From Arson to Murder: The Study on Charles Chitat Ng

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ABSTRACT

Serial killers Charles Ng and Leonard Lake teamed up in the early to mid-80s committed some of the most heinous murders imaginable, severely torturing their victims before putting them out of their misery. In the 1980s, Charles Ng and Leonard Lake rented a lonely property and created a bunker where they exploited and imprisoned women for sex, torture, and murder. They assassinated the spouses and children of the female victims as well. Police linked Ng to 12 deaths when the spree stopped, but they feared the real number was closer to 25. Ng was a troubled boy since adolescence, he was fired multiple times for behaviors like fighting and stealing, and arson. But what lead Ng from these crimes to aggravated assaults even murders? To further study the cause of his behavior, this paper uses related theories to study Charles Chitat Ng from multiple angles. This essay uses theories like social learning theory to analyze the cause of Ng's criminal behaviors from multiple dimensions like childhood mistreatment and Ng's personality disorder.

Keywords: Charles Chitat Ng, Serial killer, Childhood Mistreatment, Personality disorder, Social learning theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Analyses on serial murderers have become more diversified and critical in recent years. Until recently, theorizing that studied the biography of the particular serial killer and his etiology, or concerns of definition, was almost entirely dominant in explaining this phenomenon. Even though serial murder is neither a modern nor a specifically North American problem, it was the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the 1980s that gave "serial" murder and the prospect of "offender profiling" as a method of apprehending this sort of murderer attention. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) definition is the most generally used in serial killer research. A serial killer, according to the FBI, is someone who kills two or more people over some time [1]. Serial killers like Ted Bundy, Dennis Ladd, and Jeffrey Dahmer all meet the public's definition of a serial killer. Each of these people has its own set of qualities. The average serial killer, for example, is a white male who kills alone to satisfy an aberrant sexual need and desire [2].

However, the existing analyses on a famous serial killer Charles Chitat Ng did not show the same detailed information as other analyses of serial killers. Most of the existing studies on Ng only focus on his partnership with Leonard Lake and how he utilized the loopholes of the legal system to try to get away with the crimes he committed.

To better understand what caused a first-generation immigrant to become one of the most horrifying serial killers in American history. A literature review on current studies is conducted to study the impact of childhood mistreatment and personality disorder.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Life Experiences

Charles Chitat Ng is the only son of a wealthy Hong Kong executive. He had a difficult childhood and was often abused by his father. From his early teenage years, he began to exhibit various deviant and criminal tendencies. As a teenager, he was expelled from several schools for inappropriate behaviors like fighting and shoplifting. He was arrested for theft at the age of 15, and at the request of his father, he went to school in England. Not long after arriving in England, Ng was expelled for stealing again and returned to Hong Kong. He came to the United States with a student visa in 1978 and he

dropped out after one semester. Shortly after, he was involved in a hit-and-run accident, to avoid prosecution, he enlisted in the US Marine Corps. He was also arrested and put in jail for stealing firearms. He met his partner, Leonard Lake in the marine in 1985 and began abducting, raping, torturing, and murdering. Ng and Lake targeted women in particular, although they would abduct the entire family. They would lock the ladies in a room in the Lake's ranch bunker after killing the men and children, tying them up, torturing and rapping them while videotaping each other. Ng was caught shoplifting in South San Francisco on June 2, 1985, and escaped to Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Lake was apprehended and committed suicide without admitting to any wrongdoing. However, the police examined the property where they concealed the remains and discovered all of the information about their illicit operations. Ng fought back against two police officers in a Canadian police station and was charged with a felony, for which he was sentenced to four and a half years in jail. The American detectives discovered him and attempted to extradite him, but the Canadian authorities refused to owe to forbidden regulations. After six years of legal processes, Ng returned to California in 1991. It took another seven years and more than $10 million in government funds for him to be charged with murder. Ng is now serving in San Quentin State Prison on death row.

2.2. Cause of the Crime

2.2.1. Childhood Mistreatment

2.2.1.1. Definition

Child abuse is defined as any type of physical, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, negligent care, or commercial and other exploitation, resulting in real or potential harm to the child by the World Health Organization (WHO) [3]. Physical, sexual, and psychological abuse are the three basic categories of abuse discussed in the criminal analysis. Physical child abuse is the act of causing or threatening to cause physical harm to a child. Sexual abuse is the exploitation of a child for sexual pleasure. Psychological abuse occurs when a child's emotional health and development are harmed by the lack of an appropriate supportive environment or activities that impair the child's emotional health and development.

