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# The Development of Homicidal Behavior in Relation to Life-Course Theory

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# The Development of Homicidal Behavior in Relation to Life-Course Theory

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# ABSTRACT

Name: Rebekah Jensen Major: Criminal Justice

The Development of Homicidal Behavior in Relation to Life-Course Theory

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Reader's Name: Dr. Anandita Mukherji

This paper examines the role of life-course theory in order to explain the relationship between individuals developing violent behavior and committing murder. By incorporating evidence from case studies, documentaries, and various forms of criminological literature, I discuss how the development of violent behavior through exposure to risk factors increases the likelihood of developing homicidal behavior. In Chapter 1, I seek to establish this correlation by narrowing the risk factors down to three categories: antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence. To further support this correlation, I utilize control theories and learning theories which focus on the development of homicidal behavior.

As part of the investigation concerning the process of the criminal justice system in convicting homicidal individuals, Chapters 2 and 3 focus on specific murderers who were convicted and punished through their country's criminal justice system. In my last chapter, I utilize the evidence found in research to support the benefits of resocializing programs aimed at minimizing the development of homicidal behavior during adolescence. I suggest improvements to the United States criminal justice system to offer more rehabilitation opportunities aimed at reforming antisocial and violent behavior. Additionally, I discuss the importance of restorative justice as a method to support healing secondary victims and offer remorseful offenders the opportunity to actively reflect on their crimes while undergoing their punishment.

## DEFINITIONS

The following terms are significant for understanding the literature discussed in the chapters.

**Homicidal Behavior** - Behavior exhibited by homicidal individuals after developing violent behavior through frequent exposure to and development of risk factors.

**Homicide** - Intentionally killing another human being. It is discussed separately from behavior considered self-defense or acting in defense of another.

**Social Bonds** - The formation of relationships within a community. That may include individual relationships, attachment to a group of people, and may be informal or hierarchical.

**Adolescence/Childhood** - Individuals under the age of 18.

**Adulthood** - Individuals at or above the age of 18.

**Age-Graded Trajectory -** Patterns of pathways attributed to distinctive age groups, such as adolescence and adulthood, that are subject to modification through transitions.

**Transition** - Social changes or specific life events often associated with the modification of age-graded trajectories.

**Antisocial Behavior** - The act of maximizing personal gain by inflicting pain on another individual with little concern or respect for them.

**Normalization of Violence -** Rationalizing violent behavior in everyday life that often results from untreated violent trauma.

**Negative Reinforcement and Negative Punishment** - The removal of negative stimuli/positive stimuli from desirable/undesirable behavior in order to alter the frequency of such behavior.

**Positive Reinforcement and Positive Punishment** - The addition of positive stimuli/negative stimuli from desirable/undesirable behavior in order to alter the frequency of such behavior.

# INTRODUCTION

I was in the care of an orphanage in China until two weeks before my first birthday when the Jensen family adopted me. The orphanage did not know anything about my biological parents, and I have never been contacted by them either. With such little information about my biological family, I have a difficult time attributing my behavior to my genetics. Instead, I have an easier time understanding who I have become as a result of the way my parents and siblings socialize me. There are a lot of similarities between my adoptive parents and me. For instance, I like to be organized and schedule my day in advance like my mom, and prioritize efficiency in my tasks like my dad. However, despite being raised by the same parents, my adoptive brothers (their biological sons) and I are different people who made different decisions throughout our lives. Our experiences vary from the friends that we made, the extracurriculars we participated in, and even how we responded to our parents' guidance growing up. I wanted to know why this was the case, and who I could have become if I was raised by a different family.

I wanted to connect the thesis topic to my criminal justice major and my interest in true crime. I had always been fascinated by the cutthroat environment that many royals around the Middle Ages experienced. There were constant fights for more power and control to reach the highest rank possible. Royal adolescents were raised to trust few people and eliminate anyone who stood in their way. One example is Mary Tudor, who behaved violently towards her sister and the citizens she ruled in order to establish and maintain her power. I found that her behavior was similar to that of serial killers that I learned about in true crime videos, which ultimately inspired my topic on the development of homicidal behavior through life course.

I was mainly familiar with adult serial killers and only knew a few cases of homicidal adolescents. So, I wanted to know how homicidal behavior could manifest during childhood and

how that compares to homicidal behavior developing during adulthood. In order to analyze the development through both age groups, I conducted a multi-case study about Mary Bell and John Wayne Gacy. Mary Bell is known for murdering two young boys during her childhood (Blakeway, 1998). My analysis of Mary focuses on the exposure and development of risk factors that increased the likelihood of her becoming homicidal. She was a rare case in that her homicidal behavior was recorded in detail, when nowadays minors who offend are heavily protected from media and research coverage. On the other hand, adults such as John are more frequently discussed and studied for research. John is known for murdering 33 men during his adulthood with little evidence to suggest violent behavior during adolescence (Berlinger, 2022). By focusing on both of these cases during separate yet connected chapters, my intention is to compare their exposure to risk factors and the cultivation of homicidal behavior.

My goal with this research is not only to inform the readers about the social theories and behavioral analysis on murderers but also to share how the social environment in which individuals grow up can influence the development of homicidal pathways. As such, the information provided explains how much influence society has on the specific crime of murder, supporting the strength of the mitigation mentioned in my last chapter. In my last chapter, I utilize the research evidence to support the benefits of resocializing programs aimed at minimizing the development of homicidal behavior during adolescence and rehabilitative programs focusing on deterring homicidal adults from reoffending. Additionally, I recommend improvements to the United States criminal justice system regarding the prosecution of adolescents within an age-appropriate court environment and propose that the system focuses on reintegrating violent and homicidal individuals into society rather than imprisoning them for life.

Everything discussed in my thesis is for educational purposes. In order to properly dissect life-course theory alongside related criminological theories in relation to the development of homicidal behavior, the topics analyzed in this thesis are detailed and potentially disturbing and/or triggering. The following is a warning for such triggers: childhood abuse/assault, sexual crimes (child, rape), murdering of toddlers - elders, sexuality bashing, drug and alcohol usage, mental illness, and a multitude of detailed traumatic experiences. If you are unable to read about any of the following or have any hesitance to read the prior mentioned, please take care of yourself and do not read further.

## Chapter 1: Diving into Criminological Theories

This chapter defines common criminological theories concerning personal development, socialization, and correlations to homicidal behavior and the motive to commit homicide. Additionally, after each theory follows a section analyzing its strengths and weaknesses as it concerns homicidal behavior. Each theory was selected to consider the sub-argument about insufficient socialization manifesting into the development of violence and homicidal behavior discussed further in the chapter.

### Life-Course Theory

Life-Course Theory (LCT) focuses on analyzing the relationship between individuals' development at various stages of their lives. These stages are broken up into adolescence (under the age of 18) and adulthood (age 18 and older). The development that occurs during adolescence correlates with the likelihood of committing a crime during adulthood (Elder Jr., 1994). The age-crime curve, in particular, displays a correlation between aging and committing violent crimes. Its bell-shaped curve exhibits an upward trend that peaks around the ages of 17 to 19, followed by a downward trend (Casey et al., 2022). The peak represents the average age range where violent crime is at its worst, followed by a decrease in committing violent crimes as individuals age. While specific versions of the curve may vary, this is the universal trend in Western societies (National Institution of Justice, 2014).

LCT and the age-crime curve are best understood by analyzing age-graded trajectories and social transitions in life. Trajectories are the "pathway or line of development over the lifespan" that are marked by a progression of life events and transitions, while transitions are "specific life events, or turning points, that are embedded in trajectories" (Sampson & Laub, 1990, p. 610). Age-graded trajectories refer to patterns of pathways attributed to distinctive age

groups, such as adolescence and adulthood, that are subject to modification through changing conditions (Elder Jr., 1994; Sampson & Laub, 1990). Researchers found that the modifications largely depend on how individuals choose to adapt to these life-changing transitions like marriage, employment, and parenthood. They also suggest that individuals can experience the same events, but adapt to them differently following their current life-course trajectory, individual differences, and how they were socialized (Sampson & Laub, 1990).

**Strengths and Limitations of Life-Course Theory**

LCT is a strong theory for discussing the cultivation of homicidal behaviors at different stages of life. It not only supports explaining how the development during adolescence shapes transitioning into adulthood but it can also be discussed alongside other developmental and social theories in order to explain homicides. By itself, however, LCT is limited to explaining age patterns as evidence of an increased likelihood of developing homicidal behavior. In fact, LCT often explains crime with age patterns by including other aspects of theories that explain the socialization of an individual (Akers, 1990). For example, social learning theory discusses that individuals learn how to behave by observing and mimicking those around them. If an adolescent learns how to behave violently at a young age and continues to behave violently as they transition into adulthood, social learning theory can explain why. While the age of exposure does play a significant role in the ability to retain and mimic behavior, the violent behavior introduced in this scenario is best explained in the context of the individual's social influences (Loeber, 1892).

In the context of homicide, LCT describes the methods of homicide and opportunities to commit crime alongside an increase of agency as individuals age. Agency is the condition or ability of an individual to act on their own accord (Elder Jr., 1994). Most adolescents grow up

with a lack of agency due to being less cognitively developed and more supervised. Even gifted adolescents who are described as more intelligent than their peers, experience a lack of agency as society generally perceives them as more immature than adults to behave responsibly with greater freedoms. Adolescents' ability to travel, victimize a more vast array of individuals, and even murder in more complex forms is limited because of legal rights that consider their underdeveloped minds. On the other hand, adults have more agency and are arguably more cognitively developed to commit more complex forms of homicide. They are legally able to drive, can explore more environments for targeting individuals, and have legal access to harmful devices like weapons to commit murder. As such, when LCT is contextualized through homicide, it can be used to discuss age by comparing the opportunities available at different stages of life to murder.

