

## FIVE

## MURDER WITHOUT GUILT

The gruesome discovery in June, 1985, of the vicious crimes of 39-year-old Leonard Lake and 24-year-old Charles Ng left residents of Northern California shaking their heads. For the San Francisco police, the afternoon of June 2 began routinely enough. They were called by the owner of South City Lumber when he observed Ng stealing a vise from the store. Arriving at the scene, the police witnessed the young thief depositing goods in the trunk of his buddy's car. Before they could reach him, Ng ran off, leaving Lake holding the bag. In Lake's trunk, along side the stolen vise, the police found an illegal .22-caliber automatic pistol equipped with a silencer.

Leonard Lake was arrested and taken to the police station for questioning. During the interrogation, he asked for some water with which to take an "aspirin." Almost immediately, he slumped over, appearing to have suffered a heart attack. Instead, he was suffering the lethal effects of a cyanide pill that he had ingested.

The investigation of the bizarre suicide of their suspect led the San Francisco Police to Leonard Lake's small ranch near Wisleyville, about 150 miles northeast of the Bay area in Calaveras County. Calaveras is Spanish for skull, but the police found much more than skulls when they arrived at Lake's two-bedroom bungalow, down Blue Mountain Road.

It did not take investigators long to realize that the ranch was not so much a rural retreat as it was a torture chamber. They found hooks and chains, as well as photographs on the walls of women in various poses of submission. Backdrops to the "artwork" indicated that the photos had been taken from inside the ranch itself. The police also found a well-stocked library of

homemade “snuff” films in which real-life murder victims were captured on tape. Viewing the movies on the living room television, the police replayed gut-wrenching scenes of victims being raped, tortured, and murdered by the directors—Leonard Lake and Charles Ng. One chained-up woman had been filmed as she pleaded on behalf of her child, who was being tortured in front of her eyes. Another woman, while tied naked to a chair, was shown being told by Lake, “You’ll wash for us, clean for us, fuck for us.” Outside the house, the police found the killers’ refuse—large garbage bags filled with human bones, somewhere between two and four dozen people’s worth.

Unlike most serial killers, who prefer certain kinds of victims, Lake and Ng showed no favorites. They killed acquaintances and strangers, men and women, children and adults, and people of all races. They abducted their captives in equally diverse ways. One man was kidnapped from his home when Lake and Ng answered a classified ad for a camcorder he was selling—the same one they later used to produce their torture films. In another instance, they snatched two young lovers who were camping in the woods.

In part, Lake and Ng were motivated by a ghoulish desire for sexual sadism. The torture tapes revealed the vicious rapes that the gruesome twosome perpetrated against their defenseless victims. The murders were also part of a power game—a team sport—in which the two players set loose some of their victims into the woods, only to hunt them down as if they were wild animals. The police found, at the hideout, an inscription bearing the killers’ creed: “If you love something, set it free. If it doesn’t come back, hunt it down and kill it.”

Lake and Ng also were inspired by their survivalist theory that a nuclear war would soon destroy the world. At their ranch, they built a concrete bunker to shelter them from the impending apocalypse, and they planned to stock it with sex slaves who would keep them entertained and later bear the children of the new world.

## THE SOCIOPATHIC PERSONALITY

As suggested, murder for profit, jealousy, or revenge, although unjustifiable, makes some sense to most people, at least at some level. By contrast, anyone who kills for fun, pleasure, or power would appear to be irrational, if not insane; after all, it would not seem to make logical sense that taking another person’s life could be in any respect entertaining. Contrary to the popular view,

however, most serial killers are neither insane in a legal sense nor psychotic in a medical sense. For example, only 1 of 20 sexually sadistic serial killers studied by Warren et al. (1996) was psychotic. These killers know right from wrong, know exactly what they are doing, and can control their desire to kill but choose not to do so. They are more cruel than crazy.

Psychologically, the thrill-motivated, sadistic serial killer tends to be a sociopath, indicating a disorder of character rather than of the mind. He lacks a conscience, feels no remorse, and cares exclusively for his own pleasures in life. Other people are seen merely as tools to fulfill his own needs and desires, no matter how perverse or reprehensible (see Harrington, 1972; Magid & McKelvey, 1988). The sociopath is bad, not mad; his crimes are sickening, but his mind is far from sick.