2.2.1.2. Previous Studies

There have been studies done to see if there is a link between different childhood abuse and the types of criminal behaviors. Research undertaken by scientists from all around the world in 2020 has developed a new way of charting serial murderers' developmental processes. A group of male serial killers with a history of childhood abuse (physical, sexual, or psychological) was

studied using typologies and crime scene behavior. Sexual, physical, and psychological abuse is commonly linked to a range of crime scene behaviors, according to their research [4]. In the study, physical abuse was discovered to be in a separate sequence with rape/lust typology and wrath typology. Those with rape/lust typologies were more likely to kill quickly, and crime scenes revealed signs that the victim was tied. There was also evidence of overkill and body dump at the crime scene. Psychological abuse was shown to be linked to both the rape/lust and money gain typologies. Murders were mostly sophisticated-designed and finished quickly in cases where financial gain was the objective; however, fewer were carried out quickly if the reason was rape/lust. There was also a strong correlation between torture and overkill, as well as bodily mutilation. However, sexual abuse was linked to all four typologies. The rape/lust typology was somewhat more likely to torture victims as opposed to displaying indications of overkill. The speed with which the murder was carried out was more closely associated with the power type than the victim's mutilation. The anger typology revealed a correlation between completing a murder rapidly and achieving financial gain, as well as a link between committing a murder quickly and gaining financial gain. Finally, taunting and confining the victim, as well as the victim's mutilation, had significant relationships. The mix of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse is likely to result in the rape/lust typology for homicide.

2.2.1.3. Representation in the Case

As the only son of his father and the youngest kid in the family, Ng was raised under the stringent regulation of his father. Despite Ng' academic achievements, his father physically abused him constantly, especially during Ng' adolescence, to reduce his tendency to be lazy. In Ng's case, he experienced continuous physical abuse from his father in his childhood and correspondingly the psychological abuse due to the absence of a leading role and his father's morbid expectations of him. The crimes Ng committed significantly correlate to the physical abuse and psychological abuse he had experienced. Kidnapping, rape, torture, and murder of men, women, and children became a pattern for Lake and Ng. According to court records, the males and infants were slaughtered right away, while the women were enslaved, raped, and tortured before being killed. Rape, bind, and overkill connected to the physical abuse and torture, overkill, and mutilation connected to the psychological abuse were all presented in Ng's murders.

2.2.2. Personality Disorder

2.2.2.1. Previous Studies

Relationships between different types of personality disorders and certain types of crimes have been studied

nowadays. A study on criminal behaviors among personality disorders introduces the idea of personality disorders by their definition and categorization [5]. Personality disorders are a set of mental health illnesses in which a person's long-term pattern of actions, feelings, and ideas differs significantly from the expectations of his or her society. Personality disorders have no recognized causes. Personality disorders are assumed to be caused by both genetic and environmental causes, and the symptoms vary greatly depending on the kind of personality disorder. Personality disorders are characterized by feelings, attitudes, and actions that do not adjust to a variety of situations. These habits frequently start in adolescence and can cause issues in social and professional settings. These disorders range in severity from moderate to severe. Personality problems can affect a person's capacity to perform in relationships, work, and other situations. A personality disorder is a long-term pattern of inner experiences and behaviors that deviates significantly from societal norms, is inflexible and pervasive, begins in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and causes distress or disorders. Each of the 10 personality disorders is classified into one of three groups or "clusters": A, B, or C. Cluster A is considered as comparably strange, bizarre, and eccentric, including personality disorders such as paranoid personality disorder, schizotypal personality disorder, and schizotypal personality disorder; Cluster B includes personality disorders such as antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder, which are considered dramatic and erratic; Cluster C includes personality disorders such as avoidant personality disorder, dependent personality disorder, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, which are considered to be anxious and restless [6].

Personality disorder, especially antisocial personality disorder, is more common to show in people placed in correctional and forensic mental health facilities than in the general community, according to studies. Treatment and risk management are both impacted by a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the link between personality disorder and offending. Another study looks at how personality disorders are linked to specific sorts of crimes.