***Relevance of LCT to This Multi-Case Study Analysis***

In maintaining the research narrowed down to the development of homicidal behavior, I primarily look at homicidal behavior as a consequence of socialization and developing risk factors that occur during adolescence. However, there are limited case studies concerning homicidal adolescents in comparison to adults. Yet, research about violent adolescents has revealed common risk factors that increase the likelihood of developing homicidal behavior studied in adults (Howell & Hawkins, 1998). This emergence of violent behavior is most often linked with the development of risk factors such as antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence. With a limit of research to analyze adolescents that exhibited homicidal behavior, I have decided to focus on studies concerning predictive patterns of violent adolescents, in addition to analyzing case studies surrounding existing homicidal adults that have exhibited exposure to and development of the previously mentioned risk factors.

In accordance with the age-crime curve concerning violent crime that is discussed within LCT, transitioning into adulthood generally correlates with a decrease in violent offending. Scholars argue that adults experience an increase of agency from adolescence, and the advancement of "a new sense of self and identity" as adults gain a larger grasp on their desires and how they want to pursue them (Sampson & Laub, 2005, p. 37). Oftentimes, as individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood, they are more cognitively capable of weighing the good and bad of their choices. They can make rational decisions to pursue a stable life with little criminal behavior, rather than offend at the expense of their future. Scholars also concluded that age-graded trajectories explored during adulthood may modify the instability that develops during adolescence into stability for the future (Elder Jr., 1994; Sampson & Laub, 1990). The experiences of age-graded trajectories such as college and employment, expose adults to the higher standards that society holds them to in comparison to adolescents. Society generally finds adults more responsible and in control of their behavior in comparison to adolescents because they are more cognitively developed. Thus, with an increase in cognitive ability to consider the consequences of one's behavior after either experiencing it or being threatened by it, violent adolescents often curb their deviancy as they transition into adulthood as evident in the age-crime curve.

However, there is a significant critique on research establishing a relationship between age-crime that questions the relevance of studying an invariant, or unchanging age-crime curve (Tittle & Grasmick, 1997). The argument follows that there is no need to study the various developmental aspects of an individual's life-course for an invariant curve when the data results in the same bell shape. However, scholars dispute the argument through research on individual age-crime relationships, concluding that there is some variance in the data (Tittle & Grasmick,

1997). When going beyond the mathematical form of the curve, scholars found individual variations in criminal trajectories that can explain why some individuals commit more crimes as they transition into adulthood rather than desisting after the transition (Casey et al., 2022). Such a variance occurs because of insufficient social learning, low self-control, and lack of social control during adulthood. Therefore, a limitation of LCT is that it does not account for these variances unless studied in the context of other theories that do discuss the previously mentioned factors outside of age.

## Social Learning Theory

At an early age, adolescents learn how to behave by socially interacting with others and learning how to integrate into society. This is studied through social learning theory (SLT), which focuses on how individuals influence each other's behaviors by observing and modeling the demeanor of those around them (Akers, 1990). In the context of criminology, the concept of socially learning deviant behavior is often theorized under differential association theory, which explains that criminal behavior is socially learned rather than genetically inherited (Williams & McShane, 2018). Individuals can develop homicidal behavior as early as adolescence through violent socialization which includes frequent exposure to the risk factors of antisocial behavior and low self-control (Akers, 1991; Loeber, 1892; Stevens, 1996). However, just as frequent exposure to these risk factors can induce a homicidal trajectory, individuals can learn normative behavior at different points in their life course through strong social bonds with individuals who integrate into society without being exposed to violence. Chapter 2 further discusses the impacts of violent socialization, while Chapter 4 discusses how individuals violently socialized can go through programs that mitigate the effects of such poor development.

A significant theory to explore alongside SLT is the social bond theory (SBT). SBT considers that individuals with stronger bonds to conventional society are less likely to behave deviantly than those with weaker bonds (Chriss, 2007). The influence of relationships on an individual's likelihood to deviate is critical in discussing ways to mitigate antisocial behavior, which I discuss in later chapters. When dissecting the development and exposure of antisocial behavior, studies often examine the influence of weak social bonds between a parent and their child compared to strong social bonds (Calkins & Keane, 2009). Weaker social bonds are established through little supportive connections with the child and are frequently exhibited through abuse and neglect. The child experiencing such poor treatment learns to normalize a lack of sympathy and respect when interacting with others. Thus, the child experiences ongoing difficulty when establishing future relationships, resulting in a disconnect between the child and the people around them.

On the other hand, strong social bonds between a parent and their child promote a sense of devotion to the parent from their child. Such devotion is more frequent for stronger parent-child relationships because these children are "more heavily supervised" than weaker parent-child relationships (Chriss, 2007, p. 697). The stronger the bond, the more nurturing and responsible parents behave towards their child and ensure to positively reinforce the child's desirable behavior while negatively punishing undesirable behavior. Frequent exposure to such teachings helps introduce children to a system of right from wrong to guide them outside the household. Additionally, frequent supervision may induce a psychological presence of the supervisor(s) into the supervisee(s) and encourage reluctance to misbehave. Since supervising parents guide and intervene in deviant behavior, children start to become morally aware of their behavior and ask themselves, "What will my parents think?" (Chriss, 2007, p. 697). While

adolescents may not fully understand the weight of their actions due to their underdeveloped brains, they are more than capable of learning from their parents and creating a moral compass to deter them from deviancy as they age.

In accordance with the age-crime curve, most adolescent deviance will be curbed during their transition into adulthood (Casey et al., 2022). While transitioning and entering adulthood, individuals develop higher cognitive capacities than during adolescence. This was concluded in a study comparing the cognitive capacity of age ranges 13-17, 18-21, and 22-25. It found that cognitive capacity improves with aging, demonstrating more "mature psychological abilities" the further one is into their 20s (Casey et al., 2022, p. 328). Additionally, higher cognitive abilities improve one's ability to socially learn and adapt to the normative behavior in society. The maturity of psychological abilities allows for a more complex understanding of the world around us (Casey et al., 2022). As a result, adults are more capable of rationalizing normative behavior over deviant behavior by weighing the consequences of deviancy and the rewards of normalcy that society constructs (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Consequences constructed in America include the removal of an individual's freedom by being imprisoned or sentenced to death, while the constructed rewards may involve the individual being accepted into society and receiving opportunities to satisfy their social needs and desires as a result of behaving normatively.

**Strength and Limits of Social Learning Theory**

The literature I have reviewed focuses less on homicidal adolescents because of the lack of research about them in comparison to homicidal adults. On the other hand, violent behavior developed during adolescence has been researched in correlation with the development of homicidal behavior during adulthood. In fact, the National Institute of Justice (2014) found that "40 to 60 percent" of youth stop violently offending prior to adulthood, with any continuation of

violence often resulting in an increase in "lethal violence" as one becomes an adult (National Institution of Justice, 2014). Thus, my research focuses on how the developing violent behavior during adolescence can escalate into homicidal behavior. However, in answering that question, my analysis does not take into account the biological theories of crime.

Biological theories of crime focus on the idea that individuals are predisposed to commit crime as a result of their genetics (Gavin, 2018; Williams & McShane, 2018). Yet, biological theories of crime do not dismiss that there are environmental influences relating to a greater likelihood to commit crime or to desist from crime. Instead, scholars have proposed that social concern is to some extent ingrained in our biology, which is then cultivated through socialization and strong social bonds. With little conclusive evidence suggesting individuals are born to be homicidal, genetics are only one variable in developing a homicidal trajectory, which is still influenced by social learning (Gavin, 2018). As such, my choice to limit my discussion to biological theories of crime comes down to how abundant the evidence for socially learning violence during adolescence and developing homicidal behavior during adulthood is.

***Relevance of SLT to This Multi-Case Study Analysis***

Most influences for committing homicide can be traced back to the way an individual was socialized. Chapters 2 and 3 dive deeply into the improper socialization of violent adolescents and how their environment greatly impacts the way violent and homicidal behavior develops. While biology and genetic influence may impair an individual's ability to understand right from wrong and the consequences of their actions, there has to be an environmental influence that negatively reinforces deviant thoughts and behaviors. These include exposure to risk factors such as antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence, which

promote an individual's likelihood of developing violent and homicidal behavior and may exist with or without genetic influence.

## Control Theories

Control theories focus on the relationship between individuals and their deviation from social norms. Every society has established social norms that define conventional behaviors that individuals in that society must abide by to fit in (Gavin, 2018). The promotion of social norms can be explained by self-control theory (SCT), which focuses on the individual desire and ability to control impulsive behavior as a result of positive reinforcements and negative punishments (Akers, 1991; Welch et al., 2008). Social norms are also promoted through rewards and punishments as explained by social control theory (SOCT), which focuses on the implementation of informal and formal control methods and their influence on the likelihood of behaving socially desirable. In discussing both theories, I expand the discussion from social learning theory in order to further explain the influence that social bonds have on impulsive control and the likelihood of becoming a persistent offender.

