



**MALMÖ HÖGSKOLA**  
FAKULTETEN FÖR  
HÄLSA OCH SAMHÄLLE

# **PARTNERS IN CRIME**

TOWARD AN INTEGRATED, EXPLANATORY  
THEORY OF SERIAL KILLER COLLABORATION

***MONIQUE BRAIMOVIC***

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The study of serial killer collaboration has received little attention in academia. While current explanatory theories of serial homicide can include subtypes of serial killers that operate alone, the study of collaborating serial killers has been neglected. In this paper, an integrated, explanatory theory of serial killer collaboration is proposed. The theory builds on concepts from social learning theory, the trauma control model, and relational self theory and aims to examine what interpersonal dynamics that characterize the partnerships of collaborating serial killers. Five cases of collaborating serial killers have been analyzed and compared with focus on individual life histories and how these are reflected in the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration. The study found that serial killer collaboration is fundamentally characterized by a mutual need for human connection and approval, and that sociocultural role expectations affect the interpersonal dynamics of collaborating serial killers in terms of dominance, victim-preference, victim-acquisition, and method of murder.

*Key words:* Interpersonal, offender collaboration, serial homicide, serial killer, social learning, trauma control model

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Studiet af seriemordere, der samarbejder, har modtaget begrænset opmærksomhed indenfor den akademiske verden. Mens eksisterende teories forklaringer kan omfatte subtyper af seriemordere, der arbejder alene, er studiet af samarbejdende seriemordere blevet forsømt. Dette speciale har til formål at udvikle en integreret, uddybende teori om samarbejde mellem seriemordere. Teorien inddrager begreber fra hhv. social indlæringsteori, trauma-kontrol-modellen og en teori om det relationelle selv i forsøget på at forklare, hvilke interpersonelle dynamikker, der karakteriserer partnerskabet mellem disse seriemordere. Fem cases om seriemordere, der samarbejder, er blevet analyseret og sammenlignet med fokus på casepersonernes individuelle livshistorier, og hvordan disse kommer til udtryk i de interpersonelle dynamikker. Det konkluderes, at samarbejde mellem seriemordere grundlæggende er karakteriseret ved et fælles behov for menneskelig relation (connection) og bekræftelse, og at sociale rolleforventninger påvirker de interpersonelle dynamikker i forhold dominans, offerpræference, offertilvejebringelse og mordmetode.

*Nyckelord:* Forbrydersamarbejde, indlæringsteori, interpersonel, seriemord, seriemorder, social, trauma-kontrol-model

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# INTRODUCTION

Serial killers account for more than 10% of all solved murders in the United States; that is between 2000-35000 murders a year (Miller 2014). Considering the fact that the case clearance rate of serial murders is low, the number may be even higher. With only 5% of the world's population living in the US, the amount of cases of serial murder is extremely high; some have even suggested that the U.S. may hold up to 75% of the total population of serial killers in the world (Miller 2014), leaving the phenomenon of limited interest from a global or international point of view. However, the open nature of American society has been suggested as one of the major reasons for the large population of serial killers in the US, as it allows the killer high mobility. In an age characterized by globalization, where distances continues to shrink and unions are formed across cultures and countries (e.g. the EU) so people can move freely within the entire continent, the issue of serial murder is more relevant than ever before, especially on an international level. Several cases of serial murder have been recorded all over the world, including Japan (Kaori 2003), Australia, Austria (Newton 1990), England (Gurian 2011), France, and Belgium where at least two cases indicated that high mobility between countries was one of the reasons the killers were not apprehended earlier (Leistedt et al 2011), thus making serial killers a cross-national phenomenon of international concern. Despite somewhat promising progress in the identification and apprehension of serial killers (Leistedt et al 2011), the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime explicitly recognizes the need for more current research due to the limited knowledge of the phenomenon (Beasley II 2004). Adding to the importance of studying the complex nature of serial murder, these offenders rarely stop unless they are apprehended or die (Miller 2014). In a study of female serial killers, Gurian (2011) found that serial killers vary in terms of method, motive, and victim-preference depending on their gender and whether they collaborate with a partner. More research is needed on the different types of serial killers in order to comprehend the nature of these killings and prevent them in the future. In this paper, the focus is on collaborating serial killers.

## **Collaborating serial killers: A subpopulation**

While most explanatory theories of serial homicide can include other subtypes, such as female and homosexual serial killers, the study of collaborating serial killers has been neglected due to a belief that this is a particularly rare phenomenon (Hale 1993). Therefore, existing explanatory theories of serial murder do not address the interpersonal dynamics between two or more individuals. However, different researchers have established that serial killer collaboration is not as rare as first assumed. In fact, studies indicate that collaborating serial killers account for 26% of all serial killers (Hickey 2012), and that approximately 1/3 of all female serial killers collaborate with one or more partners (Furio 2001). The majority of the teams consist of only two offenders, typically a male and female who are sexual partners. Although most collaborating serial killers are apprehended within two years (ibid), some manage to go on for decades, and the sexual and even sadistic nature that characterize the majority of these murders are at least as incomprehensible as those of the single male serial killer. Unlike the stereotypical serial killer, many of the members, especially female, usually have little or no prior criminal history, and it is generally argued that these teams are made up of individuals who would probably never have

turned to murder, if their personalities had not been combined (Hickey 2012; Furio 2001). Thus, an explanatory theory that integrates the interpersonal dynamics of collaborating serial murderers needs to be developed in order to fully understand the phenomenon.

## **AIM AND PURPOSE**

The aim of this paper is to develop an explanatory theory of offender collaboration in serial homicide, based on theories of the individual development of a serial killer and a theory of interpersonal dynamics, respectively. In other words, the aim of the paper is to build on the strengths of these theories and propose a theory that specifically covers the unique dynamics of collaborating serial murderers. In order to do so, a research question has been formulated for the purpose:

*What are the interpersonal dynamics that characterize the partnership of collaborating serial killers?*

## **DELIMITATION**

This study focuses on the interpersonal dynamics of serial killers that operate in pairs. Serial murder committed by families or groups are not examined as group dynamics differ from the dynamics between two individuals; for research addressing leader-follower dynamics and murder in groups, see Jenkins (1990). Further, the primary focus of the study will not involve gender characteristics or sexual preferences of the offenders, rather these characteristics will be taken into account during the analysis in terms of gender distribution, victim preference, and the socio-cultural context of the killings. Studies of serial murder in relation to gender and sexuality are provided elsewhere (see Gurian 2011, or Beauregard & Proulx 2007). Profit killings will not be explored in this study as the primary motives of these crimes are self-explanatory, and finally; the study will not examine psychotic serial killers or serial killers with delusional disorders, as these illnesses are generally attributable to their offences (Taylor 1985) and because they mainly operate alone or as part of a group.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A lot has happened within the field of crime since the 1970's. Contemporary crime policies, including crime prevention and criminological theory, have developed in ways that leave them barely recognizable compared to the original formulations and aims (Garland 2001). According to Garland, the transformation of the criminological field reflects the change in social and cultural conditions of late modernity which, in turn, created new problems of crime and insecurity (ibid). One of these new problems was serial homicide. In order to address this

problem, the FBI formed a Behavioral Science Unit (later Profiling and Behavioral Assessment Unit) in which experts developed classifications and typologies of human behavior and psychology in order to help the investigation by presenting complete offender profiles. Since the 1970's, the popularity of serial killer profiling has spread to wider areas of police and psychology in several countries, and in academia profiling has become subject for an increasing number of masters and doctoral programs (Miller II 2014).