The term *sociopathy* is often used interchangeably with *psychopathy* and *antisocial personality disorder*. Initially, the word *psychopathy* was widely used by psychiatrists and psychologists to identify the syndrome of character traits involving the impulsive, reckless, and selfish disregard of others. In the 1950s, however, the psychiatric profession recommended the use of the diagnostic term *sociopathy*, in part to distinguish the psychopathic personality from the much more serious psychotic disorders. Then, in the late 1960s, psychiatrists once again proposed a change in terminology, replacing both the sociopathic and psychopathic diagnoses with the diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder (APD). Some experts in psychopathology maintain fine distinctions among the three diagnostic categories, even offering various subtypes for each (see Samenow, 2004). To understand serial murder, however, these differences are not particularly important, because the fundamental characteristics prevalent among the offenders are, for the most part, common to all three terms.

Preparing to build an elaborate underground bunker in which to imprison young women as sex slaves, Leonard Lake sat calmly in front of his camcorder and described in logical, although patently selfish, terms why he felt the need to proceed with what he called “Operation Miranda”:

I am a realist. I am 38 years old, a bit chubby, with not much hair, and I’m losing what I have. I am not particularly attractive to women—or I should say particularly attracting to women. And all the traditional magnets—the money, the position/power—I don’t have. And yet I am still very sexually active, and I am still very much attracted to a particular type of woman who almost by definition is totally uninterested in me.

Dirty old man, pervert, I'm attracted to young women, sometimes even as young as 12, although to be fair certainly 18–22 is pretty much an ideal range as far as my interests go. I like very slim women, very pretty of course, petite, small breasted, long hair, if I am allowed. And, such a woman, by virtue of her youth, her attractiveness, her desirability to certainly the majority of mankind, simply has better options. There is no particular reason why such a woman should be interested in me.

But there is more to it than that. It is difficult to explain my personality in 25 words or less, but I am in fact a loner, I enjoy the peace, the quiet, the solitude, I enjoy being by myself. And while all my relationships with women in the past have been sexually successful, socially they have almost always been a failure. I've gone through two divorces, innumerable women, 50–55, I forget exactly the count, I counted recently. I'm afraid the bottom line statement is the simple fact that I'm a sexist slob.

I enjoy using women, and of course women aren't particularly interested in being used. I certainly enjoy sex. I certainly enjoy the dominance of climbing on a woman and using her body. But I'm not particularly interested in the id, the ego, all the things that a man should be interested in to complement a woman's needs. Now I can fake these emotions, and I can fake them very well. In the past, I've been very successful at attracting fairly interesting and attractive women simply because I did fake fairly well an interest in their needs and their requirements. So momentarily I had what I wanted and they thought they had what they wanted. But in the long term I don't want to bother.

What I want is an off-the-shelf sex partner. I want to be able to use a woman whenever and however I want. And when I'm tired or satiated or bored or not interested, I simply want to put her away, lock her up in a little room to get her out of my sight, out of my life, and thus avoid what heretofore has always been the obligation to entertain or amuse or satisfy a particular woman or girlfriend's whims of emotional whatever.

Such an arrangement, of course, is not only blatantly sexist, but highly illegal. There's no doubt about it. It violates all of the human rights and blah blah, blah blah blah. To spare posterity my concept of other people's morality, I'm explaining my morality—what I feel, what I want. And as of this moment I am going to try to get it. (Fox's transcript of a videotape recovered at a crime scene in 1985)

Although Lake understood concepts of morality and right versus wrong, in true sociopathic style, he placed his needs above the rights of others. It has been estimated that 3% of all males in our society could, like Leonard Lake, be considered sociopathic, also referred to as having the antisocial personality type (American Psychological Association, 1994). Most sociopaths are not violent:

They may lie, cheat, or steal, but rape and murder are not necessarily appealing to them. The other critical ingredient to the profile of the serial killer is an overpowering need for control. Most thrill killers, for the sake of sexual gratification, tie up their victims in order to watch them squirm and torture their victims to hear them scream. Others find personal fulfillment and control by taking the life out of their victims—by “mercifully” killing a hospital patient or drugging a normal, vigorous captive into the state of an obedient “zombie.”

