

Forensic Psychology

Forensic psychology is the intersection between psychology and the justice system. It involves understanding fundamental legal principles, particularly with regard to expert witness testimony and the specific content area of concern (e.g., competence to stand trial, child custody and visitation, or workplace discrimination). An important aspect of forensic psychology is the ability to testify in court as an expert witness, reformulating psychological findings into the legal language of the courtroom, providing information to legal personnel in a way that can be understood.

In order to be a credible witness the forensic psychologist must understand the philosophy, rules, and standards of the judicial system. There are also rules about hearsay evidence and most importantly, the exclusionary rule. Lack of a firm grasp of these procedures will result in the forensic psychologist losing credibility in the courtroom. A forensic psychologist can be trained in clinical, social, organizational or any other branch of psychology.

Forensic psychology can be thought of as encompassing both sides of the justice system (criminal and civil) as well as two broad aspects of psychology (clinical and experimental). Forensic psychologists may be trained as either clinical psychologists or experimental psychologists and engage in a variety of roles within each of these two broad areas.

Roles and Responsibilities of Forensic Psychologists

There is no one particular path to becoming a forensic psychologist and forensic psychologists may be employed in a wide variety of settings. In general, they will take on one primary role but may engage in additional roles depending on his or her interests and training. The various roles that a forensic psychologist may take on include, but are not limited to:

- **Trial Consultant** - work with legal professionals to assist in various aspects of case preparation, including jury selection, development of case strategy, and witness preparation.
- **Expert Witness** - testifies in court about specialized knowledge that he or she possesses. Forensic psychologists are often called upon to testify regarding matters of mental health (clinical forensic psychologist) or general theory and research in psychology and law (clinical or experimental forensic psychologist).
- **Evaluator** - this refers to the evaluation of criminal defendants or parties to civil litigation with respect to mental health issues that relate to the legal issue at hand; however, this may also refer to the evaluation of service delivery or treatment programs.
- **Treatment Provider** - provide psychological intervention or treatment to individuals requiring or desiring these services. Forensic psychologists who are treatment providers work in a wide variety of settings, including: forensic hospitals, state psychiatric hospitals, community mental health centers, and private practice.
- **Researcher** - design and implement research on various issues relevant to forensic psychology or psychology and the law, both criminal and civil.
- **Academic** - involved in teaching, research, and a host of other education-related activities such as training and supervision of students. Psychologists who take on this role can be trained either generally in psychology or in one of the specialties such as clinical psychology.
- **Correctional Psychologist** - is a forensic psychologist who works in a correctional setting with inmates and offenders. These psychologists often engage in direct service delivery—both evaluation and treatment—of individuals who have been incarcerated or who are out on probation or parole.

The Difference Between Clinical and Forensic Psychology

The fields of psychology and law are concerned with and focus on understanding and evaluating human behavior. The law exists to regulate human conduct; for this reason, psychologists are invited to participate in the civil and criminal justice systems. Because psychology is involved in studying behavior, in certain legal cases, findings and insights may assist the judge or jury in deliberations and decision making. However, there are significant differences between psychologists working in traditional settings and those conducting forensic assessments for the courts.

The major role of psychologists working in clinical settings, whether as psychotherapists or as psychological evaluators, is to help the client. What is learned about the patient is used to benefit the patient in terms of personal growth and support. However, in forensic psychology, the role of the expert is significantly different. In clinical psychology, psychiatric diagnosis serves a major function in treatment strategy. In addition, a diagnosis, based on criteria described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, is required for patients to receive insurance reimbursement.

Forensic psychologists are charged with using the results of their assessment to help or educate the court, without regard to the potential benefits to the examinee. In forensic psychology, the role of psychiatric diagnosis is generally less critical an issue. Diagnoses are not required in many legal issues (e.g., child custody, Miranda rights waivers). Although insanity statutes require a diagnosis as a prerequisite for its consideration by a jury, but this does not define insanity.

Rather, in forensic psychology, “diagnoses” are based on statutes, which define behaviors of concern to the court and become the focus of the evaluation. For example, the question of a defendant’s ability to validly waive Miranda rights is defined as being able to do so knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily—in legal, not psychological, terms. The job of the Forensic psychologist is to translate the legal terms into psychological concepts, which can be

objectively evaluated.