### **The concept of a serial killer: Origin and characteristics**

The terms serial murderer, mass murderer, and spree killer are at times confused or used interchangeably; however, serial murderers are distinguished from mass murderers and spree killers in several ways: The term mass murderer applies to individuals who kill multiple victims in a single incident (Hickey 2007; Homant & Kennedy 2014) with the goal to quickly and efficiently kill as many victims as possible at once by using advanced technology (such as handguns, explosives, or arson). Spree killers are individuals who kill a series of victims in a "continuous span of murder", often in connection with other crimes such as robbery (Miller 2014). The serial murderer, on the other hand, focuses on a single victim at a time, and the murder activities are characterized by a slow and close-up approach, involving low-tech weapons that gouge, flay, or strangle (ibid). The term serial murderer was devised in the 1970s by FBI Special Agent Robert Ressler during the "Son of Sam" killings (Homant & Kennedy 2014). The FBI defines serial murderers as individuals who, by themselves or with an accomplice, kill at least three people over a period of time, and with a "cool-off" period in between the murders, that indicates premeditation of each killing (Leistedt et al 2011; Miller 2014; Beasley II 2004).

However, a couple of issues with this definition have been identified, namely the length of the cooling off period, and the number of killings (Homant & Kennedy 2014). Although a 30 day period has been suggested (Holmes & Holmes 1988), there is no general, agreed upon time frame that determines whether a given period of time qualifies as a cooling off period. The main point of including a cooling off period in the definition of a serial murderer is to acknowledge that the first murder has satisfied whatever motivation the killer had, and that the subsequent killings must be seen as a separate sequence of behaviors. Thus, researchers are free to appoint some arbitrary period of time in order to distinguish, for instance, between serial and spree killers (Homant & Kennedy 2014). Since multiple and serial killing are not legal terms, different authors have suggested different numbers, ranging from two to five (Egger 1984; Hickey 2002; Hodge 2004; Dietz 1986; Myers 2004). Establishing a minimum number of killings is difficult for several reasons, one of them being that the killer may be apprehended after just one or two murders (which would disqualify him/her as a serial killer), although it was the intention to continue his/her murder activities. However, three is the most frequently required number as it is enough to provide a pattern within the killings (Homant & Kennedy 2014).

### **Developmental models of serial homicide**

Unfortunately, there are no explanatory theories known to the author that focus on the study of serial killer collaboration. In order to develop an adequate theory of collaborating serial killers, it is necessary to both examine the individual development of each offender as well as the interpersonal dynamics that characterize and encourage these partnerships. The following accounts focus on



the biological and psychological development of the serial killer as an individual. This approach has its strengths as it allows one to examine the personal life history and world view of each offender. However, these theories are unable to explain the interpersonal dynamics that characterize collaboration between two individuals and must thus be supplemented in order to fill the gap between theories of single serial killers and a theory of collaborating serial killers.

*Biological/neuropsychological models of explanation:*

In the case of serial murder, much research points towards neurobiological and neuropsychological influences as part of the explanation (Miller 2014; Pallone 1996; Raine 2002) of homicidal behavior. In the following, an account of the most frequently discussed factors is provided.

**Aggression.** When dealing with violent and aggressive behavior, multiple and/or sexually sadistic homicide belongs in the top of the scale. But aggression is not in itself pathological; in fact, aggression is crucial for human survival and most animal survival in general. Authors often distinguish between two overall kinds of aggression; affective and predatory (Miller 2014 II; Meloy 2006; Cohen & Felson 1979). Affective aggression involves high levels of physical and emotional arousal as the purpose is to intimidate or dominate potential intraspecies rivals in situations where food, mates, territory, or social status has to be defended. Predatory aggression involves low arousal as the purpose is to track down, kill, and eat prey animals to sustain survival. This type of aggression mostly occurs across species. Affective and predatory aggression can overlap, which, in a human context, is expressed through cognitive abilities such as complex planning and socialization. Miller (2014) argues, that the serial killer's meticulous stalking of the victim indicates a case of predatory aggression directed at a fellow species victim.

**Hormonal influences on aggression.** Now that it has been established that aggression originally serves the purpose of protection and sustenance, the next step is to examine the potential reasons for why aggression goes from healthy to pathological in some individuals. A possible answer may be found in the individual balance of neurotransmitters and hormones in the human body. High levels of the male sex hormone testosterone are clearly associated with aggression, especially when combined with low levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that plays a crucial role in the inhibitory control of aggression within the limbic system of the brain. It is speculated that the modulation of the relationship between serotonin and aggression lays the noradrenergic system which function is to raise the preparedness of the organism to react aggressively (Coccaro 1989). Further, hormones that are related to stress-response mechanisms, such as cortisol, are also involved in the regulation of aggression, although its exact function is difficult to determine (Popma et al. 2007). According to Lee (1991), high levels of dopamine and noradrenalin generally enhance aggression as well. Thus, a deficit that affects the levels of these neurobiological components would seem to increase an individual's propensity to act aggressively. However, the effect of any neurological or hormonal deficit will always depend on and interact with social factors in the given environment (Miller 2014 II), and more importantly: Aggression does not equal serial murder. At best, aggression alone offers only a partial explanation to why some people become serial killers.

**Brain neurology I: The influence of frontal and temporal lobes.** In addition to an increased propensity to aggressive behavior, brain dysfunction or vulnerability ought to be taken into account when examining why some individuals become serial murderers while others do not. Several researchers have discussed the influence of different brain regions on deviant behavior (See for instance Raine et al.1998; Raine 2002). Studies indicate that frontal lobe dysfunction is associated with violent, nonsexual offending such as murder, lack of remorse, and tend to be present in affective murderers. Temporal lobe dysfunction is associated with sexual, but relatively nonviolent offending such as pedophilia (Miller 2014 II). It seems that dysfunction involving both frontal and temporal brain lobes is associated with offending that combines sexual and violent elements (ibid), which would explain why the predatory murderers in the studies had temporal lobe dysfunction and still acted aggressively.