Henry Lee Lucas, who at one time claimed to have murdered hundreds of victims across the country, was devoid of any feelings or concern for his victims. Lucas talked, without emotion, of killing someone just because they were around and he decided that it might be fun. “Killing someone is just like walking outdoors,” explained Lucas. “If I wanted a victim, I’d just go get one” (Jeffers, 1991, p. 45).

When an absolute stranger, for whatever reason, struck his fancy, he would stalk his prey until the time and place were right to move in for the kill. At one time, he boasted of killing several hundred people, although he was likely fabricating in many cases. Regardless of the exact body count, Lucas didn’t draw the line; he didn’t have a line to draw. Indeed, anyone was fair game.

One of Lucas’s earliest victims was his 74-year-old mother, Viola. He stabbed her to death after she struck him with a broom and nagged him incessantly. Murder was payback for years of cruelty and mistreatment when he was a child. In his first year of grade school, Viola would dress Henry as a girl and curl his hair in ringlets. She beat him repeatedly and forced him to watch as she performed sexual acts for money.

Another one of his victims was a 14-year-old girl whom he claimed to have loved. Frieda “Becky” Lorraine Powell was Lucas’s traveling companion and soul mate, at least until she acted out of place and slapped him across the face. Without hesitation, Lucas stabbed Becky to death, then raped her, cut her body into pieces, and stuffed them into pillowcases. Asked why he would commit such an atrocity against someone he purportedly loved, Lucas said, “It was the only thing I could think of” (Jeffers, 1991, pp. 44–45).

## THE CULTURE OF SOCIOPATHY

The crimes committed by Lake and Ng surely were horrific. Still, they reflect, in an obviously extreme form, a disturbing general trend in which more and

more people feel unconstrained by both conscience and social norms from offending other human beings. Most of this unscrupulous behavior is relatively innocuous, certainly not at the level of Lake and Ng. More people today are willing to cheat their neighbor, lie in a job interview, or steal “souvenirs” from their hotel room.

During the 1960s and 1970s, America fought two major wars. Of course, there was the war in Vietnam, which claimed thousands of lives and occupied the attention of a whole generation of baby boomers. On the domestic front, moreover, Americans also fought the “War Against Guilt.” For years, they were encouraged not to feel guilty—“do your own thing,” “love the one you’re with”—and be assertive.

Blended with the message of individualism that Americans embraced during the 1960s was a more altruistic theme encouraging social responsibility and equality of opportunity. It was this positive focus that led the baby boom generation to join the civil rights movement and push for women’s rights. However, when double-digit inflation and repeated energy crises enveloped the American psyche during the 1970s, altruism quickly dissipated, leaving selfish individualism in its wake. Economic exigency forced Americans of all ages to abandon humanitarian impulses.

We continue to be veterans of the War Against Guilt. The slogan of the day used to be “I’m OK, you’re OK.” Now, for many people it’s “I’m OK, you’re dead.” At a societal level, the decline in moral responsibility has been so profound that some observers have called the United States a “sociopathic society.” In his book *Money, Murder and the American Dream: Wilding from Wall Street to Main Street*, sociologist Charles Derber (1992) suggests that the collective conscience of America has been seriously debilitated. He sees a declining sense of morality in everything from business decisions to interpersonal relationships. Thus, Americans may still know cognitively the right thing to do, but to an increasing extent, they don’t feel morally compelled to do it. Behavior is determined more by what is convenient and practical than by what is ethical. Morality has taken a back seat to expediency—leaving nobody to steer a righteous path or even to drive the car.

As an important aspect of this trend, there have been repeated scandals at the uppermost levels of society. Familiar incidents include Chappaquiddick, Watergate, Abscam, Irangate, the savings and loans scandals, Travelgate, and Enron. People behind widely publicized scandals include Bob Packwood, Michael Milken, Leona Helmsley, Monica Lewinsky, and Martha Stewart,

to mention but a few. In addition, youngsters are now more inclined than ever to resort to violence over seemingly trivial issues—over a pair of Nikes, a leather jacket, or even a challenging glance—or with no reason at all. At the extreme, beyond white-collar criminals and teenage desperadoes, our culture may have created would-be serial killers at the moral margins of society. Unrestrained by conscience, they are free to satisfy their needs and desires, no matter how perverse or reprehensible.