Using data from the National Survey of Psychiatric Morbidity in Prisoners in England and Wales [7], Roberts and Coid investigated the relationships between different personality disorder subtype scores and lifetime offenses. Antisocial personality disorder was associated with the majority of crimes, including obstruction of justice, robbery, blackmail, fraud, burglary, theft, and violence, according to the study. When compared to other Cluster B disorders, narcissistic personality disorder has been linked to forgery and fraud. Avoidant personality disorder scores were shown to be positively associated with criminal damage but negatively connected with

firearm offenses in the cluster C disorders. Dependent personality disorder levels were linked to firearm offenses and violence but not criminal damage, while obsessive-compulsive personality disorder scores were linked to firearm offenses and violence but not criminal damage. Robbery and blackmail were favorably associated with paranoid personality disorder scores, although driving infractions were negatively associated. Arson was found to have a positive relationship with schizotypal personality disorder scores, but robbery and blackmail had a negative relationship. Theft, robbery, and kidnapping have all been connected to Schizoid personality disorder scores. Personality disorders have also been linked to homicides. Personality disorder has consistently been found to be the most common mental health diagnosis among homicide offenders in representative studies, with 6% of all homicide offenders in the UK receiving a primary diagnosis of personality disorder over three years and 20% of homicide offenders in waves of anger, France receiving a diagnosis of personality disorder over ten years [8].

2.2.2.2. Representation in the Case

Ng's personality problem was also a major factor in his decision to commit murder. Dr. Stuart Grassian, a psychiatrist, testified that Ng had "a textbook dependent personality." Ng met his partner Lake, an ex-marine with schizoid personality disorder and a proclivity for harsh sexual torture, through a survivalist magazine's email. Ng and Lake's kidnappings, torture, and murders resulted from their shared mistaken belief that the world was on the verge of a nuclear apocalypse. The men believed that after the human species was wiped off, they would be assigned the mission of repopulating the earth with the help of their sex slaves.

A dependent personality disorder is categorized in the cluster C disorders which is closely connected to violent crimes like homicide. As a patient of dependent personality disorder, Ng played a submissive role in the crimes, but he still has helped Lake abduct and murdered more than 25 victims. Ng's father wanted him to be independent so that Ng could be capable of accomplishing great things, he put Ng in boarding school since little. However, the absence of a father figure and a close kinship caused by going to boarding school since little and later studying abroad made Ng constantly see himself as weak or fragile and seek constant reassurance from stronger figures. In this case, Lake showed up and became his leading role of him. After being arrested, Ng confessed that he was doing everything Lake asked him to. As a schizotypal personality patient, Lake played the role of dominance and seemed to be extremely apathetic in the crimes. He abducted the whole families of victims, killed the men and children instantly, and brutally tortured the female victims for days before ending their lives.

2.2.3. Social Learning Theory

2.2.3.1. Definition

Social learning theory is a learning and social behavior theory that claims that new behaviors can be learned by seeing and copying others. It claims that learning is a social cognitive process that can be completed wholly by observation or direct instruction, with no motor reproduction or direct reinforcement. When rewards and punishments are observed alongside behavior, a mechanism called vicarious reinforcement occurs. If behavior is repeatedly rewarded, it is more likely to continue; on the other hand, if it is constantly punished, it is more likely to terminate.

2.2.3.2. Previous Studies

Social learning theory has been used to explain the formation and maintenance of deviant behavior, from shoplifting to severe violence like murder. To create a comprehensive explanation of criminal behavior, criminal psychologists Ronald Akers and Robert Burgess merged the theories of social learning theory and operant conditioning with Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory. According to Burgess and Akers, criminal behavior is acquired through a combination of direct incentives, alternative reinforcement, explicit instructions, and observation in both social and non-social circumstances. Group norms determine the likelihood of being exposed to alternative behaviors and the sort of reinforcement received. Their findings have set the way for more current studies on the application of social learning theory to criminal behavior.

Delinquency in Turkey is used in Ozgur Solakoglu and Durmus A. Yuksek's study to examine Akers' social structure and social learning theory [9]. The study looks at how social learning theory can be used in criminology. The differential association theory of Sutherland (1947) is viewed as a behavioristic reformulation of the social learning theory [10]. People in modern societies are exposed to cultural messages favoring or opposing criminal behavior through interpersonal interactions according to the differential association theory and learn criminal behavior by interacting with concepts that benefit criminal activity rather than ones that are detrimental to criminal activity. Furthermore, the closeness, frequency, duration, and intensity of these connections have a higher influence on behavior [10]. Differential reinforcement and other behavioral learning theory principles of behavioral acquisition, continuation, and cessation were combined with Sutherland's differential association and definitions by Akers to further study the application of social learning theory in criminology. In this way, rather than competing with Sutherland's theories, the purpose of the social learning theory is to create a bigger framework to thoroughly explain criminal behavior.