**Brain neurology II: Kindling.** Another neuropsychological model that has been proposed as an explanation for predatory violence is kindling. Kindling refers to the notion that the brain continuously is exposed to stimuli. In an already vulnerable brain, these stimuli make the brain more and more sensitive, until a minor stimulus finally evokes a seizure-like response expressed through uncontrolled behavior (Miller 2014 II). Kindling has been used as an explanatory model for the slow, progressive build-up of anger that eventually turns into spontaneous rage, violence, or depression (Post 1980; Pallone & Hennessy 1996). It has been suggested that kindling may in fact be specifically relevant in cases of serial sexual killers as it explains the escalating pattern of killing and build-up of tension prior to the crimes, and the sense of relief felt subsequently (Simon 1996). Further, it is argued that serial killers with this vulnerability may in fact be suffering from some extreme kind of mood- or impulse control disorder, closely related to generally acknowledged disorders such as intermittent explosive disorder (uncontrollable attacks of extreme rage), pyromania, and kleptomania. However, Miller (2014 II) argues that, despite any deficits, the offender is completely aware of and in control of his actions when he chooses to commit murder.

**Psychopathy and aggression.** As previously mentioned, most serial killers, and violent serial offenders in general, are either psychopaths or exhibit extreme antisocial traits demonstrated (among other ways) in high scores on instruments such as the PCL-R (Beasley 2004; Harris et al 1991; Hare & Neumann 2009). The theory of under-arousal suggest that psychopaths engage in antisocial behavior as a way to seek stimulation and thus compensate for their low levels of physiological arousal, that is, they are sensation-seekers (Cook & Michie 1999). Studies have showed that psychopaths have significantly lower resting heart rates and reduced skin conductance activity (Miller 2014 II), and there are indications that psychopaths respond with increased arousal to stimuli of interest (Salekin et al 2004; Salekin et al 2010). Finally, it is suggested that serial killers could be a lethal subspecies of psychopath (Miller2014 II) which would explain the pleasure they derive from their extreme actions as well as the lack of remorse - a key characteristic in psychopathy.

### *Psycho-social models of explanation*

Although only a few actual psychological accounts have been given on serial murderers, the psycho-social and socio-cultural perspectives have adopted several ideas formed within the field of psychology, for instance Freud's notion that

overpowering another person by force leads to excitement as the offender is spared the anxiety over the chance of rejection (Wade et al 2006). Similarly, Simon (1996) proposed a shift in focus from narcissistic entitlement and antisocial traits in general, to a deep-rooted sense of self-loathe as the underlying psychology of the serial murderer. Thus, when the killer controlled, tortured and murdered his victims, he would experience a temporary relief from his own self-hatred. However, the idea of aggression displacement due to self-hate has since been contested (Bushman & Baumeister 1998; Baumeister & Bushman 2000). In the following, the concept of serial murder will be explored from a psycho-social point of view.

**The motivational model.** Although the motivational model was originally designed as an explanatory model of sexual homicide specifically, the model has since been applied in cases of serial homicide as well (Burgess et al 1986). Wade (2006) argues that most serial killers should in fact be considered as sex offenders with a paraphilic disorder that is sadistic and homicidal. Thus, Wade proposes that a subtype of sexual sadism should be added to the DSM-IV-TR, named "Sexual Sadism, Homicidal Type" in order to successfully capture this population. The unclear distinction between sexual offenders and serial killers makes the motivational model seem even more relevant in examining the development of sexual serial murderers. The model was developed by Ressler et al (1988) who based the theory on a study of 36 sexual killers. Ressler describes five components that shape the personality of the sexual killer, each with a set of subcategories (Burgess et al 1986):

- Ineffective social environment
- Formative events
- Patterned responses
- Actions toward other
- Feedback filter

In an ineffective social environment, parents and/or caretakers either ignore or accept the cognitive distortions of the child, and sometimes even encourage them through their own antisocial behavior. Key characteristics of ineffective social environment are so-called "nonprotective" and "nonintervening" adults (ibid). The formative events are characterized by direct trauma (physical/sexual abuse) or indirect trauma (witnessing family violence) that is neglected by the social environment. The neglect affects the child's thought patterns and leads to developmental and interpersonal failure. These situations involve a failed or negative attachment to the caretaker, as the caretaker fails to provide a positive role model for the child, e.g. due to absence or violent behavior. The patterned responses include the development of critical, negative traits (aggression, sense of entitlement, aggression, chronic lying, preferences for autoerotic activities, and sense of social isolation) and cognitive mapping that affects the sense of self, beliefs about the world, and interpretation of others (ibid). These traits are nurtured by increased exclusion and social isolation. The individual then relies on fantasies instead of human contact, thus failing at learning social values like respect for others' lives and feelings. The cognitive mapping in the offender is negative and repetitive, and the fantasies are characterized by violent themes including dominance, revenge, rape, torture, power/control, and death.

These dark thoughts are expressed through deviant actions such as animal cruelty, child abuse, stealing, and later assault, arson, burglary, rape, and finally murder (Hale (1993) even suggests that arson and animal cruelty are directly associated with the development of serial killers). As the individuals are able to express rage without experiencing, or without regard for, any negative consequences, they fail to develop proper impulse control. Combined with the failure to establish interpersonal relationships, their ability to feel empathy is impaired. The individual reacts to and evaluates his actions based on his cognitive patterns (Burgess et al 1986). This is called the feedback filter as it feeds back to the patterned responses and includes experience into a prospective way of thinking and acting. Through the feedback filter, the offender's actions are justified, mistakes are evaluated, and strategies are improved.

The motivational model gives a thorough account of the intra- and interpersonal development of an individual that includes environmental influences. However, some issues that compromise the explanatory value of the model have been pointed out (Homant & Kennedy 2014): For instance, the model is unable to account for serial sexual killers that emerge from well-functioning homes or for those serial killers that are highly socially adept. As mentioned earlier, many serial killers are capable of living a double life for years and even decades. Ressler later includes the notion of the "socially skilled killer" (ibid) but does not provide a thorough description of origin. Finally, the model fails to explain *why* the sexual killers are aroused by aggressive experience and high levels of stimulation. As with the model of aggression, the motivational model can only partially explain the nature and development of serial killers.