Of course, it takes much more than motive to become a serial killer. Many people seek thrill in their lives but are able to satisfy it in ways that are legitimate, if not entirely safe, such as skydiving or driving at excessive speeds. Other people may have an inordinate need for power and control, but they also are able to find socially acceptable modes of fulfillment. For example, certain business executives derive a sadistic pleasure by “eating alive” their competition; they wheel and deal not just for the profit but also for the feeling of power. Many individuals have a mission in life, but these missions are pursued not by killing, but by organizing a legitimate endeavor in an effective and legal manner. There are, of course, numerous methods, aside from serial murder, to make money or gain power.

There may be tens of thousands of people whose motivations are such that they could find serial murder to be psychologically rewarding. Most have other outlets; a few may experiment with violence but find it distasteful, repulsive, or even more difficult than they had imagined. Remaining a serial killer at large requires some level of criminal *savoir faire*. Some potential serial killers lack the ability to avoid detection long enough to accumulate large numbers of victims. They may leave physical evidence at crime scenes, abduct their victims in the presence of eyewitnesses, or select a victim who is resourceful enough to escape.

Even if they successfully avoid detection and find murder enjoyable, some would-be serial killers may simply quit after one or two attacks. Feelings of guilt and remorse may deter them. For any of several reasons, guilt does not seem to control the behavior of those men and women who make a career—or at least a passionate hobby—out of killing. Unencumbered by guilt, they murder with moral impunity.

## EMPATHY AND SERIAL KILLERS

In line with the notion that almost all serial killers are sociopathic, many investigators have argued that sadistic serial killers lack empathy—that is, they are

incapable of knowing or feeling their victims' pain and suffering. In Hare's (1993) Psychopathic Checklist, for example, the callousness and lack of empathy of the psychopath (or sociopath) are indicated by his insensitivity to the feelings of others and by the presence of a cold, contemptuous, and inconsiderate attitude.

In the case of repeat killers for whom murder is a means of eliminating the eyewitnesses to their profit-motivated crimes, this may frequently be true—lack of empathy may indeed be regarded as essential for avoiding apprehension. Profit-motivated serial killers may not enjoy the suffering of their victims, but they still take their victims' lives, in order to avoid a prison sentence or the death penalty. In the 1970s, for example, Gary and Thaddeus Lewington committed a series of 10 armed robberies around central Ohio, in which they took their victims' wallets and then shot each one in the head. A few years later, the brothers Bruce, David, and Norman Johnston of Chester County, Pennsylvania, gunned down a number of their accomplices to protect themselves from a grand jury investigation of their crime ring in Philadelphia. In 1993, Sacramento landlady Dorothea Puente administered a lethal dose of poison to her nine elderly tenants to steal their Social Security checks. And in 2002, John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo terrorized the Washington, D.C., area in an attempt to extort \$10 million from the local authorities.

For sadistic serial killers, however, the presence of empathy—even intensely heightened empathy—may be essential in two ways. First, their crimes require highly tuned powers of cognitive empathy in order to trap their victims (Gabbard, 2003). Indeed, killers who do not understand their victims' feelings would be incapable of “conning” them effectively. For example, Theodore Bundy understood all too well the sensibilities of the female college students who were taken in by his feigned helplessness. He trapped attractive young women by appearing to be disabled and asking them for help. Many complied and died for their troubles.

Second, a well-honed sense of emotional empathy is essential for a sadistic killer's enjoyment of the suffering of his victims. That is, for sadistic objectives to be realized, a killer who tortures, sodomizes, rapes, and humiliates must be able both to understand and to feel his victims' suffering in order to enjoy it. Without the capacity for empathy, there would be no excitement or sexual arousal. Thus, he experiences his victims' pain, but he feels it as his own pleasure.