Conceptualization of Human Behavior

During Introduction to Psychology, college students are taught that behavior falls on a continuum. Behavior is complex and cannot be readily categorized into discrete groups (e.g., normal versus psychotic). Unfortunately, the legal system most often considers behavior to be dichotomous. Typically, it requires us to classify people and behavior into one of two categories (e.g., guilty versus not guilty; sane versus insane; liable versus not liable). With the exception of awarding monetary damages and instructing jurors to consider lesser charges in criminal proceedings, gradients rarely exist in the justice system. Ethical conflicts arise when those who view behavior as falling on a continuum but are expected to sort individuals into discrete categories.

In forensic psychology, explanations of behavior and level of intelligence are generally irrelevant. Such explanations may be accurate, but they do not respond to the specific legal issue or question. To be valuable, forensic reports should address psycho legal behaviors, rather than focusing on explanations for conduct.

Trust of the Client's Responses

Rarely do clinical psychologists question the truthfulness or motivation behind a patient's statements or test responses. Inaccuracies are typically attributable to a lack of insight rather than a conscious effort to deceive. However, in forensic assessments, the motivation to consciously distort, deceive, or respond defensively is readily apparent. Consequently, forensic psychologists cannot take the word of the client unquestioningly. All information must be corroborated by seeking consistency across multiple sources of information (e.g., interview of third parties, review of documents).

Definition of Insanity

Clinical insanity is a medical term. Someone can be totally insane but still know the difference between right and wrong. Legal insanity is decided under what is called the "M'Naughton rule" (After Daniel M'Naughton, who was found not guilty of murder on the grounds of insanity in England in 1849). The Law Lords (English equivalent to the Supreme Court) established a set of rules to determine when someone was not guilty of a crime by reason of insanity. These rules were adopted in most 'common law' countries, including most American states. The Rules, stated shortly are:

1. *Persons acting under the influence of an insane delusion are punishable if they knew at the time of committing the crime that they were acting contrary to law.*
2. *Every man is presumed sane and to have sufficient reason to be held responsible for his crimes.*
3. *To establish a defense on the ground of insanity it must be clearly proved that, at the time of committing the act, the accused was laboring under such a defect of reason, from disease of the mind, as not to know the nature and quality of the act he was doing or, if he did know it, that he did not know he was doing what was wrong. If the accused was conscious that the act was one that he ought not to do, and if the act was at the same time contrary to the law of the land, he is punishable.*

In the USA, the Supreme court has held that there is NO Constitutional right to an insanity defense. It is Constitutional for a State to decide to not allow such a defense. This question was finally settled in "Clark v. Arizona":

In 1999, 16 year old Eric Clark was discharged from a mental hospital when his parents medical insurance ran out. Clark suffered from delusional paranoid schizophrenia. After being released he became convinced that Flagstaff was infested by space aliens who were preparing to take over the earth. He visited the police station many times begging them to arrest various people (Including, at one point, his parents) as alien spies. Shortly after his 17th birthday he became convinced that the invasion was about to begin, and was driving around the streets yelling for everyone to get out of town as the aliens were coming. A police officer approached his truck, and Clark shot him. He then drove to the police station and told them he'd just shot an alien soldier, and they should call out the National Guard. Under Arizona law there is no "Not guilty by reason of insanity" defense, so Clark was convicted of murder. His guardians appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, arguing that it was "cruel and unusual punishment" to convict a minor for a crime that even the prosecution agreed that he did not know he was committing. The Supreme court upheld his conviction, ruling that there is no absolute right to an insanity defense.

The insanity defense is used by criminal defendants. The most common variation is cognitive insanity, which is specifically described by the third rule stated above. The vast majority of states allow criminal defendants to invoke the cognitive insanity defense.

Another form of the insanity defense is **volitional insanity**, or **Irresistible Impulse**. A defense of irresistible impulse asserts that the defendant, although able to distinguish right from wrong at the time of the act, suffered from a mental disease or defect that made him or her incapable of controlling her or his actions. This defense is common in crimes of vengeance. For example, suppose that a child has been brutally assaulted. If an otherwise conscientious and law-abiding mother shoots the perpetrator, the mother may argue that she was so enraged that she became mentally ill and incapable of exerting self-control. Very few states allow the volitional insanity defense.