### *Describing collaborating serial killers*

Offender collaboration in serial homicide has not been given much attention within academia. However, a few typologies have been proposed, taking a descriptive point of view on the behavioral characteristics of these types of offenders. Miller (2014) lists three main characteristics of couple serial killers; although originally intended to describe the dynamics of lovers who kill, it is argued that, in this context, "couple" can apply to both platonic and romantic relationships between two offenders:

- They commit their murders as a pair
- One member is typically baiting, befriending, or seducing the victim into a position of submission, with the other member then perpetrating or joining in the killing
- Motives range from pure robbery–murder for profit to prolonged torture–murder for sexual gratification, with various gradations in between

Considering the interpersonal dynamics in shared acts of murder, Jenkins (1990) suggests four types of cooperating serial killers. The two first types describe the interpersonal dynamic of two persons while the two last address the dynamic of groups:

- Dominant–submissive pairs: Consist of a dominant partner (usually male) and a submissive partner (usually female). The submissive partner primarily participates in the murders to please the leader and often act as "bait" to lure victims. She may or may not actively engage in the torture and murder of the victim, but may observe it. In some cases, women with

masochist features derive satisfaction from actively being submissive to the man during participation in or witnessing of the crimes (Leistedt et al 2011). When apprehended and facing legal charges, these women often claim to have been brainwashed by the man, or describe themselves as reluctantly willing participants (Miller 2014).

- Equally dominant teams: Both partners derive pleasure from the killings, and both are volitionally and actively participating in the crime. The woman mostly participates in preliminary activities such as the capture and binding of the victim, but more rarely takes part in the actual torture and murder, although she may enjoy witnessing the crimes. The couple may subsequently incorporate their recollections of the crime into their own sexual activities, for instance by keeping photographs, videos, objects or even body parts as trophies.
- Extended family or group: Range from biological families who collaborate in serial murders, to so-called “cult-families” where unrelated people form a group that participates in multiple homicides. Motives typically include robbery, sexual gratification, and “loosely-articulated” philosophies or ideologies (Miller 2014: 8), sometimes in combination.
- Organized or ceremonial social groups: This type separates itself from the previous as the ideological or political aspect is more systematic while sexual motives rarely occur. It often involves quasi-religious cults who commit mass murder, although single victims can be targeted in some cases as well.

In a study of female serial murderers, Gurian (2011) found that female serial murderers who collaborated with a male partner were influenced in terms of method, motivation, and victim-preference. While single female murderers tended to target adult family members for purpose-oriented motives such as enrichment, partnered serial killers were more likely to kill strangers, both adults and teenagers for pleasure-oriented motives. Further, results indicated that mixed-sex partnered serial offenders were more likely to use a variety of killing methods such as blunt force, shooting, and strangulation, while female serial murderers mostly stick to one method, usually poison or medical drugs. Gurian recognizes the need to further explore the role of social and cultural dynamics as they seem to affect the patterns of female serial killers when working with a male partner.

### *Summary*

In sum, the following has been established:

Little is written about offender collaboration in serial homicide. Current knowledge is limited to descriptive rather than explanatory accounts of the dynamic patterns and motivations of collaborating serial killers. From a neurobiological perspective, aggression, brain dysfunction, and psychopathy offer possible explanations for the development of serial murderer individuals. However, neurological deficits alone only partially explain this development. A psychosocial point of view offers insight into how environment and failed interpersonal relationships can cause some individuals to develop a hateful and aggressive outlook on the world, and how they may express their violent behavior. However, this view does not address the interpersonal relationships between

collaborating serial killers. Neither does it explain why only a few individuals that are exposed to these factors turn to murder and why some individuals that have not been exposed to these factors still become serial killers. The explanatory models provided in this review only examine the serial killer as an individual with his/her own developmental history and world view. Therefore, the models provide a platform which can be built on and supplemented by interpersonal theories in order to develop an integrated theory of offender collaboration.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Since no current theories explain serial killer collaboration, an integrated, explanatory theory that specifically covers the interpersonal dynamics must be developed in order to understand the nature of the phenomenon. The theoretical framework of this paper includes Hale's (1993) application of social learning theory to serial murder, Hickey's (1997) trauma control model, and an interpersonal theory of the self called relational self theory (Andersen & Chen 2002). The two first theoretical models specifically target the intrapersonal development of a serial killer while the relational self theory explains in general how the individual self is related to others, and how an individual's personality is affected by others in terms of motivation, self-evaluation, and self-regulation.

### **Social learning theory**

In 1993, Robert Hale applied social learning theory to serial murder. Hale stressed the need for a deeper, more complete understanding of the intrinsic motive toward killing which – according to Hale – had been neglected in previous research. The overall aim of social learning theory is to provide a general explanatory theory of human behavior in which behavior (including deviant and/or criminal) is learned. According to social learning theory, certain behaviors are strengthened through positive and negative reinforcement, and weakened by positive punishment or loss of reward (Akers 1979) but ultimately, it is the cognitive capacity of the individual that will determine both how he is affected by these experiences, and the future direction of his actions (Bandura 1971). Since its application to deviant behavior under the name “differential association-reinforcement theory”, social learning theory has incorporated the theory of modern behaviorism into sociological theory (ibid) within a criminological frame of reference. However, the focus on individual learning alone is too narrow to provide a deep understanding of the dynamics of collaborating serial murderers. Therefore, supplementing theories that address factors that influence an individual's ability to learn and examines how social learning affects the nature of interpersonal relations, respectively, will be included later to provide a full theoretical framework.

In his application of social learning theory to serial murder, Hale (1993) includes aspects of frustration theory (Amsel 1958) and discrimination learning (Spence 1943) to support his central claim: That serial murder is learned. According to Hale, the serial killer has experienced and internalized humiliation at some point in his life, and serial homicide must be understood as an attempt to overcome the humiliation and regain lost power. Hale's theory has been applied in several studies that examine certain factors in relation to serial homicide; including

adolescent firesetting (Singer & Hensley 2004), animal cruelty (Wright & Hensley 2003), and doing military service (Castle & Hensley 2002). However, the studies show mixed results and calls for further research to overcome different limitations in conducting serial murder research. Nonetheless, indications of a possible link between animal cruelty and serial murder remain, and empirical support of childhood and adolescent firesetting as an indicator of future serial homicide has been established. Support of the claim that humiliation is closely connected with serial homicide has repeatedly been established (see for instance Pollock 1995).

### *Social learning and serial murder*

Although serial murderers tend to experience an abundantly high number of humiliations during childhood (Singer & Hensley 2004), all individuals experience humiliation at some points in their lives. Therefore, the humiliation must be internalized and recognized as a motive in order for the hypothesis that humiliation can lead to serial murder to apply. According to Hale, it is this process of internalization that separates the serial killer from other people. Hale further argues that humiliation occurs in so-called non-reward situations (Hale 1993; Singer & Hensley 2004). A non-reward situation means that a reward does not occur in a situation where one has previously been given, and thus created the anticipation of a reward in future similar situations. In a non-reward situation, this anticipation is not met and an unconditioned frustration response – humiliation – takes place. The situational cues that were present during the humiliating experience then become associated with the experience itself by the killer, and form a conditioned anticipatory frustration response (ibid). In other words, the killer has internalized certain cues that he believes predict a frustration which urges him to avoid future potentially humiliating situations, indicated by similar situational cues.