## Self-Control Theory

SCT focuses on the ability of individuals who can control their impulses or learn to control them (Akers, 1991). This phenomenon is known as high self-control, and can occur as early as adolescence by promoting a "*desire* to restrain [deviant] behavior" (Tittle et al., 2004, p. 147). However, several studies have found that individuals with low self-control are very susceptible to deviant behavior that advances their self-interest to feel pleasure and avoid pain (Akers, 1991; Welch et al., 2008). Consider the unconventional use of force, where force is defined as an individual's desire to gain control over a situation by threatening to, or acting forcefully against their victim (Gavin, 2018; Myers et al., 2006). When concerning homicidal

behavior, offenders will intentionally use force to capture and/or restrain their victims before proceeding to murder them. This may correlate to a desire to act impulsive or with low self-control, as a result of frequent exposure to force and even developing the sadistic desire to inflict force onto others (Deepak & Ramdoss, 2021). This is discussed further in depth in Chapter 2 in the section about low self-control.

One way to restrain impulsive behavior is by positively reinforcing individuals with rewards that promote pleasurable experiences when conducting self-restraint. For example, individuals who choose to treat their peers with respect rather than malice can receive respect and a lack of malice in return. However, if the individual chooses to hurt their peers for fun, their peers may negatively punish them by reporting them. Negative punishments remove any positive stimuli that individuals experience from deviating soon after they offend. In the previous scenario, the act of being reported may result in the removal of the privilege to interact with peers and feel emotionally relieved, thus taking away the pleasure of impulsive deviancy.

**Strengths and Limitations of SCT Theory**

Low self-control is a significant factor in explaining the inability of individuals to restrain their impulses when exposed to situations that could advance their self-interest. However, scholars concluded that the ability to restrain one's impulses, and the desire to do so, can exist independently in predicting crime (Tittle et al., 2004). Several studies found that a low ability to exhibit self-control can exist with a high desire to exhibit self-control, and vice versa. The ability for high self-control is defined as being "*capable* of delaying gratification" (Tittle et al., 2004, p. 147). With this definition, one study discovered that if the desire for high self-control is little to none, the predictability for crime can still be established through the ability for high self-control. This is also the case with little to no ability for high self-control, with the desire for self-control

being significantly capable of predicting criminal behavior. In relation to my own discussion on low self-control, this study suggests that the desire for high self-control should be met with the ability for high self-control, allowing for more narrow rehabilitation programs that focus on increasing both instead of one over the other.

### *Relevance of SCT to This Multi-Case Study Analysis*

The research does not specifically look at homicidal behavior, but the discussions about assault are closely related to the violent behavior I discuss in Chapter 2. Regarding the rationale of the data, researchers found that the ability for self-control is "rooted in the personality," with little connection to the individual's social environment, while the desire for self-control is attributed to the social context (Tittle et al., 2004, p. 165). However, since the ability for self-control and the desire for self-control can be discussed independently, I analyze resources that support higher self-control development in both areas within Chapter 4. The resources predominantly encourage the ability and desire for resocialization and stability in life (Howell & Hawkins, 1998).

## Social Control Theory

Social Control Theory (SOCT) focuses on the process or conditions of controlling individuals and the mechanisms that ensure they comply with society's norms (McCall et al., 2013). Research suggests that social bonds are a vehicle for social control, where individuals depend on socially learning conventional behaviors from their parents, family, and peers, in order to appropriately integrate into society (Chriss, 2007; Sampson & Laub, 1990). The more attached individuals are to others integrated into society, the more they believe in the values of that society in addition to being invested in conventional behavior (Chriss, 2007; Sampson & Laub, 2005). As such, the individuals become law-abiding citizens who are accepted into society with

their desirable behavior. However, if for example, adolescents learn from antisocial parents, or if their parents are neglectful towards nurturing them, the adolescents experience weak social bonds and inadequate socialization. They are “less likely to conform to normative behavior” as opposed to individuals with stronger bonds (McCall et al., 2013, p.169). This is further supported in Chapter 2 where I discuss the effect of adolescents’ exposure to and development of risk factors. Here, I argue that when adolescents are raised in an antisocial environment, they are at risk of developing violent and emotionally impulsive behavior as a result of a lack of deviant behavior control.

However, even if certain adolescents develop weak bonds at an early age, it does not mean that they are unable to strengthen them or make new ones that become stronger further in their life course. As per the age-crime curve, violent behavior that has developed during adolescence decreases at the peak of crime, which often ranges around 17 to 19 years old (Casey et al., 2022). This can be explained by the increase of social controls and opportunities to create strong social bonds outside of the home; through work, marriage, and higher forms of education that expose them to diverse individuals and environments. For instance, employees learn how to maintain responsibilities that can promote job stability and encourage a successful lifestyle with the income received. Success can also be established through strong bonds with co-workers who help each other stay on task. On the other hand, employees who offend are more likely to lose the stability and supportive relationships as a result of their crime.

**Strengths and Limitations of SOCT Theory**

SOCT can explain how effective rehabilitation programs may be for violent and homicidal individuals (Howell & Hawkins, 1998). Rehabilitation programs control the environment that individuals are held in, removing them from exposure to risk factors and

individuals who socially teach them to behave deviantly. Additionally, it encourages and supports them to behave acceptably by teaching them normative mannerisms and making them aware of the consequences of their actions. However, SOCT is limited in explaining those individuals who do not positively respond to rehabilitation methods or forms of social control such as imprisonment. Individuals who choose to re-offend after being sentenced to prison, or even break out of prison (which is an offense by itself), are difficult to explain with SOCT but may be explained through SLT. Chapter 4 dives deeper into how imprisonment by itself is not an effective form of social control and should be accompanied by rehabilitation rather than as an alternative to it.

***Relevance of SOCT to This Multi-Case Study Analysis***

There are two primary forms of social control studied to deter criminal behavior: informal and formal control (Chriss, 2007). Informal social rewards and punishments are primarily utilized to teach non-criminal adolescents socially desirable behavior. On the other hand, adolescents who have committed crimes are often formally controlled through intervention and rehabilitation programs which are discussed in Chapter 4. Formal controls include legally instilled methods to deter criminal behavior, such as the death penalty. Juveniles are prohibited from receiving capital punishment because it is cruel and unusual punishment (Casey et al., 2022). Alternatively, juveniles are far more likely to be rehabilitated because they are less competent than adults (Casey et al., 2022; Feld, 1998). As such, they are less likely to understand right from wrong and are not culpable for their behavior. As such, adults in the United States are arguably justified to receive the death penalty because they have more mature brains to weigh the risks of deviant behavior and the benefits of conformity, and therefore are more culpable for their crimes.

Further supporting the death penalty is the utilitarian approach offered by John Stuart Mill that emphasizes capital punishment to be morally acceptable to achieve the greatest amount of happiness by removing a dangerous individual from society (Sorell, 1993). Mill argued that security is connected to an individual's well-being, produced here by the fulfillment of desire for those impacted by the loss of the victims by the knowledge that the offender will be suffering "an evil equal or proportionate" to the one they committed (Sorell, 1993, p. 203). However, Mill's argument defines capital punishment to "seem more rigorous than it is," where the practical power of a "rapid death" depends far less on the actual result than how people perceive it (Sorell, 1993, pp. 204-205). Not only is the death penalty proportionate to the crime of murder, but the fear factor of losing one's life when taking another's promotes deterrence. Yet, similar arguments could be made towards the more severe punishment of life imprisonment when considering Mill's argument that such a conviction with the inclusion of hard labor is far more severe in the result than capital punishment.

## Conclusion of Chapter 1

I discussed the development of violent and homicidal behavior in relation to human life, comparing such developments between adolescents and adults. My argument follows that the influence of poor socialization and weak social bonds, combined with the lack of self and social control, can transition from adolescence into adulthood. During that transition, the violent behavior that may develop from exposure to risk factors in those poor social environments may evolve into homicidal behavior if there is no method of intervention. Intervention methods are often labeled within social control, which positively reinforces normative behavior while negatively punishing deviant behavior. This chapter lays the basis for the following three, which discuss violent adolescence, homicidal adults, and social control further in depth.

## Chapter 2: Youth and Violence

This chapter dives into early exposure to and development of risk factors during adolescence. I begin by analyzing research that supports a correlation between exposure to antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence with the development of violent behavior. As part of the analysis of specific cases of homicidal youth, I dive into the case study of Mary Bell, a young girl under the age of twelve who murdered two toddlers.

## Risk Factors

The development of homicidal behaviors begins all the way back with adolescents' exposure and development of risk factors. Risk factors are the conditions of individuals and their environment that increase the "likelihood of developing problems such as violent behavior" (Howell & Hawkins, 1998, p. 275). Violent behavior is a significant trait found in behavioral and developmental risk factors like antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence (Akers, 1991; Loeber, 1892; Stevens, 1996). The behavioral risk factor of becoming antisocial is an individual trait that is cultivated through weak social bonds. Developmental risk factors such as normalizing violence and low self-control grow through unstable environments. The following sections consist of an in-depth analysis of how risk factors increase the likelihood of developing homicidal behavior.

### Antisocial Behavior

Here, antisocial behavior is not discussed in reference to a mental diagnosis, but rather, as a behavioral trait exhibited by violent adolescents. Adolescents with antisocial behavior will often "maximize" their personal gain through the infliction of "pain or loss on others" (Loeber, 1982, p. 1432). When these traits persist over time, individuals are considered chronically antisocial and have a greater chance of exhibiting aggressiveness. In regard to learning violent

behavior, antisocial parents may expose children to an “ineffective social environment” where adolescents are insufficiently socialized as a result of weak bonds developed through neglectful parents (Braimovic, 2015, p. 11). With weak social bonds between parent-child, adolescents do not experience the love and nurture of their parents and are less likely to grow up learning social values including empathy and sensitivity towards their peers’ feelings.