The insanity defense should not be confused with **Incompetency**. Persons who are incompetent to stand trial are held in a mental institution until they are considered capable of participating in the proceedings. The insanity defense also should be kept separate from issues concerning mental retardation. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2002 in **Atkins v. Virginia** (2002), that the execution of mentally retarded criminals constituted "cruel and unusual punishment" and that it was prohibited by **Eighth Amendment**. But if a person is acquitted by reason of insanity, execution is not an option.

The insanity defense reflects the generally accepted notion that persons who cannot appreciate the consequences of their actions should not be punished for criminal acts. Most states regulate the defense with statutes, but a few states allow the courts to craft the rules for its proper use. Generally, the defense is available to a criminal defendant if the judge instructs the jury that it may consider whether the defendant was insane when the crime was committed. The judge may issue this instruction if the defendant has produced sufficient evidence at trial to justify the theory. Sufficient evidence invariably includes **Expert Testimony** by psychologists and psychiatrists.

Reasons Why a Person Kills

A lot of people die every day but not all of them are murdered. Murder is when a person kills another for selfish reasons. But are some of those selfish reasons for which a person might kill someone? A group of expert psychiatrists and a defense department genius have studied criminals and came across a lot of reasons for killing someone. The most common reasons are:

- **Mercy killing:** not very common but prevails in every society by a certain percentage. Mercy killings are when the person being killed has asked to do so. If a person is extremely ill and sick and cannot be cured.
- **Automobile Deaths:** commonly called road rage. But it is not restricted to this, it can be something akin to road racing or even drunk driving, or distracted driving.
- **Greed:** it be in the form of anger or disagreement over an inheritance. Perhaps there are problems over shared property by two owners, or a business disagreement. The Seminal factor is always money.
- **Anger:** many have died due to the foul mood of another or their inability to think rationally. Being angry means nothing more than being out of control. The mind focuses only on those things that have been the root cause of the anger. The person may lose the capacity to think of the consequences of their actions.
- **Self-defense:** the process of self-defense encompasses the protection of one's self and property.
- **Religions argument:** one of the oldest reasons for one man killing another. "My faith is better than yours." There is a reason they were called the *Holy Wars*.
- **Alcohol and drugs:** drugs and alcohol have a very powerful effect on the brain of a person irrespective of the age and sex. Whether the reason is impaired judgement or want for money to buy more drugs, consequences for ones actions are rarely considered.
- **Revenge:** if someone wronged you, the desire to seek retribution is a natural one. It is also a desire that society has deemed illegal. That is was the judicial system is for.

The term *serial killer* is widely believed to have been coined either by FBI agent Robert Ressler or by Dr. Robert D. Keppel in the 1970s (the credit for the term is still disputed). *Serial killer* entered the popular vernacular in large part due to the well-publicized crimes of Ted Bundy and David Berkowitz ("Son of Sam") in the middle years of that decade. However, this term has become interchangeable in common usage in the last few years with other categories of killers. Recently it has become a catch-all term for any killer who kills more than one person. However there is a distinct difference between the psychology, triggers, M.O., and behavior of the three most prominent types of killers. The following are brief definitions of these three types:

- A **serial killer** is someone who commits three or more murders over an extended period of time with cooling-off periods in between. In between their crimes, they appear to be quite normal, a state which Hervey Cleckley and psychologist Robert Hare call the "mask of sanity." There is frequently — but not always — a sexual element to the murders.
- A **mass murderer**, on the other hand, is an individual who kills three or more people in a single event and in one location. The perpetrators sometimes commit suicide, meaning knowledge of their state of mind and what triggers their actions is often left to more speculation than fact. Mass murderers who are caught sometimes claim they cannot clearly remember the event.
- A **spree killer** commits multiple murders in different locations over a period of time that may vary from a few hours to several days. Unlike serial killers, however, they do not revert to their normal behavior in between slayings.

All of the above types of crimes are usually carried out by solitary individuals. There have been examples in all three categories in which two or more perpetrators have acted together. Author Michael Newton states that this happens in about a third of the cases. Lee Boyd Malvo and John Muhammad are prime examples. Both are known for the Beltway sniper attacks. There are other types of multiple killings as well, although they often involve larger organizations than two or three perpetrators: genocide and terrorist attacks.

Serial killers are specifically motivated by a variety of psychological urges, primarily power and sexual compulsion. They often have feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness, sometimes owing to humiliation and abuse in childhood or the pressures of poverty and low socioeconomic status in adulthood. Their crimes tend to compensate for this and provide a sense of potency and often social revenge, by giving them a feeling of power, both at the time of the actual killing and afterwards. The knowledge that their actions terrify entire communities and often baffle police adds to this sense of power.