According to the theory, the serial killer has encountered various non-reward situations during childhood and adolescence, but only few or no situations in which positive reinforcement occurred. This makes the killer unable to distinguish between potentially rewarding or non-rewarding situations. Instead, all situations, in which the predictive cues are present, indicate a potential humiliation and trigger the anticipatory frustration. The seeking of approval from parents, lovers, and other primary influences, is not restricted to serial killers, rather it must be seen a basic human need. However, when an individual experiences a situation in which he seeks social acknowledgement from a person of importance to him, but does not reach his desired goal, frustration occurs. Hale argues that serial killers first experience and internalize this frustration during some critical period of their social development which makes them unable to experience social success in the future (Hale 1993).

Although humiliating experiences during the formative years may cause aggression in an individual, perhaps even enough to drive them to commit murder, the theory does not so far explain why some people become serial killers. If serial murder is a means to overcome humiliation, then why does the serial murderer not go back and kill the originator of the humiliation, and why does the killer continue to kill even after this person has died? According to Hale, at the time the frustration was experienced and internalized, the aggressive drive in the serial killer was blocked by the originator, either due to fear of retaliation, or by anxiety of expression of aggression due to memories of prior punishment for such

behaviors. Thus, the person who originally caused the humiliation and frustration remains in some position of power which prohibits the serial killer from approaching him and regain power. However, the feelings of aggression do not disappear; instead they are suppressed and must eventually be released. When an aggressive drive is blocked in a humiliating situation, the aggressive impulses may be released through displacement or *transference* to less threatening objects that are unable to retaliate (Hale 1993). In the case of serial killers, these objects are often selected based on a resemblance to the originator of the humiliation, made by the serial killer. In other words, the objects become “scapegoats” for the intended victim (ibid). For instance, Ted Bundy experienced rejection by his ex-fiancé and started targeting victims that resembled her in terms of hairstyle, hair color, and stature.

One question remains: Why is the serial killer not satisfied with taking his aggression out on a single victim? Why does he continue to kill over time? Hale suggests that in order to fully restore “what is right” to the serial killer, it is necessary to have witnesses, preferably the same individuals that witnessed the original humiliation. Without this audience, the humiliation cannot be rectified. Naturally, the serial killer does not perform in front of an audience, and the victims do not survive to bear witness. Therefore, the serial killer does not succeed in correcting the humiliation and is caught in a vicious circle where, on the one hand, he must kill to overcome the humiliation, and on the other, nobody can confirm that “justice” has been restored (ibid).

In sum, it is established that serial killers are destined to kill continuously for two main reasons: There is no audience to bear witness to the fact that “right” has been restored, and the serial killer is failing to remove the actual target of his humiliation.

### *Strengths and limitations of Hale’s application of social learning theory*

A general strength of the theory is that it incorporates studies and insights from other theories in attempt to provide explanations to basic questions about the motives behind serial homicide. However, little or no attention is given to the effect of biological influences or individual predispositions. For instance, it is mentioned that the interpretation and internalization of humiliating experiences is what separates the serial killer from other people; however, how or why the internalization of humiliation differs among individuals is not discussed or even mentioned. Further, in cases of partnered homicide, there *is* in fact an audience to the crime which means that at least part of the explanation of serial homicide is fallacious or needs serious revision. Nonetheless, the focus on the deeper, psychological motives supplements already existing theories that primarily focus on outlining the social characteristics of serial murder and developing typologies of the killers based on external drives. Hale contests the traditional view on the serial killer as a “deranged” and irrational human being by discussing the acts of serial homicide as something that is logical to the killer due to a fundamental misperception of himself and his surroundings. However, this understanding also indicates that serial homicide can potentially be unlearned, and that the offenders may someday be able to reenter society as “cured” citizens. The idea of releasing former serial killers back into society raises concern as treating serial murderers by establishing new conditioned responses can be highly problematic. Pavlov (1927) argued that the inhibition of a conditioned response is only temporary which means that once the arousal of the initial inhibitory state diminishes, the



killer may “spontaneously recover” from the new learned responses and resume to his homicidal behavior.

### **The trauma control model**

Based on examinations of the backgrounds of numerous serial killers, Hickey (1997) developed a multifactor model of serial murder that incorporated the occurrence of traumatizations in the early life, biological predispositions, and socio-cultural factors. At times accelerated by certain facilitators such as alcohol, drugs or pornography, these factors are considered to contribute to criminality and particularly to serial homicide. Despite not providing an actual theory, a non-existing account of the etiology of different variations of serial homicide, and a vague distinction between types of predispositions, Hickey’s trauma control model has frequently been applied in the examination of various serial murder characteristics, including paraphilia and lust murder (Arrigo & Purcell 2001), strictly male serial homicide (Arndt, Hietpas & Kim 2004), spree killing (Pollock 1995), and geographic variations of serial homicide (DeFronzo et al 2007). The model has gained empirical support in terms of correlation between cultural characteristics and geographic variation of serial murder and the notion of rejection as a trigger of events; however, it does not explain the elements of lust or paraphilia in serial murder, and some results explicitly contradict the model’s notion that the frequency of killings will eventually escalate (Pollock 1995).

As in the review in the current paper, the role of potential biological factors is discussed in the trauma control model in terms of head injury, brain pathology, and neurological malfunction. However, despite a correlation between some neuro-biological malfunctions and serial murder, Hickey points out that the majority of people suffering head trauma or neurobiological vulnerabilities do not become antisocial; rather, Hickey argues, the answer is to be found in social and/or environmental settings.