Parental neglect often results in a lack of supervision, which enables adolescents to grow up being “unaware of what they have done or that they have done anything wrong” when they misbehave (Gavin, 2018, p. 100). Without that awareness or psychological presence causing hesitation from misbehaving, adolescents are at risk of developing antisocial behavior in the household. Antisocial adolescents are often more aggressive because they are easily over-aroused and lack discipline in self-control (Calkins & Keane, 2009). As a result, adolescents are unable to control their emotions and behaviors outside of the house as well, such as while interacting with peers and participating in institutions such as church and school. Violent behavior may develop from unrestrained aggressive behavior, which is significant to study in regard to developing homicidal behavior through adulthood.

**Low Self-Control**

Low self-control is associated with a propensity to commit crime, rooted in a greater difficulty for individuals “to resist the temptations of the immediate rewards” that crime may offer (Akers, 1991, p. 203). Immediate rewards are primarily attributed to the provision of gratification that comes from committing the crime. Adolescents are more likely to behave impulsively in order to receive immediate gratification because they are less likely than adults to exhibit “cognitive control” over their “emotionally arousing conditions” (Casey et al., 2022, p. 327). In studies concerning homicide by adolescents, scholars hypothesized that individuals may

develop a sexual desire formulated through a “sadistic fantasy” (Myers, 2004, p. 359). These sadistic fantasies primarily manifest as adolescents are socialized in traumatic environments. Adolescents who have frequently been exposed to trauma are at risk of normalizing the trauma without access to healing methods (Maas et al., 2008). Normalization of trauma may come with normalizing violence, where individuals form a tolerance for violence and a likelihood to develop violent behaviors when they are traumatized by a family member (Chan et al., 2011). The sadistic characterization of adolescent fantasies is a combination of aggression and sexuality that is socially reinforced as promoting positive feelings, thus paving the way toward sexual deviancy toward other individuals.

However, it is important to note that there is a difference between forming sadistic desires from trauma and simply witnessing pornography. A report from the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography found that sexually deviant behavior does not develop from witnessing aggressive depictions of pornography, let alone aggression or hostility towards another individual even if there was some prior to consuming violent pornography (Chan et al., 2011). While exposure to aggression from pornography alone is enough to develop sadistic fantasies, it may be that the establishment of weak social bonds with parents and caregivers is also needed to socialize individuals into normalizing their abuse and violent urges. Despite being weak, the relationship still maintains some bond, with the parent as a role model for their children. Thus, while they may be encouraged to fulfill their sadistic fantasies through pornography, they are ultimately taught sexually deviant attitudes and violent behavioral patterns through abuse and unattended trauma (Deepak & Ramdoss, 2021). Those teachings result in an acceptance of impulsive behavior, or rather, a lack of social control to inhibit adolescents from exhibiting low self-control.

**Normalization of Violence**

When individuals normalize violence, they learn to rationalize or expect violent behavior as a societal norm. Adolescents especially, are prone to normalizing violence when raised in unstable environments that are "flooding" with physical and verbal abuse, parental arguments, and neglectful parenting (Stevens, 1996, p. 129). A study by Dennis Stevens discovered that out of 313 incarcerated adult offenders, 101 of them shared experiences of seeing their parents frequently fighting. 80% of those offenders became violent convicts, and the study explains these results by analyzing the effects of parental fighting. Since the study mentions bickering and fighting synonymously, it is uncertain what constitutes bickering or fighting in the data collection. However, the analysis focuses on how children witnessed violence and aggression.

The neglect demonstrated in the study narrows in on data regarding unsafe environments. Unsafe environments in the context of the research are attributed to neglectful parenting with data showing 79% of 189 violent criminals revealed to have been "always or very often injured at home" (Stevens, 1996, p. 127). This repetition of injury is arguably caused by parents neglecting to teach their children how to behave safely, or comforting them during times of pain. Furthermore, the research establishes that neglect due to bickering parents creates "harmful effects" on their children, who learn to disregard the pain of others just as their parents ignored theirs (Stevens, 1996, p. 127). Through repetition of neglected injuries, these children become traumatized and more likely to develop an inability to "positively cope" with future pain (Maas et al., 2008, p. 64). Instead, they are more at risk of finding comfort in their trauma and even traumatizing others, due to their emotional and mental impairment in healing from it. However, unlike the offenders in this study, the case of Mary Bell is about a young girl who committed homicide during her childhood.

## Mary Bell

On Saturday, May 4, 1968, 4-year-old Martin Brown was murdered in Scotswood, Newcastle, England (Blakeway, 1998). That same year on Wednesday, July 31, 3-year-old Brian Howe was also found murdered in the same town. The murderer was a child named Mary Bell, who had turned 11 years old between her first and second murder. There is limited information about her case as it involved minors, but in 1998, her story was aired on a BBC documentary, featuring interviews with various individuals involved in Mary's life and the investigations surrounding her crimes. Researchers have analyzed her story through the exposure to and development of early risk factors such as antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalizing violence (Blakeway, 1998; Gavin, 2018; Myers, 2004).

### Traumatic and Abusive Childhood

Mary was raised in a poorly developed area of Scotswood. She lived in a community that was "notorious for social problems and difficult families" where poverty was abundant and crime frequented the neighborhoods (Blakeway, 1998, 4:57). Mary's father was an alcoholic criminal and her mother was a prostitute who actively brought clients into her home. With her father participating in petty crimes or becoming intoxicated at the pub, and her mother often away from home or bringing prostitution clients into their home, Mary was actively neglected during most of her childhood. This arguably resulted in her developing many social problems, including being traumatized from maltreatment and insufficiently socialized by her parents.

Mary's trauma did not end with neglect. Her mother treated Mary with little respect for her humanity. Neighbors recount Mary's mother trying to kill her daughter with sleeping tablets, and Mary herself recalls her mother often selling her to pedophiles (Gavin, 2018). As a result, she became a child prostitute against her will at an early age, unwanted by her mother, and a

victim of abusive intimate relationships. The pedophiles and her pimping mother became role models for shaping Mary's sexually deviant behavior (Chan et al., 2011). Part of the sexually deviant behavior included normalizing violence and developing low self-control, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. Additionally, Mary's relationship with her mother created a dysfunctional understanding of social bonds; she often experienced her mother behaving erratically and aloof towards her, noted by the frequent attempts to put Mary up for adoption, only to refuse to give her up when an offer was made (Blakeway, 1998). Such distortions of affection damaged her development of empathy and respect for other people, traits that correlate with antisocial behavior and the development of weak social bonds. While a parent-child relationship is arguably different from peer-to-peer relationships, Mary most likely presented what she learned from her maltreatment and treated her peers in a similar abusive way.

**Risk Factors and Mary Bell**

Mary was unable to develop many strong social bonds because her peers were very afraid of her. She never learned how to respect other people or empathize with them because of being maltreated by her parents and a distorted understanding of intimate relationships from prostitution. The closest relationship she did have was with Norma Bell (no relation), who was acquitted of her part in Mary's future homicides due to her "simple-mindedness" that made her easy for Mary to control (Blakeway, 1998, 35:53). Not much is shared about Norma in the documentary, but her then-school peers describe her as Mary's follower who would jump off the Thames Bridge if Mary told her to. Norma exhibited submission while with Mary, even joining her in tormenting their peers and murdering both boys. Although Norma was an accomplice to both murders, it was determined that Mary was the mastermind and was leading Norma the entire time, rather than Norma being able to act of her own volition. Neither Norma nor Mary

Bell exhibited self-control when terrorizing their peers, and they had no reason to because they were never punished for their behavior.

Mary's repeated maltreatment and exposure to prostitution led to her normalizing violence. It is very likely that this normalization contributed to Mary's choice to abuse her peers (Gavin, 2018). A major contributor to her transition from abused to abuser came from her mother's unconventional sexual relationships. The documentary describes her mother as having allegedly "specialized in sadomasochism" in her prostitution (Blakeway, 1998, 39:50). Sadomasochism combines sadism and masochism, and refers to the "enjoyment from hurting someone or being hurt," most often in a sexual context (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d. -a). Mary's development of normalizing pain and pleasure through social bonding was constantly reinforced by her mother and visiting clients. While there is little information on what she witnessed, it is possible that strangulation was one form of sadism that she witnessed, suggested through the multiple instances where Mary strangled her peers during playtime. The victims rarely reported details of what happened to the police or adults, and even when they did, Mary received little if any reprimanding. As a result, she was improperly socially controlled and continued exhibiting low self-control from behaving violently.

Common forms of social control concerning adolescence include school programs that positively reinforce prosocial behavior, parent-child programs focusing on the enhancement of social bonds and parental nurturing, and after-school community programs that teach responsibility and conflict resolution (Howell & Hawkins, 1998). All of these programs are positive reinforcements to deter crime, and help mitigate the exposure to and development of risk factors from weak social bonds. However, Mary received little sanctioning or deviancy intervention, and thus, she was not exposed to resources that curbed her low self-control. At

school, Mary was not reprimanded for strangling her classmates by the teachers or administration (Blakeway, 1998). While many of her peers did not speak up about being tormented, one of her teachers was informed with visible evidence that she put a lit cigarette on a classmate's cheek, and was forced to admit she was sorry. Yet, that was all that happened, and the teacher went on to say that he knew she had a "sadistic streak" from incidents similar, but for unshared reasons, did not take action (Blakeway, 1998, 8:29). It could be argued that unless law enforcement was involved, little could be done to deter her from reoffending. With her father as a criminal, and her mother being a prostitute, the little school resources that could have helped mitigate the exposure to and development of risk factors, might follow a regression once she went back home.