In the literature of psychiatry as well as that of criminology, lack of empathy—along with a manipulative and calculating style, an absence of

remorse, and impulsiveness—is frequently regarded as a defining characteristic of the psychopathic or antisocial personality disorder (Hare, 1993). An earlier study by Heilbrun (1982), however, came to quite a different conclusion. In interviews with 168 male prisoners in the Georgia correctional system, he observed two kinds of psychopaths—those who had poor impulse control, low IQ, and little empathy (the Henry Lee Lucas type) and those who had better impulse control, high IQ, sadistic objectives, and heightened empathy (the Theodore Bundy type). In fact, the most empathic group of criminals in Heilbrun's study were intelligent psychopaths with a history of violence. He found the greatest empathy in high IQ prisoners who had committed rape—the violent crime in which sexual sadism seems most likely to play a systematic role.

According to Heilbrun, violent acts inflicting pain and suffering are more intentional than impulsive. In addition, empathic skills promote the arousal and satisfaction of sadistic objectives by enhancing the criminal's awareness of the pain being experienced by his victim. Heilbrun's finding of empathic sadistic psychopaths was all but ignored in the literature until very recently, when forensic psychiatrists began to question the commonly held view that antisocial types necessarily lack the ability to feel their victims' pain, noting that in many cases they instead possess "enormous powers of empathic discernment—albeit for the purposes of self-aggrandizement" (Heilbrun, 1982, p. 557).

In the 1930s, social philosopher George Herbert Mead (1934) identified "role taking" as a basic human quality, whereby an individual is able to adopt the viewpoint of another person. Many serial killers apparently share this ability, even if they use it to enhance the pleasure they derive from inflicting pain and suffering on others. In the research of symbolic interactionists, role-taking ability has been shown to take the form not of a dichotomy (able versus not able), but of a continuum along which any given individual's degree of empathy can be plotted. Thus, there are some individuals whose empathy is so profound and broad that they commiserate with the plight of starving children on the other side of the world. Many individuals are closer to the middle of the continuum, identifying with the grief of victims in proximity to them but emotionally oblivious to the pain and suffering of most strangers, especially those who are physically removed. At the other end of the continuum, however, there may also be millions of Americans, according to the American Psychiatric Association, who are antisocial personality types and completely lacking in empathy. They may not be serial killers, because they are not sadistic in their aims, but they are nonetheless insensitive to human tragedy.

## BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Some criminologists have described Daniel Harold Rolling, who brutally slew five college students in Gainesville, Florida, in 1990, as a sociopath. He had a long history of criminal activity prior to the student murders, including theft, robbery, and assaultive behavior. Not only did he butcher five innocent strangers, but he also attempted to kill his own father. Rolling also committed a grisly triple murder in a family that lived only a few blocks from his home in Shreveport, Louisiana. Anyone who got in his way or who could satisfy his sadistic desires—family, neighbors, or strangers—was totally expendable.

The commonly accepted conception of the sociopathic or antisocial serial killer may fit the moral immaturity found in violent offenders like Leonard Lake or Henry Lee Lucas. We question, however, whether sociopathy is present, at least in such an extreme form, in many other serial killers. Many probably do have a conscience—some weaker than others, perhaps—and should not be considered pure sociopaths. Others have empathy, although in a perverted self-serving form.

Ansevics and Doweiko (1991) offer an alternative to the antisocial personality (sociopath) diagnosis. According to them, many serial killers appear to suffer from a related character abnormality called borderline personality disorder (BPD), which is marked by a pattern of instability in mood, relationships, and self-image. In response to a stressful situation, the borderline type may become “pseudo-psychotic” for a short period of time. The makeup of BPDs often includes impulsivity, intense anger, and chronic feelings of boredom. They often feel a profound sense of abandonment and rejection, and they may be extremely manipulative with other people. Unlike the antisocial personality, however, the borderline personality type is capable of feeling remorse and empathy when he or she hurts other people (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Disorganized killers who are not genuinely psychotic may instead be BPDs who are confused and angry but who, when they are not killing, have the capacity for empathy and compassion. Borderline personality disorder may help to explain impulsive attacks of killers, like Danny Rolling, who repeatedly murder in a state of frenzy without making much of an effort to cover their tracks. Because of their confusion and impulsivity, they usually are discovered and apprehended before amassing a large victim count.

Despite the merits of their argument, Ansevics and Doweiko appear to overstate the role of BPD among serial killers. Given the care and planning

with which they kill, most serial killers are organized in the way they both approach and leave the crime scene, and they generally do not possess the pattern of unstable mood and impulsivity that characterizes borderline personality disorder.