Negative events that occur during the formative years of the serial killer’s life, such as an unstable home life, the death of one or both parents, divorce, corporal punishment, or sexual abuse, are considered potential childhood traumas in the trauma control model. According to the model, what separates serial murderers from other people is the effect of- and negative coping with these childhood traumatizations (Hickey 2012). For serial murderers, rejection (especially by relatives or parents) is the most common effect of traumatization, and is most often experienced in abusive, unstable home environments. Physical or psychological abuse is extremely confusing to the child or adolescent and causes a deep sense of anxiety and mistrust toward the surroundings and the abuser in particular (ibid). Further, witnessing aggressive or self-destructive behavior in the home such as murder, rape, or suicidal behavior, may result in fantasies of revenge, violence, or mutilation, and potentially leads to a destabilization of impulse control in the child. However, millions of people experience such traumatic events without becoming serial killers or even criminals. In the case of serial murderers, a combination of traumas is present in the early life. Hickey argues that the combined effect of different traumatizations is greater than any single trauma by itself. For instance, rejection outside the home or later in life, such as ostracism in school or exclusion from a group, may contribute further to the stress experienced by the individual. Thus, the combined effect of trauma ought to be understood exponentially rather than arithmetically (Hickey 2012). As with Hale’s concept of frustration and blocked aggression, the childhood traumas

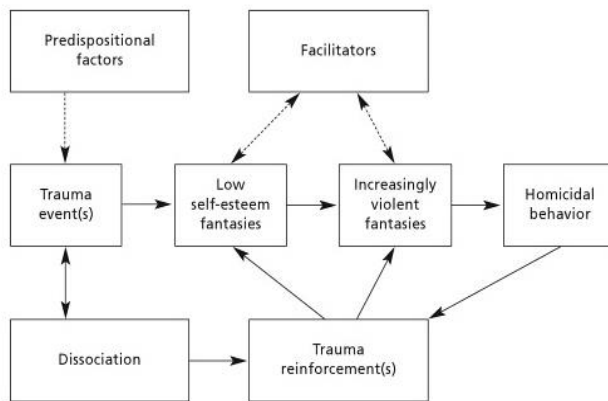
experienced by the serial killer may function as a triggering mechanism, leaving the individual unable to cope with the stress of certain events that resemble the traumatic situation.

As mentioned earlier, experiencing some sort of rejection in life is not the equivalent of becoming antisocial. According to Hickey, it is necessary to look into the coping methods of serial killers in order to comprehend what makes them unique. Each individual has its own way of coping, depending on the perceived degree, frequency, and intensity of the occurrence. According to Hickey, the children who later become serial killers have experienced trauma(s) that have not been effectively processed by therapeutic strategies (ibid). Whereas most people tend to cope with the stress of rejection from a “self-centered” and nonviolent perspective, some individuals deal with rejection in a negative and destructive manner, for instance by breaking objects, tormenting animals, or behave violently towards others, thus indicating an innate tendency to externalize aggression (Miller 2014 II).

Hickey further argues that serial killers do not cope constructively with their early traumas, which means that they develop a distorted view on themselves and the world that surrounds them. This negative mindset nurtures a basic feeling of low self-esteem, a characteristic that – according to Hickey – is very common among serial killers and includes feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and worthlessness (Hickey 2012). During childhood, the serial killer will attempt to regain the psychological equilibrium by dissociating from- or completely blocking out the traumas and the painful emotions connected to them, from his consciousness. In addition, to disguise the ongoing internal conflict, the killer constructs a “mask” of self-confidence and self-control, somewhat similar to how Cleckley (1941) describes the construction of “masks of sanity” in psychopathic personalities. In the trauma control model, this dissociation is seen as a state in which the mind is overwhelmed by the anxiety generated by certain traumas. However, despite the effort of blocking out the hurt, fear, and anger, the pain eventually resurfaces. Much like in Hale’s theory, the serial killer is now caught in a vicious circle of trauma and the quest to regain control; however, in the trauma control model this pattern appears already in childhood and is thus not restricted to the homicidal acts. Finally, it is argued that, apart from trauma, some sociocultural facilitators, such as alcohol, pornography, and drugs, may contribute in order for an individual’s innate aggressive compulsion to become a series of homicidal acts (Miller II 2014), although these facilitators are said to have a merely precipitating effect on individuals that are already harboring destructive urges (Hickey 1997). The exponential effect of the different factors is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1

Trauma Control Model for Serial Murder. Source: Cengage Learning, 2013.



### *Strengths and limitations of the trauma control model*

The overall strength of the trauma control model is that the provided framework is broad enough to include various types of serial murder which is crucial when analyzing a subpopulation of serial killers. Furthermore, the model does not apply a classification system. This exempts the model from the restraints of having to place the serial killer somewhere within a static, narrow typology, which is problematic when dealing with complex human behavior. According to the trauma control model, even two serial killers that share the same characteristics, for instance sexual sadism, may not have any particular background variables in common since their behavior, although similar, could derive from different combinations of predispositions, traumas, or facilitators (Homant & Kennedy 2014). The incorporation of neurobiological predispositions as possible explanatory factors strengthens the model in comparison to Hale's learning theory, in which the individual "internalization" process is not discussed in depth. However, the distinction between predispositions, traumatization, and stressors seems vague and is not discussed thoroughly in the outline of the trauma control model. Since predispositions can have biological, psychological, and sociological origins, it is unclear where the distinction is made; for instance, child abuse is considered a trauma while postnatal brain damage is considered a predisposition, even though the damage may have been caused by the abuse (ibid). Without proper distinction, the list of contributing factors is endless; thus, it could be argued that some cases may exist in which the sociological factors are so profound, that innate factors like psychological and neurobiological predispositions, are dispensable. Finally, the trauma control model provides quite a deterministic perspective on the serial murderers as it does not explain whether proper therapeutic processing of early traumas at a later stage in life could potentially treat the murderous tendencies.

### **The relational self**

The theory of the relational self offers an interpersonal social-cognitive understanding of the self as something that is fundamentally entangled with others. The theory draws on different psychological traditions, including social- and cognitive psychology in its examination of the processing of knowledge, goal-setting, and self-regulation (Bandura 1976; 1977); personality psychology through the inclusion of classic trait based personality models (see for instance Goldberg 1990), and clinical self-psychology through the adopted view of the self as

psychosocial (Conradson 2005) and closely connected to transference (see for instance Kohut 1971). It is argued that the relation between self and others affects the personality functioning of an individual in terms of self-definition, self-evaluation, and self-regulation (Andersen & Chen 2002; Higgins 1987; 1989). Instead of applying an exclusively trait based approach, the authors argue that idiographic constructs in memory shape subjective interpretations that are equally important sources of individual differences. Although interesting, the idea of a fundamentally interdependent self is controversial and at times contradicts itself, for instance in some cases of self-protective goals and motivations. Thus, researchers continue to strive to provide fuller explanations and sharper conceptualizations (Chen et al 2006), and some studies work towards developing a concept of an “autonomous-relational self” in which autonomy should not be seen as separateness but rather as a synthesis of two basic human needs: agency and relatedness to others (Kağıtçibasi 1996). The relational self theory consists of five main propositions that address the concept of the relational self in regard of significant others, social context, and different models of personality. These propositions will be examined in the following.