**First Murder**

With low self-control and normalization of violence, Mary committed her first murder. Martin's cause of death was originally deemed natural, as there was little evidence to suggest otherwise (Blakeway, 1998). However, Mary did her best to get the attention of the investigators and members of the community, subtly incriminating herself for the murder. On the Monday after Martin's body was discovered, Mary handed her school notebook to the teacher like any other day but wrote specific details about Martin's murder that included a drawing of Martin lying dead at the scene of the crime (Blakeway, 1998). This piece of evidence contributed to the investigation after she committed her second murder and her teacher decided to look through Mary's work due to being suspicious. That same Monday, she and Norma broke into a children's nursery and wrote on the walls that they killed Martin, choosing to be ambiguous by omitting their names. However, the ambiguity was enough to indirectly give them attention from a fearful community. Mary's grasp for attention was met with disappointment when Martin's death was ruled an accident and the investigators refused to look at the vandalism as anything but a prank.

**Second Murder**

Brian's homicide was Mary's last offense before she was convicted of homicide, and the investigation into his case reopened Martin's case as well. Two months after Martin's closed case, investigators chose to reopen the investigation when they suspected Mary from a witness account. Unlike the lack of physical evidence suggesting Martin being murdered, Brian was discovered half naked and with "puncture wounds" on various areas of his legs (Blakeway, 1998, 21:20). Additionally, his body revealed how someone attempted to carve an 'M' initial into his stomach, and his genitals were partially mutilated. It is unclear why Mary decided to use scissors during her second murder, but in one study analyzing her behavior, there is evidence of Mary admitting to a desire to "stick people with needles, adding that she liked hurting people" (Myers, 2004, p. 366). Her choice to mark Brian's body suggests a sadistic desire to make the community afraid of her once again.

Mary was seeking attention, and this time, she made her connection more obvious. After the body was discovered, Mary was heard "boast[ing] in the playground" to her peers about strangling a boy — an incident that investigators tied to Brian's recent murder (Blakeway, 1998, 23:43). The children were still afraid to report Mary, but an anonymous source did inform the investigators about Mary's behavior, clarifying that her boast was believable given her history of strangling her peers. After Mary's arrest, one of her teachers decided to investigate past assignments that Mary turned in. He discovered that her assignment the Monday after Martin was murdered, included a drawing of the boy's body at the crime scene with details that were not shared with the public yet. His submission of the assignment to the authorities, and the anonymous tip about Mary's boast, allowed investigators to connect Mary to both murders and convict her in court.

**Aftermath**

Despite the events that unfolded, much of the community of Scotswood did not seek retribution for the murders (Blakeway, 1998). In fact, it was clear to them that Mary's upbringing contributed largely to her development of homicidal behavior, and that she was a victim of injustice herself. There are few details about Mary after she was put in various special locations to protect and resocialize her from her parents' misguidance. However, the documentary notes that Mary has not reoffended since she was prosecuted, even after being released in her 20s. The Newcastle Children's Officer at the time has gone on record to say that Mary's rehabilitation demonstrated a "real exchange of affection and interest in the person concerned, not simply as a case, but as a person" (Blakeway, 1998, 44:38). Her punishment should have given her opportunity to resocialize in healthier developmental environments, mediating the effects of her exposure to risk factors that influenced the development of homicidal behaviors.

## Conclusion of Chapter 2

I discussed risk factors contributing to the development of homicidal behavior, with violent behavior being a significant trait cultivated during adolescence. Antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence can all be found within adolescents' primary environments such as their home and school. Beginning with home, violent adolescents experience a neglectful and often traumatic upbringing that is exemplified in detail through the case of Mary Bell. Her case, while being rare due to the limited research there is on homicidal adolescents, shares the commonalities of how exposure to risk factors can influence the development of violent behavior towards others, which may become homicidal. The following chapter discusses how those same risk factors can be found in homicidal adults.

## Chapter 3: Homicidal Adults

This chapter dives into the cultivation of homicidal behaviors as a result of exposure to and development of risk factors in adulthood. In relation to the previous chapter on violent adolescents, the development of homicidal adults correlates to further cultivation of risk factors that individuals were exposed to earlier in life, alongside more opportunities to establish motives from past trauma. Furthermore, the specific individual I discuss to expand my research is John Wayne Gacy, a sexual serial killer who grasped to maintain power and control while presenting himself as a socially normative individual.

### Cultivating Risk Factors from Adolescence

The exposure to and development of risk factors during adolescence significantly influences the likelihood of developing homicidal behaviors (Deepak & Ramdoss, 2021). This increase occurs when antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence are not curbed prior to entering adulthood, but rather cultivated through opportunities to act criminally on that behavior. More information regarding how these behaviors can be curbed is offered in Chapter 4, but it is important to discuss how risk factors can be cultivated after adolescence.

#### Cultivating Antisocial Behavior and Low Self-Control

When adolescents develop in neglected social environments they might develop antisocial behaviors that persist or increase during their transition into adulthood (Braimovic, 2015). Antisocial behavior disrupts an individual's ability to socially bond with other people. Adolescents often develop antisocial behavior due to a neglectful upbringing where they lacked exposure to strong social bonds and supervision that deterred them from misbehaving. Lack of social interaction will likely result in the reliance on fantasies as opposed to human contact and a failure to “[learn] social values” such as respecting the lives of others and their feelings

(Braimovic, 2015, p. 11). The fantasies may become outlets to express desires for attention and company while providing power and control to modify the behaviors of others in their fantasies. As a result, these manipulated "interpretations of others" in the fantasies become an outlet for adolescents to express any frustration from being neglected (Braimovic, 2015, p. 12). Such repetitive unrestrained expression may be aggressive and grow into violence as a result of low self-control.

Additionally, media may have a significant impact on providing the missing role models that abused antisocial adults look for as they grow apart from their parents (Chan et al., 2011). While the research discussing media does not provide specific data correlating violent pornographic media to sexual murder, it does discuss how sexual murderers who admit having a large interest in such media use it as a means to "compensate for their social isolation and emotional loneliness" experienced in their domestically abusive environment (Chan et al., 2011, p. 238). Their lack of social interaction led them to enter a fantasy world where they controlled and re-enacted pleasurable scenarios in which they were the offender rather than the victim. Such routined escapism motivated them to enact sexually offensive and even murderous behavior as they grew up. Once they reached adulthood, they were legally able to escape their parents and develop their own methods of victimizing others.

However, not all antisocial individuals fantasize or become violent, nor do all of them commit homicide during their life-course, because of the exposure to age-graded trajectories during adulthood that curb their insensitivity towards other people. For instance, marriage in America is a significant social transition that individuals are more likely exposed to during adulthood. Most states require individuals to be around the age of 18 before they can marry without the consent of an authorized adult (Levey, 2021). Being married may reduce "some

antisocial behavior" by promoting strong attachments to one's partner and the benefits of emotional ties (Sampson & Laub, 1990, p. 611). This reduction of antisocial behavior may positively reinforce empathy and respect that is often absent among violent adolescents and homicidal adults. However, there are numerous instances where married individuals behave violently towards their partner and others, sometimes resorting to murder (Gavin, 2018). This often occurs after the individual has normalized violence, such as during adolescence and socially interacting in fantasies.

**Cultivating Normalization of Violence**

Normalization of violence often occurs when individuals experience trauma that repetitively exposes them to violence (Braimovic, 2015; Maas et al., 2008; Stevens, 1996). Adolescents may experience violence through sexual abuse, and become abusers themselves. In fact, studies found "30-80% of [sexual] offenders have been sexually abused themselves," suggesting their sexually deviant behavior as adults had been influenced by their adolescence (Gavin, 2018, p. 166). When adolescents experience sexual abuse early on and for frequent periods of time, they socially learn to appropriate violence and sexual deviancy as victims. This is also known as "imprinting," which involves experiencing sexual stimuli through "operant conditions" that positively reinforce sexual pleasure in abnormal situations (Gavin, 2018, p. 163). Rather than feeling angry towards their abusers, adolescents learn how to accept their abuse and even desire it as they grow older. Due to the sadistic relationship between the abuser and the victim, the victim may develop a thrill for sexual deviancy that transforms their trauma into motivation for victimizing others. Alternatively, adolescents may have unrestrained aggression that transforms into motivation to do unto others as was done to themselves. It may

also be a mix of both, similar to Mary Bell's childhood in which she was sexually traumatized and chose to victimize younger individuals as adults did to her (Blakeway, 1998).

However, research focusing on sexual differences in serial killers suggests that there is more of an evolutionary variable in considering the normalization of violence and committing homicide (Harrison et al., 2019). The author argues a difference between female serial killers (FSKs) and male serial killers (MSKs). FSKs are known as "gatherers" who scout for resources in close proximity to their community (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 299). Research in 1994 collecting data on 14 FSKs found that at least 80% of them personally knew their victims, suggesting that their targets were vulnerable due to their location. Additionally, the research found that most of those victims were under the care of the FSK or somehow related, which is attributed to the nurturing role that women were labeled in back then. Even the crime is related to the housewife role that women had as gatherers, in which they remained in one area most of the time to conduct their duties. Similarly, FSKs commonly remain in "one area or place" to commit their murders with little evidence of "victim stalking" like their MSK counterparts (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 300). Much of the motivation for committing crime concerns securing stability for them, often leading to a violent separation from the husband and children.