Common Motives of a Serial Killer

Not every serial killer takes a life just for the thrill. Some murderers have motives or feel psychologically compelled to kill. There are a handful of categories used to describe the motives of a serial killer:

- **Visionaries** - one who believes that voices are speaking directly to them and instructing them to commit murder. It is not uncommon for the killer to feel that God, the Devil or another demon has told them to commit a crime. Oftentimes, the killer is a schizophrenic and psychotic. The serial killer typically suffers a psychotic break from reality. The infamous "Son of Sam" killer David Berkowitz is an example of a visionary killer. He claimed that a demon transferred orders through his neighbor's dog that told him to commit murder. Berkowitz would go on to kill six and wound seven victims between July 29 1976 and July 31 1977.
- **Missionaries** - believe that it is their duty to rid the world of what he or she perceives as an unwanted element. The type of person they deem undesirable differs for each killer, but common targets have been homosexuals, prostitutes, and people of varying religions or ethnicities. An example of a missionary serial killer is the infamous Jack the Ripper, who pinpointed "ladies of the night" as his victims.
- **Lust Killers** - achieve sexual gratification through their actions, which often involve sadism, is what moves a lust killer. The main reason for their killing is for sex (ultimately POWER) and it doesn't matter if their victim is dead or alive. Sometimes, a dead victim is one that best fits into the 'fantasy' they wish to live out. Killers under this category often use torture and mutilation as their means of murder. They typically enjoy being close to their victims when they kill, and often use knives to subdue, kidnap, or kill. They may strangle their victims.
- **Thrill Killers** - motivated by the sheer excitement of the act. Those identified as thrill killers are typically young males, but other profile characteristics may vary. The major common denominator with those who commit thrill killings is that they usually feel inadequate and are driven by a need to feel powerful. To a certain extent, they may make their victims suffer so that they can feel good. Sadism is fairly common in thrill killings. The killer might torture, degrade, or rape his victim before he takes his or her life. They frequently have an "ideal victim type" who has certain physical characteristics.
- **Gain Killers** - display the apparently rare (among serial killers) motive of financial or personal gain. For this type of killer the murder is often incidental and a troublesome event that moves them closer to their goal. Even though we tend to think of gain killings as something that happened in decades or even centuries gone by, the availability of firearms, and other weapons matched with the rise in bank robberies, mugging etc. leads us to think a new generation of serial killers is emerging.
- **Power Seekers** - It is very difficult to distinguish power oriented killers from the larger group of lust killers. However, even though domination is often to the same degree, power seekers tend to be aware of their behavior and have been able to describe their symptoms while under investigation. The most famous example – though fictional is Hanibal Lector, who killed to be like he was god.

Serial killers are generally, but not always, male. Noted female exceptions include Aileen Wuornos, Myra Hindley and Erzsébet Báthory. There are even differences between male and female serial killers. Most of these findings were limited to information that newspapers chose to include about the women they profiled and their crimes, this was the source of the information that the researchers chose when collecting their data. It should be noted that these statistics contrast what we typically understand about male serial killers.

- Most were middle and upper-class.
- Almost all (92%) knew their victims.
- Almost all were white.
- Their most common means to kill was poison.
- The primary motive for murder was money.
- Most of these women had earned college degrees or had attained at least some higher education.
- They held a wide variety of jobs, ranging from religious teacher to prostitute.
- Nearly 40% worked in health-related fields as nurses or aides, and about 22% worked in direct caregiving roles (mother and babysitter).
- Most were married at some point. In fact, these serial killers were serial monogamists – married, on average, twice, and as many as seven times.
- Where we could ascertain appearance, most were reported to be average to above-average in attractiveness.
- Where we could ascertain religion, 100% were Christian.

- Nearly two-thirds were related to their victims, nearly one-third killed their significant others and about 44% killed their own biological children. More than half the sample killed children, and about one-quarter killed those who were elderly or infirm, those who had little chance of fighting back.