## COMPARTMENTALIZATION AND DEHUMANIZATION

Whether or not they are borderline personality types, many serial killers are still not classic sociopaths. Many possess powerful psychological facilitators for overcoming or neutralizing whatever pangs of guilt or conscience that might otherwise plague them. They are able to compartmentalize their attitudes toward people by conceiving of at least two categories of human beings—those whom they care about and treat with decency, and those with whom they have no relationship and therefore can victimize with total disregard for their feelings.

Hillside Strangler Kenneth Bianchi, for example, clearly divided the world into two camps—those whom he cared about and everyone else. The group toward whom he had no feelings included the 12 young women whom he brutally tortured and murdered, 10 with his older cousin in Los Angeles and 2 on his own in Bellingham, Washington. Ken's inner circle consisted of his mother, his wife and son, and his accomplice, cousin Angelo Buono. "The Ken I knew couldn't ever have hurt anybody or killed anybody," recalled Kelli Boyd, his common-law wife and mother of his child. "He wasn't the kind of person who could have killed somebody" (Public Broadcasting Service, 1984). Similarly, Sean Vincent Gillis, the Baton Rouge man who in 2004 confessed to murdering eight women, was regarded by his live-in girlfriend as "laid back" and "calm." After living with Gillis for some 8 years, 46-year-old Terry Lemoine struggled to think of him as a vicious killer. "He wouldn't squish a bug," she said ("Suspect Claims He Killed 8," p. 1-A).

According to psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton (1986), the Nazi physicians who performed ghoulis experiments at Auschwitz and other concentration camps compartmentalized their activities, attitudes, and emotions. Lifton suggested that any possible feelings of guilt were minimized through what he calls "doubling": The camp doctors developed two separate and distinct selves, one for doing the dirty work of experimenting with and exterminating inmates, and the other for living the rest of their lives outside the camp. In this way, no

matter how sadistic they were on the job, they were still able to see themselves as gentle husbands, caring fathers, and honorable physicians.

The compartmentalization that allows for killing without guilt is an extension of a phenomenon used by many normal people in their everyday roles. An executive might be a heartless “son of a bitch” to all his employees at work but be a loving and devoted family man at home. Similarly, many serial killers have jobs and families, do volunteer work, and kill part-time with a great deal of selectivity.

Just as it was in the Nazi concentration camp doctors, the process of compartmentalization is especially pronounced in the case of a serial murderer who kills for profit, that is, who robs and then executes in order to silence the eyewitnesses to his crimes. Like a hit man for the mob, he kills for a living yet may otherwise lead an ordinary family life. Even a sexual sadist who may be unmercifully brutal to a hitchhiker or a stranger he meets at a bar might not dream of hurting family members, friends, or neighbors.

Serial killer John Wayne Gacy of suburban Chicago, for example, was “not all bad,” as those closest to him would attest. Despite his conviction on 33 counts of murder, Lillian Grexa, his former neighbor, wrote to Gacy on death row. “I know they say he killed thirty-three,” explains Grexa, “but I only know him as a good neighbor . . . the best I ever had” (personal communication).

It wasn’t only Lillian Grexa who was fond of John Gacy. He was voted the Jaycee “Man of the Year,” was a respected member of the local Democratic Party, and was photographed with then–First Lady Rosalyn Carter. He played a clown at children’s parties and held theme bashes for the neighbors. On weekends, however, when his wife was away, Gacy had private parties for special guests—young attractive males—parties with beer, drugs, sex, and torture. Then he would literally cover up the truth about his deadly passions by burying 29 of his victims in the crawl space under his house. Four others had to be buried elsewhere for lack of space.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine for certain if a particular serial killer successfully separates his friends from the rest of humanity or whether he is just a clever sociopath who successfully plays the role of a loving friend and family member. Although sociopaths lack the capacity for human kindness and compassion, they know the right thing to do. In fact, they are often very skillful at maintaining a caring and sympathetic facade, especially when it is in their self-interest to do so. Could John Wayne Gacy have

fooled his wife and his neighbor? Or do they know more about his character than those who have analyzed his criminal behavior?