MSKs are categorized as "hunter' of victims" whose characteristics go back to when humans lived as hunter-gatherers of prey and resources (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 296). Comparable characteristics between actual hunters and MSKs include routine stalking and overpowering their prey. Additionally, during and after the process of hunting, they might "[bind], torture…and mutilate]" their victims to receive a pleasurable outcome (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 298). For hunters, it was to prevent escape, skin them for fur and edibility, and even remove a part of the animal as a trophy. MSKs may also confine their victims and physically

harm them, even taking an item from them as memorabilia. These methods encourage a sense of masculinity and dominance that coincides with the gender role of men (Myers et al., 2006). John Wayne Gacy may be labeled as a hunter based on his method of finding his prey, but he was also a married and well-loved community man with lots of power.

## John Wayne Gacy

The case of John Wayne Gacy is about his victimization of young men for sexual pleasures while presenting an image of normativity in the community. He was taken to trial in 1980 for murdering 33 men, and sentenced to death in 1994 (Berlinger, 2022). While there is little evidence of him having offended during his adolescence, his childhood played a significant role in his development of homicidal behavior and becoming a sexually driven murderer (Herman et al., 1984). Some of the most significant aspects of his childhood involve being traumatized by his father and questioning his own sexuality.

### Childhood Violence and Sexual Deviancy

Similar to Mary Bell's upbringing, John was raised by neglectful parents and suffered most of his abuse at the hands of one parent. His mother describes her husband as exhibiting a "Jekyll and Hyde" personality that was triggered by his daily alcoholism (Herman et al., 1984, p. 1778). Her description references the protagonist of the story, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Stevenson, who showed signs of having two personalities: "sometimes very pleasant" and "sometimes very unpleasant" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d. -b). Similarly, John's father was polite when sober, but "belligerent and stubborn" when he was drinking (Berlinger, 2022, 27:25). His frequent intoxication caused a significant strain on the father-son relationship. Furthermore, his father would constantly punish John for failing to meet his expectations of the "macho image" (Berlinger, 2022, 25:50). Sometimes John's father would shout at his son and

demand that John “strike him,” getting angrier when John refused to do so (Herman et al., 1984, p. 1778). These punishments likely encourage John to normalize violence as an appropriate social interaction between a man and a younger man (his father and himself).

His later sexual homicides may have started when his mother found John in a compromising position. At one point during his adolescence, John’s mother caught him trying on her underwear and punished him by forcing him to wear it (Berlinger, 2022). She even threatened to make him walk down the street with it on if she ever caught him again. This humiliating treatment contrasted with her usual gentle and tender personality, which made him feel betrayed. Despite that, John often hid his mother’s underwear since he was prohibited from wearing it but lusted for the feeling of having it (Herman et al., 1984). John explained that his curiosity may have contributed to the sexual repression of his homosexuality during adolescence, but during an interview discussing homosexuality, he denied being attracted to men. His sexual victimization of men may be explained by the fact that he was traumatized by his father, but he also experienced a misconstrued understanding of sexual activities around the same time.

John admitted to sexual exploration early in his life (Herman et al., 1984). Around the ages of 6 to 8, John visually examined a female friend but was caught. Her father caught them and spanked John as punishment, simulating a sense of disappointment and attempts to positively reinforce deterrence from inappropriate conduct with women. Furthermore, around the age of 9, John was taken for a ride in a male contractor’s truck and consented to be shown a wrestling move that the contractor wanted to try. John’s head ended up between the man’s legs, but he says he felt no sexual stimulation. This specific situation is comparable to John’s adulthood when as a boss, he once invited his employee to the house and wrestled him into handcuffs (Berlinger, 2022). While there was little sexual interaction described by either party, this display of

dominance may have correlated with the vulnerable position John was in as a child. Similarly, the vulnerable position he experienced during his father's abuse may have influenced his dominant personality as an adult.

**Power during Prison and Adulthood**

John was very socially involved during adulthood and made a reputation for himself by holding leadership roles in various service organizations in the communities he lived in (Berlinger, 2022). His confident behavior contrasts with the submissiveness exhibited during childhood and social isolation from many of his peers. Furthermore, instead of being the victim he took on the role of being the offender instead. He was charged with sodomy against multiple teenage boys and faced time in prison. While in prison, he made attempts to become "not only popular, but powerful," and took on the role of a chef kitchen cook (Berlinger, 2022, 46:16). He did not want to be led by others, but rather wanted to be the leader instead. His method of being dependable to others for food, where crossing him was met with consequences of food being refused or tampered with, simulates his yearning for power and control that was missing during adolescence (Myers et al., 2006). He even developed a reputable image among the prison authorities when he added recreational activities on the prison grounds and dispensed favors to his peers. This satisfaction may have further motivated the choice to expand his presence in the community through construction work.

After leaving prison, John married a single mother who was described as "a little bit quiet and submissive" (Berlinger, 2022, 9:40). Thus, John married an individual he could dominate while coming across as a respectable family man who was exactly what he wanted. However, he felt dissatisfied with their sexual relationship and she even accused him of participating in homosexual activities with the younger boys he hired for contract work. John denied her

allegations and blamed her labeling for his future predatory behavior. However, it is likely that John was denying his homosexuality when comparing his sexual activities with men as a "form of masturbation" with no "feeling involved" (Berlinger, 2022, 23:08). He exhibited verbal disgust towards homosexual individuals during a time where homosexuality was socially frowned upon. However, his motivation for sexual assault was to experience pleasure through controlling them. His antisocial behavior promoted a lack of empathy in using others for his personal desires rather than perceiving them as human beings. John also exhibited low self-control when he took advantage of runaway homosexuals and employees of his construction company.

**Homicidal Behavior, Masculinity, and Sexual Orientation**

After prison, John formed his own construction company and only hired "young men [who were] small in stature" (Berlinger, 2022, 39:50). The general characteristics of the employees he hired reflected his victim profile for the sexual and homicidal crimes he John committed on them. By developing close relationships with them, he appeared as a fatherly figure that the young men loved and depended on (Berlinger, 2022). However, John took advantage of that dependency early on and sexually harassed them. Most of his employees were too afraid to report the non-consensual advances from John, recognizing that his charming personality had also manipulated the general public. Even the police would dismiss any claims of homosexual advances, and John's victims would risk losing their jobs and face public embarrassment for accusing a beloved member of the community of behaving atrociously. Homosexuality was a frowned upon activity in his time, and John knew that the young men he targeted had little to gain and much to lose for reporting his behavior without evidence. As such, John even made his way to prey on young boys outside of his workspace, who faced alienation

from their loved ones and would succumb to John's request to use their bodies in exchange for money.

John often hunted his non-employee victims who had run away from their homes after being rejected by their families for being homosexual (Berlinger, 2022). He would request to use their bodies for monetary compensation, and when he took them to his home, he restrained them under the guise of a magic rope trick. He created a "garrote by placing a rope around the victim's neck, tying a series of knots, and inserting a stick between the knot," forcing the rope to tighten around the victim's neck when they were physically struggling to escape (Herman et al., 1984, p. 1184). John enjoyed his victims struggling with the noose-like accessory as they experienced a slow and painful death, simulating prey that became trapped by a hunter (Harrison et al., 2019). It is unclear if he had sex with them while they were in such a vulnerable state, but he did not sexualize them after they died. Instead, he hid their dead bodies in his crawl space and kept souvenirs (Berlinger, 2022; Herman et al., 984).

Professionals such as investigators, psychologists, and even attorneys involved in the case reflected on John's sexual and homicidal behavior in a Netflix documentary on the case (Berlinger, 2022). All of them recognized John's desire to maintain control after facing trauma during his childhood. They also recognize that his method of killing through strangulation and preying on men whose bodies he could use simulated a "personal way" that suggests an emotional attachment towards harming homosexuals and dominating them (Berlinger, 2022, 50:00). It is possible that John resented being a further disappointment to his father who had instilled an expectation of masculinity, choosing to prove himself by strength and choosing to harm individuals his father would have deemed as weak. However, even after murdering them, John saw the bodies as his property that nobody else had the right to touch. He displayed less

sensitivity over being caught and more defensive behavior when his trophies were held in custody by others. His means of control was not only about manipulating how others perceived him in the community but also about receiving pleasure by capturing others as objects.

**Aftermath**

During the investigation, 26 out of 33 men were found by the police in John's house after his confession in 1980. He retracted his confession at the trial and maintained his innocence until the end (Berlinger, 2022). It is unclear why he chose to retract his confession, but his defense counsel had argued that John was insane. However, the prosecution refuted their argument by claiming that John was "evil, not insane" (Herman et al., 1984, p. 1253). They argued that the manner in which he killed and actively preyed on his victims was very organized and premeditated, suggesting intent and responsibility rather than suffering from mental illness. At the end of the trial, John was found guilty and sentenced to death. He remained on death row for 14 years before being stabbed to death by an inmate.

## Conclusion of Chapter 3

I discussed how the exposure, development, and cultivation of risk factors from Chapter 2 can influence the development of homicidal behavior in adults. When adolescents experience antisocial and violent behavior, the unrestricted self-control and normalization of their trauma follow them into adulthood. Homicidal behavior may emerge despite not existing during adolescence. Such was the case with John Wayne Gacy, who had learned violence and toxic masculine behavior that encouraged this acceptability of victimizing younger men (Berlinger, 2022). He had an antisocial perspective towards homosexual men due to the socially constructed hatred for weak men and how to control them to his advantage. The exposure to risk factors that lead to his homicidal development could have been mitigated as I explain in the next chapter.