Basic Demographics of U.S. Serial Killers		
Characteristic	Subcategory	Percent
Race:	White	52.1%
	Black	40.3%
	Hispanic	6.1%
	Asian	0.7%
	Native American	0.8%
Gender	Male	90.8%
	Female	9.2%
Categorization	Organized	60.6%
	Disorganized	33.9%
	Mixed	5.5%

Psychopaths vs Sociopaths

There is no official definition of the difference between a psychopath and a sociopath, and some say that the terms are largely interchangeable. In fact, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* lists both psychopathy and sociopathy under the heading of *Antisocial Personalities*. Both psychopaths and sociopaths engage in similar actions and tend to have similar characteristics. The idea of psychopathy is older than that of sociopathy, and has a more defined means of diagnosis. Some differentiate between these conditions based on their proposed causes, but others disagree with this method, as the causes of both conditions are not definitively known. Additionally, both of these conditions are generally considered to be different from psychosis.

Characteristics

Both a psychopath and a sociopath have a complete disregard for the feelings and rights of others. This often surfaces by age 15 and may be accompanied by cruelty to animals. These traits are distinct and repetitive, creating a pattern of misbehavior that goes beyond normal adolescent mischief. Both fail to feel remorse or guilt. They appear to lack a conscience and are completely self-serving. They routinely disregard rules, social mores and laws, and don't care about putting themselves or others at risk.

Development of a Serial Killer

Most serial killers have dysfunctional backgrounds. Frequently they are physically, sexually or psychologically abused as children. There can be a close correlation between their childhood abuse and their crimes. It is often impossible to know exactly what happened in any individual's childhood, so some killers may deny having been abused, while others may falsely claim they were abused in an attempt to gain sympathy or tell psychologists what they want to hear. The element of fantasy in serial killer's development cannot be overemphasized. They often begin fantasizing about murder during or even before adolescence. Their fantasy lives are very rich and they daydream compulsively about domination, submission and murder, usually with very specific elements to the fantasy that will eventually be apparent in their real crimes. Others enjoy reading stories of sadism, packed with rape, torture and murder.

Some serial killers display one or more of what are known as the "MacDonald Triad" of warning signs in childhood. These are:

- Fire starting**, invariably just for the thrill of destroying things.
- Cruelty to animals** (related to "zoosadism"). Most children can be cruel to animals, such as pulling the legs off of spiders, but future serial killers often kill larger animals, like dogs and cats, and frequently for their solitary enjoyment rather than to impress peers.
- Bedwetting** beyond the age when children normally grow out of such behavior.

Many experts have claimed that once serial killers start they cannot (or only rarely) stop. Recently this view has been called into question as new serial killers are caught through methods that were previously unavailable, such as DNA testing. Some argue that those who are unable to control their homicidal impulses are more easily caught and thus overrepresented in the statistics.

Prevalence

There have been conflicting reports as to the extent of serial murder. The FBI claimed in the 1980s that at any particular time there were roughly 35 active serial killers in the United States, meaning that the serial killers in question have committed their first murders but have not yet been apprehended or stopped by other means (e.g., suicide or a natural death). This figure has often been exaggerated. In his 1990 book *Serial Killers: The Growing Menace*, Joel Norris claimed that there were five hundred serial killers active at any one time in the United States, claiming five thousand victims a year, which would be approximately a quarter of known homicides in the country. Some have argued that those who study or write about serial killers, be they employed in the judicial profession or journalists, have a vested interest in exaggerating the threat of such offenders.

In terms of reported cases, there appear to be far more serial killers active in developed Western nations than elsewhere. There are several reasons that may contribute to this:

- Detection techniques in developed nations are better.

- Multiple victims of one offender are quickly identified as being linked, so the apprehension of the offender comes more quickly than in a nation where the police are generally more underfunded and have fewer resources.
- Developed nations have a highly competitive news media, so cases are reported more quickly.
- The United States and Western Europe have avoided the large-scale, state-sanctioned censorship that news outlets in certain nations have, in which stories related to serial murder have been suppressed. An example of this is the case in Ukraine of serial murderer Andrei Chikatilo, whose murder spree continued largely unreported and poorly investigated by police in the former Soviet Union due to the idea that only supposedly corrupt capitalistic Western countries bred such killers. After the collapse of the USSR, there were a number of reports of prolific serial killers whose crimes had previously been hidden from the West behind the Iron Curtain.
- Cultural differences could account for a larger number of serial killers, not just a larger number of reported cases.