Returning to the extreme atrocities committed by the Nazi doctors, we can learn about another psychological process—called “dehumanization”—that effectively permits killing without guilt. Not only did the Auschwitz physicians compartmentalize their roles by constructing separate selves, but they also were able to convince themselves that their research subjects, their victims, were less than human. The Jews were seen as a disease or plague that had to be stamped out for the health of the country. Seen in more than metaphorical terms, the inmates were regarded as vermin in semihuman form who had to be exterminated. Likewise, Jewish research subjects were truly viewed as guinea pigs who could be sacrificed for the sake of medical knowledge. Thus, by a process of dehumanization, concentration camp doctors made decisions as to who would live and who would die. In one case, they conducted twin studies in which inmates were forced to experience excruciating pain and suffering, all in the name of scientific inquiry.

Dehumanization permits normal people to engage in atrocities. During the war in Iraq in the early years of the 21st century, for example, smiling American soldiers were seen posing in digital photos that showed their illegal mistreatment, perhaps even torture, of Iraqi prisoners. On the other side, anti-American Iraqi terrorists cruelly decapitated an American citizen while being videotaped for worldwide television. In both cases, the enemy was treated as subhuman or demonic, as being outside the rules that apply to the members of civilized society.

Combatants during warfare aren't the only ones to kill with the aid of dehumanization. Infamous murderer Charles Manson, in fact, was explicit in his use of dehumanizing language regarding his victims. “Death to Pigs,” his followers scrawled in blood on the door of the opulent home of director Roman Polanski and actress Sharon Tate just after slaughtering her and her houseguests.

Through the same process of dehumanization, many serial killers have slaughtered scores of innocent people by viewing them as worthless and expendable, or “less dead,” using Egger's (2003) term. Prostitutes are seen as mere “sex machines,” gays as AIDS carriers, nursing home patients as “vegetables,” and homeless alcoholics as nothing more than trash. By regarding their victims as subhuman elements of society, the killers can actually delude themselves into believing that they are doing something positive rather than negative. They are, in their minds, ridding the world of filth and evil.

Dehumanization can occur not only for the purpose of selecting deserving victims but also for the sake of justifying excessive cruelty to those who already have been chosen. For example, Kansas City's Robert Berdella, who tortured and sodomized his male captives, didn't necessarily hold a dehumanized view of his victims until he transformed them into sex toys. At that point, they lost their humanity in his eyes. He could then do anything he wanted to his "blow-up dolls." Similarly, Milwaukee's Jeffrey Dahmer, who confessed to killing 17 young men, actually attempted to lobotomize his captives in an effort to change them into walking zombies with whom he could have sex. Both Berdella and Dahmer could avoid feeling guilty about performing ghastly sexual atrocities on their dehumanized playthings. In Dahmer's case, his ability to degrade his victims was aided by their minority status—most were gay, black, or Asian.

The behavior of a serial killer after his capture provides some insight into his level of conscience. Genuine sociopaths almost never confess after being apprehended. Instead, they continue to maintain their innocence, always hoping beyond hope to get off on a technicality, to be granted a new trial, or to appeal their case to a higher level.

To this day, Lawrence Sigmund Bittaker, who was convicted of five murders in Southern California, maintains that his partner, Roy Norris, actually did all the killing. Confronted with an audiotape of a torture session containing his voice, Bittaker has a ready excuse. "You didn't fall for that act, did you? It was all a script. We were playing around. I'd slap my hand, and she would scream. It was all a fake" (personal communication).

A few sociopathic serial killers have confessed to their crimes not because they were remorseful, but because they considered it in their best interest to do so. For example, Clifford Olson, suspected of killing 11 children in Vancouver, British Columbia, decided that the police "had the goods on him," so he decided that he might as well turn his defeat into an advantage. Olson confessed to murder and led the police to the bodies of his victims in exchange for a \$100,000 "ransom." He had struck a deal by which his wife and son would receive \$10,000 in trust for each dead child he helped locate; he "graciously" threw the 11th in for free. Olson was later asked to reveal information about other missing children, not for a fee but for the sake of the worried parents. In true sociopathic style, he responded, "If I gave a shit about the parents, I wouldn't have killed the kid" (Gray, 1982, p. 20).