### *1. Relational selves are a product of the profound importance of significant others*

Since self-psychology separated itself from the classic psychoanalysis in the sixties, the work toward a complete definition of the phenomenon of self has not been successful (Siegel 1996; Baumeister 2010). Instead, many researchers have focused on the different manifestations and functions of the self, including the sense of self, i.e. one’s perception of oneself. In the theory of the relational self, the sense of self is partly shaped by the relationships with significant others, and one’s thoughts, feelings, motives, and self-regulatory strategies may vary considerably across relations with different significant others. According to Andersen and Chen, a significant other is defined as “any individual who is or has been deeply influential in one’s life and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested” (2002: 619). People have a number of significant others throughout the life course. These may include family members, such as parents and siblings, but also “chosen” persons encountered early on or later in life, such as close friends and romantic partners. Usually, there are individual differences in the nature, number and quality of significant other-relationships as well as in their level of significance. Although the relationships with significant others are continuously updated with new experiences and changes, it is assumed that some continuity is stored in one’s memory of relational selves. A significant other does not have to be physically present in order to affect the sense of self in a given situation; the relational self is capable of constructing a mental representation of the significant other, a phenomenon also referred to as transference. This leads to the second proposition.

### *2. Relational selves emerge in the context of transference*

As in Hale’s (1993) theory, transference refers to situations where the mental representation of a significant other occurs in the encounter with a new person; in other words, the representation of a significant other has been “activated” in the perceiver’s memory. The perceiver’s interpretation of- and relationship with the new person derives from his representation of the significant other and is reflected through his emotional, motivational, and behavioral responses (Andersen & Chen 2002). According to Andersen and Chen, this happens because of a connection in memory between significant-other representations and the self. This connection

reflects how the perceiver sees himself in relation to each significant other (see also Baldwin 1992). In sum, when a significant-other representation is activated in the perceiver's memory, the aspects of his self that is associated with that particular significant other – the “self-with-significant-other” – is activated as well.

There are two ways of accessing these significant other-representations: Chronic and transient sources of accessibility (Baldwin 1992). Chronic sources stem from past activations of constructs where a high frequency of past activations results in an increased chronic accessibility. This means that the more a given construct has been activated in the past, the more likely is it to be activated again in the future (Andersen & Chen 2002). The transient sources, on the other hand, derive from cues in the environment. For instance, if a perceiver is exposed to certain cues before encountering a new person, the accessibility and thus the likelihood of activation of a certain construct is temporarily heightened. Also, the perceiver may encounter a person whose cues happen to “match” the stored representation of a significant other (ibid). It is important to note that these cues may not be consciously registered by the perceiver. Thus, transference can occur without the individual consciously drawing analogies with significant others.

### *3. Relational selves have both idiographic and socially shared elements*

According to Andersen and Chen (2002), the mental representation of a significant other defines one specific individual and not shared notions of social categories such as “Asians” or “women”. However, both representations of significant others and representations of these generic social constructs are chronically accessible to the individual. Therefore, it is assumed that significant-other-representations consist of several kinds of personal knowledge about the significant other, ranging from his or her appearance, personality, behavior, feelings, and motivations (ibid) to socially shared constructs that are somehow linked to the significant other, i.e. the belonging to a social category such as “women”. This means that every time a significant-other-representation is activated, the generic social categories or identities that are linked to the significant other are activated as well.

One of the ways that generic knowledge can be linked to a significant-other-representation is through the interpersonal roles that are maintained in the self-with-significant-other-relationships. Examples of these could be the different roles that are carried out in parent-child or male-female relations. When encountering a new person, the role-based expectations formed in the self-with-significant-other-relationship may reoccur in the interaction with the new other. For instance, if one's significant other was a romantic partner, the behaviors of that individual may be used as an exemplar of how all future romantic partners (or even how all women/men) will relate to one-self (Andersen & Chen 2002). The generic, socially shared elements of the relational selves also include the belief that significant others hold certain standards for one-self about whom one ought to- or ideally should be. These standards are referred to as “oughts” and “ideals”.

### *4. Relational selves provide a basis for an interactionist model of personality*

The relational self theory addresses both the aim of personality psychology, to identify regularities in a person, and the aim of social psychology, to identify situations that affect people across the board (Andersen & Chen 2002). In

relational self theory, personality is seen as a function of both the person and the situation, where the regularities in a person is equivalent to the individual's chronically accessible constructs, especially "significant-other"- and "self-with-significant-other"-representations; and the situations are in fact interpersonal situations that trigger and thus enhance the use of certain significant-other-representations, depending on the individual's chronic accessibility. In this section, it is examined how significant others can affect an individual's personality in terms of motivation and self-regulation.

According to Andersen and Chen (2002), motivations and goals are, too, seen as mental constructs that are stored in memory and can be activated and shape cognition, affect, and behavior. Many different motivations can be linked to relational selves, but the need for human connection (relatedness, belonging, approval, caring, respect, tenderness, and attachment) is referred to as the basic human motivation. The connection with others (or lack thereof) is crucial for the development of cognition, affect, behavior, and for mental health in particular. The underlying reason for initiating and maintaining interpersonal relationships lies in this need for connection. However, other central needs such as the need for autonomy, mastery, and security can operate parallel with the basic human motivations and at times work at cross-purposes with each other (Andersen & Chen 2002). Thus, a significant other can be associated with "profoundly conflicting feelings" if the perceiver feels that the satisfaction of his needs is prohibited in the relationship (ibid). As an example, the need for connection can be blocked with a significant other in order to express another need, e.g. the need to have more freedom or privacy. Self-regulation defines the modulating of one's own response in order to avoid a perceived threat, for instance in the form of an unpleasant emotional state (Andersen & Chen 2002). Significant others have an important self-regulatory function for the individual's emotional life, including the nature and development of hopes, fears, and disappointments. Because the need for connection and security are such basic motivations, they affect what is regulated and why in the "self-with-significant-other-relationship". This means that one may regulate certain needs or responses to maintain the relationship and avoid the threat of losing human connection. According to Andersen and Chen (2002), threats to the self weaken the individual's feeling of security and safety which, in turn, elicits a set of self-protective responses in order to regain self-esteem, capability, and security. These self-protective responses may occur in transference when encountering a new person if the activated significant-other representation is based on a negative self-with-significant-other-relation that is perceived as a threat to the self. This notion leads to the final proposition.

##### *5. Relational selves are cognitive-affective units in an if-then model of personality*

In the if-then model, different types of situations (ifs) and the unique patterns of responses an individual exhibits when exposed to them (thens) is what constitutes personality. In this view, the concept of personality combines variability, in the form of different responses across different situations, and stability in the form of a unique "personality signature" that reflects an overall pattern of an individual's if-then-relations (Andersen & Chen 2002). However, as in the previous theories (Hale 1993; Hickey 1997), Andersen and Chen emphasize that all people experience situations differently. All objective situations carry subjective meaning to the individual. Therefore, in order to identify why an individual responds in a certain way, it must be examined what mediates the relation between the objective

situations and the subjective responses in these situations. According to the model, the answer lies in the situational triggering of certain cognitive-affective units (feelings, goals, expectancies etc.), as it reflects the situation as it is psychologically experienced by the individual (Andersen & Chen 2002; Baldwin 1992). Put simply, relational selves must be seen as concrete cases of triggered cognitive-affective units in a given situation.