Serial murder before 1900

Although the phenomenon of serial murder is generally regarded as a modern one, it can be traced back in history, albeit with a limited degree of accuracy. In the 15th century, one of the wealthiest men in France, Gilles de Rais, is said to have abducted, raped and murdered at least a hundred young boys. The Hungarian aristocrat Elizabeth Báthory was arrested in 1610 and subsequently charged with torturing and butchering as many as 600 young girls. Although both De Rais and Báthory were reportedly sadistic and addicted to murder, they differ from typical modern-day serial killers in that they were both rich and powerful. Based upon the lack of established police forces and active news media during those centuries, it may very well be that there were plenty of other serial killers at that time who were either not identified or not publicized as well. Some historical criminologists have suggested that there may have been serial murders throughout history, but specific cases were not adequately recorded. Some sources suggest that legends such as werewolves and vampires were inspired by medieval serial killers.

In his famous 1886 book *Psychopathica Sexualis*, Richard von Krafft-Ebing notes a case of serial murder in the 1870s, that of an Italian man named Eusebius Pieydagnelle who had a sexual obsession with blood and confessed to murdering six people. The unidentified Jack the Ripper killer slaughtered prostitutes in London in 1888. Those crimes gained enormous press attention because London was the center of the world's greatest superpower at the time, so having such dramatic murders of financially destitute women in the midst of such wealth focused the news media's attention on the plight of the urban poor and gained coverage worldwide. Joseph Vacher was executed in France in 1898 after confessing to killing and mutilating 11 women and children, while American serial killer H. H. Holmes was hanged in Philadelphia in 1896 after confessing to 27 murders.

Categorization of Serial Killer

The FBI has roughly categorized serial killers into two different types: organized and disorganized.

- **Organized types** are usually of high intelligence and plan their crimes quite methodically, usually abducting victims, killing them in one place and disposing of them in another. They will often lure the victims with ploys appealing to their sense of sympathy. For example, Ted Bundy would put his arm in a fake plaster cast and ask women to help him carry books to his car, where he would beat them unconscious with the cast and spirit them away. Others specifically target prostitutes, who are likely to voluntarily go with a serial killer posing as a customer. They maintain a high degree of control over the crime scene, and usually have a good knowledge of forensic science that enables them to cover their tracks, such as by burying the body or weighting it down and sinking it in a river. They follow their crimes in the media carefully and often take pride in their actions, as if it were a grand project. The organized killer is usually socially adequate and has friends and lovers, often even a spouse and children. They are the type who, when captured, are most likely to be described by acquaintances as "a really nice guy" who "wouldn't hurt a fly." Some serial killers go to lengths to make their crimes difficult to discover, such as falsifying suicide notes, setting up others to take the blame for their crimes, and faking gang warfare. The case of Harold Shipman, an English family doctor, is slightly unusual in that his social position and occupation was such that he was able to portray victims as having died of natural causes; between 1971 and 1998 he killed at least 250, and possibly well over 400, of his own mostly elderly patients – and until very near the end of his rampage it was not even suspected that any crimes had been committed.
- **Disorganized types** are often of low intelligence and commit their crimes impulsively. Whereas the organized killer will specifically set out to hunt a victim, the disorganized will murder someone whenever the opportunity arises, rarely bothering to dispose of the body but instead just leaving it at the same place in which they found the victim. They usually carry out "blitz" attacks, leaping out and attacking their victims without warning, and will typically perform whatever rituals they feel compelled to carry out (e.g., necrophilia, mutilation, etc.) once the victim is dead. They rarely bother to cover their tracks but may still evade capture for some time because of a level of cunning that compels them to keep on the move. They are often socially inadequate with few friends, and they may have a

history of mental problems and be regarded by acquaintances as eccentric or even "a bit creepy." They have little insight into their crimes and may even block out the memories of the killings.

- **Mixed types:** A significant number of serial killers show certain aspects of both organized and disorganized types, although usually the characteristics of one type will dominate. Some killers descend from being organized into disorganized behavior as their killings continue. They will carry out careful and methodical murders at the start, but as their compulsion grows out of control and utterly dominates their lives, they will become careless and impulsive.

Why are serial killers not caught more quickly?