Thus, when authentic sociopaths confess, it is not out of a need to expiate feelings of guilt, but instead for a self-serving reason. The benefit is not always

as tangible as Olson's. For example, serial killer Danny Rolling continued to proclaim his innocence in the Gainesville murder case for years after his indictment, despite compelling physical evidence against him. On February 15, 1994, the opening day of what was to be a closely watched trial lasting months, however, he shocked everyone with his confession. "Your honor, I have been running from first one thing then another all of my life. Whether from problems at home, or with the law or from myself," Rolling told Judge Stan Morris. "But there are some things that you just can't run from, and this is one of them" (quoted in Fox & Levin, 1996, p. 161). In a press conference, Rolling's attorney explained that the accused wished to spare the families of his victims the agony of a trial. The prosecuting attorney argued more persuasively that Rolling's confession was more calculated than caring—a last-ditch effort designed to play on the sympathy of the court. Because he was already serving a life sentence for other crimes, Rolling's decision to plead guilty to the murders was viewed as a strategic move to escape the electric chair.

In a similar way, Henry Lee Lucas was able to delay his execution by the state of Texas by promising to help police solve their open murder cases. At one time, he boasted of having killed 600 people. Later, he claimed to have committed only one murder. Ultimately, based on lack of solid evidence, Lucas's death sentence was commuted by the governor of Texas to life without parole. Still a suspect in numerous murders, he died while behind bars, but of natural causes.

Shortly after Jeffrey Dahmer made the cover of *People*, Donald Evans falsely confessed to more than 60 murders around the country, perhaps attempting to become famous in his own right. Clifford Olson boasted from his prison cell about his celebrity, "Henry Lee Lucas was small potatoes. I'm like Hannibal Lecter" (personal communication).

Unlike true sociopaths, who are incapable of feeling remorse, serial killers who must dehumanize their victims frequently confess after being caught. Joel Rifkin of Long Island, for example, on the day after his capture freely confessed to killing 17 prostitutes and provided all the evidence that could be used against him in a court of law. Although caught red-handed with one victim, he willingly implicated himself in a killing spree that would likely put him behind bars for life.

Cannibalistic serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer similarly confessed to his crimes. After his conviction, when it was no longer self-serving to do so, he apologized both in court and on the national television program *Inside Edition*. His statement to the judge asked for no mercy:

I just want to say that I hope God has forgiven me. I know society will never be able to forgive me. I know the families of the victims will never be able to forgive me for what I have done. I promise I will pray each day to ask for their forgiveness when the hurt goes away, if ever. I have seen their tears and if I could give my life right now to bring their loved ones back, I would do it. I am so very sorry.

Your Honor, I know that you are about to sentence me. I ask for no consideration. I know my time in prison will be terrible. But I deserve whatever I get because of what I have done. Thank you, Your Honor, and I am prepared for your sentence, which I know will be the maximum. I ask for no consideration. (Associated Press, 1992)

As long as they are alone with their fantasies and private thoughts, serial killers like Rifkin and Dahmer are able to maintain the myth that their victims deserved to die. After being caught, however, they are forced to confront the disturbing reality that they had killed human beings, not animals or objects. At this point, their victims are rehumanized in their eyes. As a result, these serial killers may be overcome with guilt for all the horrible crimes they committed and freely confess.

Some serial killers, the true sociopaths, are beyond redemption. They failed to develop, early in life, the capacity for empathy and affection. As a result, they lack the internal mechanisms that usually inhibit selfish and hurtful behavior. Unlike psychotics, sociopaths understand the wrongfulness of their assaultive behavior. Unlike normal people, however, they understand it only at an intellectual level; the emotional component is absent. Consequently, sociopathic serial killers cannot be rehabilitated. They missed the boat on developing a conscience when they were young, and the boat never returns.

Other serial killers are driven by strong urges—sexual sadism, dominance, pedophilia—that overpower whatever conscience they possess. Treatment strategies do exist for managing or controlling some of these motivating forces, but they have met with limited success. Although some serial killers potentially could be treated for their behavior, the gravity of their crimes makes rehabilitation a moot issue. Public opinion is clear in this regard: Serial killers should never be released from custody, cured or not.