# Chapter 4: Juvenile and Adult Justice

This chapter discusses juvenile justice through various lenses such as mitigation of risk factors, intervention and rehabilitation programs, and the controversy surrounding juvenile prosecution for homicidal adolescents. Additionally, I discuss the effects of deterrence for homicidal adults through the court system, arguing in favor of greater use of mitigation programs for homicidal adults in lieu of those systems implemented for violent and homicidal adolescents. The argument is built up into a substantive section of rehabilitation and restorative justice towards the end.

## Common Governmental Responses to Crime

The American criminal justice system focuses on punishing criminals for their offenses, while also working towards deterring recidivism (Casey et al., 2022; Gavin, 2018; Nagin, 2013). There are 3 groups of strategies that are primarily considered to accomplish that goal: retribution, rehabilitation, and restorative justice.

### Retribution

The retributionist perspective towards homicide focuses on punitive treatment that equals the harm done by the offender (Michael & Wechsler, 1937; Nagin, 2013). For homicidal individuals, an advertised method is capital punishment: the process of executing an individual as punishment (Sorell, 1993). While the method of execution varies from lethal injection, electric chair, shooting, and more, the justification relies on evidence that the offender took one or multiple lives with intent and motive. However, the death penalty is no longer a prominent method of conviction, with most states in America abolishing it and primarily convicting homicidal individuals to life in prison without parole (Gramlich, 2021). However, there are controversies about the effectiveness of life in prison as well, with little evidence to suggest that

lengthy prison sentences in general deter the likelihood of reoffending (Nagin, 2013). Some scholars have even argued that the cost of imprisoning individuals for life or over a span of years that exceeds the human life expectancy does not justify the deterrence results (Appleton & Grover, 2007). While the data vary and often focus on the comparison between life in prison and the death penalty, a generally agreed-upon conclusion is that the process of capital punishment is expensive and so is the process of maintaining offenders in prison until they naturally die (Nagin, 2013). As such, an alternative form of deterrence from recidivism is the process of rehabilitation.

**Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation methods focus on the reformability of an individual who acted against the norms of society. Within the context of rehabilitation from violence, offenders are offered the opportunity to be more conscious of what wrongs they committed and receive supervision in guiding ethical behavior (Bibas & Bierschbach, 2004). This includes exposing them to positive reinforcement which rewards respecting and sympathizing with others, and negative punishments which remove positive stimuli from the act of physically relieving aggression onto others (Williams & McShane, 2018). Rehabilitation allows for individuals to be judged on their character and the ability to be reformed and receive help tailored to their needs. Both homicidal adolescents and homicidal adults have comparable features that can be considered in their reformability. For instance, they are exposed to similar risk factors that encourage their development of violent and homicidal behavior, lacking methods of control to curb that development. Additionally, those risk factors proceeded to corrupt their understanding of right from wrong and create an acceptance to deviate from the norms. Rehabilitation focuses on mitigating what was improperly learned during adolescence and reforming the previous belief of seeing crime as acceptable.

### Restorative Justice

Restorative justice focuses on repairing the harm that the victim or secondary victim experienced from the offense committed, while also providing the offender the opportunity to express genuine remorse for their crime (Strang & Sherman, 2003). While this method does not remove offenders being punished for crimes, it does consider the possibility of lenient sentencing as a result of the victim being more forgiving towards the offender who has shown remorse. Few studies are focusing on such methods, but there is a high demand from victims to receive support for the trauma and harm they experienced. A study discussing the effects of restorative justice found that 93% of victims agreed to meet the offender to "explain their loss and pain" (Strang & Sherman, 2003, p. 28). This supports the argument that many victims want to confront their offender about the crime.

## Juvenile Justice

Scholars found that it is more effective to control the development of violent and homicidal behavior as early as adolescence (Casey et al., 2022; Greenwood, 2008; Howell & Hawkins, 1998). As such, there is more support for intervention and rehabilitation methods for violent and homicidal adolescents than adults because adolescents have a "heightened sensitivity" toward methods influencing their development (Casey et al., 2022, p. 327). These methods include positive reinforcement and negative punishments, which are highly practiced in juvenile intervention programs and rehabilitation programs by guiding and incentivizing adolescents to abandon deviant behavior and follow societal norms (Howell & Hawkins, 1998).

### *Intervention*

The primary objectives of interventions are to reduce exposure to risk factors while strengthening the social development of at-risk adolescents (Greenwood, 2008). For example, an

intervention may reduce the juvenile's antisocial behavior by strengthening the weak social bonds in relationships that negatively reinforce undesirable behavior, like a neglectful parent-child relationship. As explained in Chapter 2, neglected children have unrestrained impulses in which they disregard the consequences of their actions or consideration for others. To reduce the results of neglect, intervention programs work to improve the child-parent relationship by "enhancing the emotional connections" to decrease exposure to antisocial behavior from neglectful parenting (Greenwood, 2008, p. 198). By decreasing exposure and improving the interpersonal relationship, adolescents experience the importance of sympathy and consideration for others. Additionally, parenting intervention programs guide parents through supervised training to assist them in problem-solving skills for raising a child, which may further increase the well-being of the relationship.

Intervention programs have also been implemented in other parts of adolescents' lives. Research regarding adolescence-limited offenders often looks at the peer-to-peer influence that is frequently spread amongst the school environment (Howell & Hawkins, 1998). Consider the case of Mary Bell in Chapter 2, and how neglectful teachers were in punishing her poor behavior that was reported to them (Blakeway, 1998). Mary pressured Norma Bell (no relation) into accompanying her to terrorize children on the school playground, and their victims received little support when they reported the issue, causing many of them to cease trying. However, if there was an intervention program, it would educate teachers in recognizing and properly supporting the victims rather than dismissing their pain. Additionally, intervention programs seek to counsel and educate harmful adolescents about their behavior, positively reinforcing social norms while negatively punishing undesirable behavior while in school (Howell & Hawkins, 1998; Greenwood 2008).

### *Rehabilitation*

While intervention methods focus on reducing the effects of risk factors that encourage violent behavior, rehabilitative methods focus more on helping homicidal adolescent offenders through juvenile rehabilitation programs or juvenile justice programs (Howell & Hawkins, 1998; Kupchik, 2003). These programs help prevent adolescent violent recidivism by focusing on curbing their deviancy through resocialization and reintegration into society. Such resocialization often includes social learning training such as moral reasoning discussions, creating social bonds in schools and home life, and improving anger management (Tremblay & Craig, 1995). Rehabilitation programs provide more stability for adolescents and are more successful than "more traditional interventions that punish or attempt to frighten youths" (Greenwood, 2008, p. 198). This is because adolescents are less likely to understand the consequences of their behavior or even be completely in control of it. Due to being more immature in their cognitive abilities compared to adults, and being frequently exposed to risk factors described in Chapter 2, adolescents are more amenable to developmental rehabilitation than their adult counterparts. As such, their violent behavior is often curbed as supported by the age-crime curve, in which violent behavior often peaks before reaching adulthood (Casey et al., 2022).

## Juvenile Prosecution

Research concerning the court proceedings for general criminal adolescents suggests that there are more rehabilitation-focused procedures for violent and homicidal adolescents in America compared to homicidal adults (Kupchik, 2003; Monahan et al., 2015). The criminal justice system in America often places adolescents in juvenile courts and focuses on protecting society while helping youth rather than taking precedence on rehabilitation and the opportunity for reintegration into society. Additionally, the juvenile courts are much more informal

throughout the process, including in their manner of "routine interaction and language patterns," allowing for more simplicity and comfortability for adolescents (Kupchik, 2003, p. 452). Comfortability is an important factor in a compliant defendant, which can be difficult when adolescents feel overwhelmed. This is especially true when the defendant does not fully understand what is going on and requires more hand-holding. Judges often speak more casually to the defendant and allow for the attorney to speak for them rather than force them to speak for themselves, other than when placed on the stand (Kupchik, 2003).

Additionally, judges in juvenile court often use their discretion to suggest alternative punishments that support adolescent rehabilitation (Kupchik, 2003). They allow for courtroom workgroups outside of attorneys and themselves to attend the trial, encouraging discussion of the adolescent's character and lack of culpability. Common groups that may attend are psychiatrists, counselors, and social workers, all of whom offer their insights regarding the defendant. Their perspectives play a role in analyzing the defendant's lack of culpability, suggesting treatment alternatives over lengthy incarceration. This is similar to the rehabilitation programs mentioned previously, and often involve juveniles being confined with other juveniles rather than adults. This rehabilitative goal protects them from the harsher life of adult prisons including staff and inmate violence where the younger individuals are popularly victimized (Feld, 1998). This retributivist perspective is less common in juvenile facilities as they focus more on supporting and rehabilitating adolescents and punishing their crimes, rather than punishing and giving up on them as adult prisons tend to do.

## Adult Prosecution

Those homicidal adolescents and adults who are found culpable and competent are often sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole (Appleton & Grover, 2007; Michael

& Wechsler, 1937). The severe punishment focuses on placing offenders behind bars without the possibility of being released. By creating an example out of homicidal individuals, the criminal justice system sends out a warning to future offenders about the severity of possible punishments, which is an example of retributivist punishment. With such intentions, there is little consideration of rehabilitating homicidal adults despite their exposure to similar risk factors as violent and homicidal adolescents (Trembley & Craig, 1995). One may argue/hypothesize that the adult's longer exposure to risk factors decreases the likelihood that they can be rehabilitated. In addition to the longer exposure, homicidal adults are often perceived as more culpable for their crimes and more competent in understanding the consequences of their behavior (Monahan et al., 2015). As such, the arguable differences in brain structure and cultivation of homicidal behavior suggest that adults are less likely to respond to rehabilitation than adolescents. In response to the prescription that adult homicidal offenders are not able to be rehabilitated, the primary methods of punishment are life in prison with no possibility of parole and the death penalty.