It is possible that many would-be serial killers are apprehended before they kill the three or more victims required to qualify them as such in the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Similarly, it is certain that some are detained under mental health regulations and do not directly answer for their crimes. Others go on to kill many more people over years without being apprehended. Serial killers, despite the media attention, commit only a tiny fraction of all murders in any time period. Murder is usually either a crime of personal relationships and short intense emotion, or an unintended consequence of other crimes. Because of this, most murders are comparatively simple to solve; in most familial deaths, the murderer makes little effective effort to conceal the crime and confesses easily; in other cases, the murderer is usually a local or is known to the police. These assumptions, with which any law enforcement officer naturally approaches a single murder, are barriers to catching a serial killer.

Another barrier to serial killers' early capture is their diverse backgrounds, choices of victim, and methods of killing. They almost never have any links to their victims—they pick by whim or impulse, seeking types or opportunity rather than any easily detectable link. As noted above, organized offenders can take steps to minimize the evidence they leave behind, and commit crimes away from their locale. It can take a number of murders before a serial killer is even suspected. Even if a serial killer is known to be operating, it is difficult to catch the culprit. Potential victims can be identified only by broad type, and generic area warnings produce little more than fear and misdirected violence.

In addition, police departments are often reluctant to admit they have a serial killer on their hands due to the immediate public pressure on them to catch them which will ensue. Law enforcement departments are known to try and "wait it out" hoping the killer will move to another jurisdiction, rather than publicly admit they have a killer on their hands. The commonality of habitual traits of serial killers allows the construction of a psychological profile. This allows targeted interviewing of suspects, although there are often a large number of entirely innocent individuals who have some match to the profile. Also, some serial killers are skilled at concealing their true selves behind a charming facade. Unfortunately, profiles are built upon historical precedents of known serial killers that sometimes do not accurately model actual culprits. Such problems plagued the hunt for the D.C. snipers Muhammad and Malvo, whose initial profile indicated a Caucasian male. A different problem plagued the hunt for Aileen Wuornos in Florida's "Highway Killer" case; police initially believed the killer to be male.

Serial killer investigations sometimes reveal an unsatisfactory side to law enforcement; inertia, incompetence, bureaucracy, mismanagement, agency "turf wars", missed opportunities, racial or gender bias, and other failures can slow down the investigation and, indirectly, allow further murders. While there is a public misconception that serial killers generally want to be discovered, in most instances this is not the case, as serial killers will often go to great lengths to prevent capture or to push police and investigators towards the wrong subjects.

Serial killers in popular culture

Because of the horrific nature of their crimes, their highly varied personalities and profiles, and their ability to evade detection and kill many victims before finally being captured and imprisoned, serial killers have quickly become something of a cult favorite, and have been featured in many novels, movies, songs, comic books, true crime works, video games and other media.

The public's fascination with serial killers has led to many successful crime novels and films about fictional serial killers, including Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*; and especially Thomas Harris' *The Silence of the Lambs* and Academy Award-winning movie adaptation, whose main antagonist, the cannibalistic serial killer Hannibal Lecter, is a cultural icon. The character John Doe, from the movie *Se7en*, is another well-known fictional serial killer.

Forensic Psychology Questions

Name: _____

1. What are 6 functions/ roles that forensic psychiatrists & psychologists perform?
2. What are 2 differences between a forensic psychologist & a clinical psychologist?
3. Explain why a psychiatrist cannot diagnose “insanity”.
4. Why is the truthfulness of a subject not a concern in clinical psychology, but an actual concern in forensic psychology?
5. How is insanity defined in most courts?
6. What is the difference between volitional insanity and cognitive insanity?
7. How is incompetency different from insanity?
8. What are the most common motives for murder in general?
9. Differentiate between **serial killers**, **mass murderers**, and **spree killers**.
10. Differentiate between the **motive based** serial killer classifications including:
 - a. **Visionary:**
 - b. **Missionary:**
 - c. **Thrill:**
 - d. **Gain:**
 - e. **Lust:**
 - f. **Power:**
11. How do common motives differ in serial killers?
12. Compare differences between male and female murderers.
13. Identify some generally accepted demographics for serial killers (race, gender, age).
14. Describe some of the characteristics associated with person who is a psychopath / sociopath.
15. Discuss some of the early warning signs/ backgrounds of violent criminals.
16. Compare the categorizations of offenders based on crime scene evidence:
 - a. Organized Offenders:
 - b. Disorganized Offender:
17. Explain the goal of criminal profilers and some of their shortcomings.
18. What is the difference between **modus operandi (MO)** & **signature**?