in the case, allowing the investigators to make connections between burial sites based on their similarities.

Although evidence collection and data coding have proved to have important forensic implications, the use of DNA evidence was imperative to the apprehension of the Green River killer. Early on in the investigations, DNA samples had been taken from the bodies that had been disposed of most recently. Unfortunately, many sets of skeletal remains were unveiled years after the murder was committed. At the time that the DNA evidence was collected, sufficient technology was not available to isolate these very small DNA strands in order to make identifications. These samples were held for years with the hope that advances would be made to allow for the identification of the DNA. Finally, after over 10 years of waiting, the Washington state crime laboratory obtained a new DNA testing process that enabled them to arrest Gary Ridgway, the Green River killer, on suspicion of murder for four deaths.
The Green River case truly illustrated the crucial role of DNA technology in apprehending criminals. In this case, without the DNA evidence, officials would not have been able to link Gary Ridgway to the Green River murders. A statement by Sheriff Reichert summarizes the forensic implications brought about as a result of the case: “Along the way we had refined the processing of outdoor crime scenes to the degree that it was practically a scientific discipline. We had also devised improved methods of case management and the use of computers ... These advances could be adopted and taken further by other teams investigating other murders. Finally, we had shown that it was possible to solve stranger-on-stranger murders with the least bit of evidence. This had to give hope to others facing the same kind of challenge” (p. 238).

Today, the role of criminal profiling can be an important component of an investigation. The first studies of common factors among criminals were in their infancy at the time this case began. Based on this small body of research, a preliminary profile was created for the Green River killer to aid the police in their search. Since then, much more research has been conducted into criminal populations. The current research discussed later within this paper will address the criminal profiles that have developed since this initial work had been done and how they relate to Gary Ridgway.

Ethical Implications

There were many frustrations revolving around the length of the Green River investigation. First and foremost, it took over 20 years to finally catch the killer. Those in charge of investigating the case went through a roller coaster when it came to working on solving the murders; they were pressured by the victim’s families, the sheriff’s department, the public, the media, and even their own family members. Most of those assigned to the case worked long, hard hours, taking time away from their own families in an effort to stop the killer. Despite their hard work, over the years, the task force had been expanded and scaled down several times until it was assigned to only one individual who would continue to pursue leads and handle any tips that came in. This was in part due to the sheriff department’s need to justify all the hours and money that went into a case that remained unsolved. According to Sheriff Reichert, “By 1988, more than $15 million had been spent. About thirty seven thousand tips were pursued and we had logged more than nine thousand items of evidence. We could argue that our efforts had forced the killer to stop. But critics who said we had failed in our most basic mission, to catch him, were right” (p. 214). Families of the victims also had an extremely difficult time with the duration of the case. It was believed that a suspect was not apprehended because the police were not working hard enough. The public perceived authorities as indifferent about the case because the victims were prostitutes. The media also jumped on this bandwagon, at times mocking the task force via cartoons or publishing articles that interviewed angry family members. Nothing was further from the truth as illustrated by the diligence of the investigators described by Sheriff Reichert’s novel Chasing the Devil: My Twenty-Year Quest to Capture the Green River Killer. The task force worked tirelessly, and after over 20 years, all their work had finally paid off.

In spite of the difficulties, this case helped to humanize prostitution. Although the victims were prostitutes, people in the community came forward to express their concern for the victims. The magnitude of the case also allowed people to see the anguish and suffering being endured by the family members of the victims. Even the media played into this by interviewing family members and making them visible to the public. These aspects of the case were crucial in aiding the development of
public awareness regarding the vulnerability of prostitutes to crime victimization.

Discussion

Ridgway’s case spanned the course of 22 years and changed the lives of countless individuals and, as such, is deserving of intense scrutiny. The Green River case has proven to have far-reaching implications for the work of both researchers and law enforcement officials. Advancements were made in terms of forensic science as well as public sensitivity toward prostitutes as victims. Although the analysis and then comparison of Ridgway’s development to the known research of serial sexual killers provides clues as to a possible path of destruction that led Ridgway to commit such horrific acts, it should not be considered an excuse for his crimes. Everyone wants to know a criminal’s reasoning, but Ridgway is unable to provide a coherent logic that the rest of humanity can comprehend. The only thing left to do in the wake of Ridgway’s killing spree is to study his life and crimes in the hope of preventing such atrocities from occurring again through improvements in forensic science.

References