Yet, there are cases in which homicidal adolescents are also deemed "incorrigible and beyond reform" to re-enter society (Casey et al., 2022, p. 322). Despite being perceived as cognitively underdeveloped as their reformable counterparts, those homicidal adolescents transfer into criminal (adult) court and are prosecuted as adults (Appleton & Grover, 2007; Nagin, 2013). There is little research into how the line is drawn in evaluating who is reformable and who is not, but cognitive development is not an underlying factor. Instead, research comparing juvenile court to adult court found that adolescents prosecuted in criminal court are labeled as more dangerous, not specifying what makes them more dangerous (Appleton & Grover, 2007; Nagin, 2013). However, unlike homicidal adults, homicidal adolescents have the

opportunity to make their case for being less dangerous in an open-minded juvenile court. Additionally, they are unable to receive the death penalty regardless of final risk perceptions. In 2005, the Supreme Court of the United States held that it was a violation of the 8th Amendment to sentence adolescents to death as it was considered cruel for young individuals (Casey et al., 2022). Yet, that argument is not entirely extended to adults in America, where the death penalty can still occur in multiple states and on a federal level. Additionally, homicidal adults are treated as dangerous to society without the opportunity to be referred to rehabilitation as most homicidal adolescents are (Appleton & Grover, 2007; Bibas & Bierschbach, 2004; National Institution of Justice, 2014).

## Rehabilitation & Restorative Justice

As reasons for imprisonment are primarily focused on a large perceived risk that a homicidal individual poses to society, there is little focus on how that risk can be alleviated on an individual basis. Scholars have argued for the importance of integrating remorse and opportunities for apologies in addition to prioritizing rehabilitation for homicidal individuals (Appleton & Grover, 2007; Bibas & Bierschbach, 2004; Kupchik, 2003; Nagin, 2013). These types of responses reflect both a rehabilitative and restorative justice approach. Instead of becoming a substitute for punishment, remorse, and apology allow the criminal to evaluate their behavior and offer genuine apologies to their secondary victims, that is, those related to the deceased (Bibas & Bierschbach, 2004; Strang & Sherman, 2003). According to a study that examined the impacts of victims who meet their offenders, victims want to be more informed about the offender such as their motive for committing the crime (Strang & Sherman, 2003). There is far more information provided during the victim-offender meeting that allows the victim to understand the offender, which may even lead to forgiving them and feeling less afraid of

being revictimized when the offender is remorseful. Similarly, the offender may truly develop an understanding of the pain they caused and the consequences of their actions, allowing them to improve through such an intervention.

However, it is important to consider that rehabilitation methods and remorse and apology may be ineffective or undesirable in certain situations. This is especially true with offenders who are deemed mentally insane or diagnosed with a mental disorder such as psychopathy which "impairs the capacity" to empathize with others and feel remorse (Bibas & Bierschbach, 2004, p. 145). There are also situations where secondary victims are afraid to meet their offender because of the risk of reliving the trauma or outright feeling hateful toward them. Yet, offenders who are deemed mentally unstable are often sentenced to facilities that supervise their mentality rather than general confinement (Gavin, 2018). They are given resources such as medication and more supervised care, while often confined for life. I propose that more supportive care to curb homicidal behavior should be implemented for homicidal adults, such as counseling and medication to help curb any harmful and impulsive behavior.

By offering resources for rehabilitation and remorse and apology, homicidal offenders have a chance to offer closure to victims and properly repent for their behavior, with the possibility of reintegrating after they face their punishment (Bibas & Bierschbach, 2004). In fact, similar to this concept is the practice of reducing sentences for individuals who display remorse during court proceedings, or individuals who have their sentences reduced for good behavior (Bibas & Bierschbach, 2004). Due to a lack of ability to identify how genuinely remorseful and apologetic an offender is, it is impossible to ensure the authenticity of every offender's expression of remorse. These limitations require further studies to be conducted to understand and identify remorseful offenders. However, the concept itself offers the opportunity for those

who are truly remorseful to reflect on their behavior and do better. In fact, there are already rewards implemented for individuals who exhibit good and normative behavior, such as a reduction of prison time.

## Conclusion of Chapter 4

Given that adolescents who committed homicide have effectively gone through rehabilitation to reintegrate them into society, it is plausible that similar programs could effectively prevent recidivism in homicidal adults. Adolescents who are deemed reformable are primarily judged based on their character rather than their crime alone, while adults are primarily judged based on their crime rather than their character (Kupchik, 2003). Despite both having committed the dangerous crime of homicide towards at least one other human being, they are treated differently even down to the possibility of receiving capital punishment. However, I argue that they should be treated similarly and examined for their redeemability with the opportunity to prove themselves remorseful and no longer a danger to society after receiving a maximum sentence.

# CONCLUSION

Throughout my thesis, my goal has been to improve the criminal justice system in regard to mitigating risk factors for developing homicidal behavior. By focusing on predominantly antisocial behavior, low self-control, and normalization of violence, my research supports the argument that exposure to risk factors during adolescent development increases the likelihood of developing violent and even homicidal behavior. This is demonstrated through Chapter 2, in which these risk factors are explained in detail and contextualized with the case study of Mary Bell, an adolescent who committed multiple homicides. Her development included all three risk factors which were primarily found in her home environment. With a lack of social control and untreated trauma, she learned poor behaviors and tortured her own classmates in the same manner that she was tortured herself. Despite her case being a rare case of adolescent murder perpetration, it connects similarly with how general violence develops in adolescents, possibly resulting in homicidal behavior (Chan et al., 2011, Maas et al., 2008).

In Chapter 3, I analyze exposure and cultivation of risk factors in homicidal adults. Much of adult development of homicidal behavior stems from their upbringing during childhood, similar to violent adolescents. Additionally, during the pre-offense period, the offenders lacked the self-control and social control to restrain their impulsive behavior, and transition into adulthood where they have more opportunities to act on those impulses and possibly hurt others in the process (Chan et al., 2011). This is especially true when focusing on the hormonal and sexual aspects of desires, which may have been repressed during traumatic childhoods such as the case of John Wayne Gacy, In John's situation, his homosexuality was restrained due to his parents' pressure to behaving in a socially-acceptable masculine manner, which meant performing more normative sexual preferences (i.e., heterosexuality) (Berlinger, 2022). As a

result, he developed a hatred towards homosexuals while finding himself attracted to them, and his untamed aggression resulted in his serial killing of young homosexual men. Once again, his development and social learning in his childhood influenced how he behaved in the future, and that behavior was violent and homicidal.

Chapter 4 focuses on how the criminal justice system in America should mitigate exposure to risk factors during early childhood. Methods such as intervention and rehabilitation predominantly focus on supporting at-risk and post-offending adolescents with reintegrating into society rather than focusing solely on the retribution of their punishment. Similarly, I argue that adults should receive developmentally supportive treatment to offer them a second chance at a normative lifestyle, rather than force them to life in prison without parole or even the death penalty. Considering the benefits for adolescents to receive rehabilitation while still carrying out a maximum sentence, adults should receive the same option when possible. However, there must be more research focusing on the effects of rehabilitation on adults, possibly starting with homicidal ones as they are most likely to receive life in prison and/or the death penalty.

Some of the literature I discuss in my thesis is limited. As stated throughout the thesis, research regarding homicidal adolescence is rare, and the effects of exposure to and development of risk factors link more with developing generally violent behavior, including during adolescence (Howell & Hawkins, 1998). As such, the case study of Mary Bell was one of few that could be discussed from both analyzed and media-documented sources. Furthermore, the sadistic motives for murder linked with her traumatic upbringing correlate well with the findings analyzed in the plethora of homicidal adult studies. Thus, the choice to discuss John Wayne Gacy, while limited to detailed accounts of his childhood, was intentional to connect the case of Mary and John in studying the development of homicidal behavior through the life course.

My choice to discuss the literature without largely focusing on the psychological analysis of mental health diagnoses that many individuals who commit murder have is a limitation purposefully set to narrow the research down to social and developmental variables (Gavin, 2018). While genetically inherited mental illnesses factor into the capability of proper socialization and rehabilitation, such as the biological factors I discussed in Chapter 1, social learning is nevertheless included in observing homicidal mentally ill individuals. Additionally, the resources to mitigate the exposure to risk factors may be limited by economic and racial factors. The stressors that come with poverty and inequality can influence the stability of individuals and their opportunities to pursue societal goals through socially acceptable means. Violent crime may become an alternative to overcoming strain, yet that is also a socially influenced phenomenon that could be identified within abused adolescents exhibiting a lack of social control.

My discussion on the development of homicidal behavior focuses primarily on the influence of insufficient socialization when exposed to and developing risk factors during adolescence. LCT is a key theory for my argument because it describes how adolescence can shape adulthood and how violent behavior can transition into homicidal behavior. I analyze this manifestation with SLT and how deviant behavior can be socially learned through an individual's upbringing in a neglectful environment. When discussing neglect, I analyze SCT and SOCT by discussing the effects of insufficient social control and highlighting the impacts of social control in curbing deviancy. After thoroughly discussing my argument, I conclude with a proposal for more opportunities for rehabilitation for homicidal adults as are provided for violent adolescents.

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