2.2.3.3. Representation in the Case

Differential association, definitions/norms, differential reinforcement, and imitation are the four key components of social learning theory [9]. In Ng's case, differential association and differential reinforcement can be used to help us understand Ng's behavior.

Direct and indirect connections with an individual or a group, such as friends and family, are referred to as differential associations. These encounters offer the social circumstances in which all of the social learning mechanisms function. Ng grew up under his father's severe punishment when he was a child. If he does something wrong or gets a bad grade, he will be harshly punished. As a result of his upbringing in such a home, Ng grew up to be violent, much like his father, who used violence to deal with dissatisfaction. He's been punished numerous times for fighting. The differential association grew more effective on Ng when Ng met Lake. Lake, as the main figure in this relationship, taught Ng how to commit the killings. Initially, he told Ng to torture the victims in any way he chose, and Ng simply did as he was told. However, as time passed, Ng grew to enjoy the process of murdering, and he began to express his fondness for torturing.

After criminal or deviant behaviors occur, differential reinforcement refers to incentives or punishments [11]. Costs, rewards, or unfavorable reactions from others can all be used as forms of reinforcement. Individuals learn what to do and say in a specific setting from their parents, friends, and others during social learning, and then initiate, maintain, or adjust conformance. Peer-to-peer and parent-to-child interactions can also be considered as a social learning process in which youngsters are exposed to normative values, behavior patterns, and delimited ideas [11].

One main reason that led Ng on the criminal path was the differential reinforcement he received since little. Ng began acting inappropriately at a young age, and he was repeatedly reprimanded for fighting and shoplifting. However, his parents did not take action for these behaviors, what happened after each incident is the brutal physical abuse from his father. And this flimsy punishment served as a motivator for Ng to commit crimes again as a kind of retaliation. Ng was also expelled from boarding school after being charged with arson. But his parents did nothing; all they did was send him to a British school because no school in Hong Kong would accept him because of his past. He received positive reinforcement from his partner Lake after arriving in the United States. Lake and Ng had the same fantasy, and when they committed crimes together, Lake always gave good reactions to Ng, which supported Ng's criminal behavior. During Ng's adolescence, he received inappropriate differential reinforcement from his parents, and during maturity, he received incorrect reinforcement

from his relationship with Lake, both of which boosted Ng's criminal will.

3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

3.1. Limitations

This study analyzes the cause of crime in Charles Chitat Ng's case in multiple dimensions but three notable limitations affected the study. First, lack of prior research studies on the topic. This study studies Charles Chitat Ng in three aspects: childhood mistreatment, personality disorder, and social learning theory. However, previous studies mostly focused on the partnership of Ng and Lake and how Ng takes advantage of the American legal system, there is a limited resource on the topics of this study. Secondly, access to real case detail. The official case file of the crimes Ng and Lake committed is not available to the public, so the study is based on all the online sources of the case. Thirdly, possible selection bias. The topic and study objectives of this study are all chosen by the author, there is a potential bias in the topic selection process.

3.2. Future Implications

In general, this study has identified the roles of childhood mistreatment and personality disorder in Charles Chitat Ng's crimes, this study also strengthens the application of social learning theory in criminology. Future studies should study the case with official case material and try to study Ng from other possible perspectives. Future studies can also make effort to study the case with Ng's own words, by this, future interviews should be conducted to analyze with both the researcher's perspective and Ng's perspective. Also, future studies should consider reflecting on this case. For example, provide how family education and society should behave to help reduce cases like Ng's case.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyze the cause of Charles Chitat Ng's criminal behavior from the perspectives of the childhood mistreatment he has been through and the effect of Ng's dependent personality disorder, this study also applies social learning theory to study the impact of social environment on people.

This study has identified the relationship between childhood abuse and Ng's criminal behavior by connecting certain types of criminal behavior to particular types of childhood mistreatment. This study has also shown that the homicides Ng committed are connected to Ng's dependent personality disorder. The third major finding is that the differential association Ng had with his family and the differential reinforcement Ng received from his family and his partner had all boosted his criminal behavior.

In general, the result of this study indicates that the cause of criminal behavior consists of many aspects, future studies should study serial killers in more dimensions.

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