### *Strengths and limitations of relational self theory*

In their study, Andersen and Chen present empirical support of the occurrence of transference and the activation of relational selves therein as well as general support of their five main propositions. By understanding the self as entangled with significant others, the concept is placed in a social, interpersonal context but remains separated from traditional social identity theories (see for instance Brewer 1991; 1996; 2001 or Goffman 1963) that distinguish between autonomous selves and group- or collective selves. This unique position may provide some specific explanatory insight into the forming and maintenance of relationships between collaborating serial killers. However, the claim that the self is fundamentally interdependent rather than autonomous is also problematic. For instance, the elicitation of self-regulation and self-protective responses indicate the existence of an autonomous self on some level, as self-regulatory responses seem to serve personal rather than interpersonal goals. Further, the variation of interdependence and independence of the self has yet to be examined across culture, subculture, and gender. Nonetheless, research has been conducted in the United States which, by the authors, is defined by “highly individualist settings” and still provides support for interdependence. Finally, the theory provides a framework in which the specific explanations of individual deviant behavior accounted for in the previous theories, are applicable to the understandings of human cognition, affect, and behavior on a general, interpersonal level.

## **TOWARD AN INTEGRATED THEORY OF SERIAL KILLER COLLABORATION**

According to both social learning theory and the trauma control model, experiencing humiliation and rejection throughout childhood and adolescence plays a key role in the development of a serial killer. In relational self theory, parents and close relatives are an individual's first significant others whose function is to provide goals and expectations, thus shaping the individual's perception of self and others from an early age. Therefore, when continuously experiencing or witnessing abuse and rejection by primary caretakers, the individual not only learns antisocial behavior; he or she also develops a negative sense of self in relation to these caretakers which is reflected in his or her view on the world and others. Humiliation and rejection damages the basic human need for connection and relatedness. Therefore, as a child, the individual is caught in a dilemma: He or she is dependent on the relatedness that, for now, is only (or primarily) provided by his or her family. Confronting the negative significant other(s), i.e. the originator(s) of the humiliation, may result in another non-reward situation, e.g. punishment or rejection, and thus break the only human connection available. In order to maintain the connection, the individual applies self-regulation, and the feelings of anger, hurt and anxiety are blocked out of the

individual's consciousness, but remains manifested as negative emotions towards the originator on an unconscious level. Certain cues that either characterize the originator of the humiliation, or the humiliating situation itself, is also stored in the individual's memory because the individual fails to process or cope with the traumas in a healthy way. The cues from the past are at times confused with cues from the present, and all the negative emotions are then transferred to new situations and persons that are interpreted by the individual as threatening to his or her sense of self. The interpretation of these events is always subjective but can be influenced or accelerated by internal and external factors such as neuro-biological predispositions or injuries, and sociocultural facilitators e.g. alcohol, drugs, pornography, and extreme and violent literature. If any of these factors are present, they affect the chronic accessibility of the negative cues and feelings associated with the negative significant other, which means that the individual is generally more likely to interpret situations and other people as threats. In school and later in life, these antisocial patterns may be reinforced by experiences of rejection and disapproval by schoolmates, peers, and later by lovers. This can lead the individual to establish so-called exemplars where the characteristics of a negative significant other becomes applicable to a larger group of people, for instance through the notion "all women are evil". In cases of serial murder, the individual may externalize his or her aggression (for instance through rape or animal cruelty) earlier in life. At some point the individual then transfers the characteristics of the trauma to a 'scapegoat' that matches certain cues associated with the negative significant other who originally humiliated the individual. In attempt to overcome the humiliation and regain power and emotional control, the individual externalizes the suppressed negative feelings through (sexual) aggression and ultimately homicide as a way of, symbolically, killing the negative significant other. Since the victim is not a significant other, the individual does not fear the loss of human relatedness, and self-regulation is therefore unnecessary. However, *because* the victim is not the actual originator of the humiliation, the satisfaction derived from the killing is only temporary and the serial killer is stuck between regaining emotional control and not being able to retaliate against the original source of humiliation.

### **Explaining serial killer collaboration**

In the case of serial killer collaboration, it is assumed that the life histories of the collaborating serial killers are somewhat similar to those of the individual serial killers. The rejection by caretakers combined with a need for human connection and approval may explain why some serial killers operate in pairs. An individual that only or mainly has negative significant others develops beliefs and expectations of the world and people based on his or her negative relations with these persons. The need for belonging and connection is unsatisfied and any attempts to form new and healthy significant-other-relations are met with rejection due to the dysfunctional goals and expectations expressed by the individual. However, the encounter with- and attraction to new persons is also characterized by past relations with significant others; a history of negative significant others combined with a need for connection may lead to the forming of new negative significant-other-relationships; in other words, two individuals with backgrounds characterized by trauma, humiliation and rejection may be attracted to each other, either romantically or platonically, due to their shared experiences and beliefs about the world. This mutual attraction brings a number benefits to the serial killers, including the satisfaction of basic needs such as a sense of belonging, understanding, approval, and relatedness, but also in forms of shared antisocial



goals. In these relationships, deviant fantasies are met with encouragement instead of rejection, and with a partner, the luring and overpowering of victims may be faster and easier plus there is an audience to witness that the control has been restored.

The composition of these serial killer teams may vary in terms of gender, age, race, and sexuality, and may affect the interpersonal dynamic in terms of relationship type (lovers, friends, family), dominance, and motivation. Even in seemingly equal serial killer teams, there is always a more dominant individual (Hickey 2013). In this theory, it is argued that the distribution of dominance within serial killer teams depends on generic social and cultural expectations of how different social “roles” ought to- or ideally should be carried out; for instance a generic social expectation could be that women are submissive (particularly in older cases up to the 60’ies and 70’ies), or that age is associated with experience and wisdom. In this view, the dominant individual should be a male, and in cases of same sex teams, the dominant individual should be the eldest. The dominant significant other provides “goals” for the team such as method of victim acquisition and method of murder, and it is assumed that the victim-preference will most likely resemble the person(s) that originally humiliated him or her. This would explain Gurian’s (2011) finding that the methods used in mixed-sex partnered serial murder often resemble the methods used in single male serial murder. Collaborating serial killers are usually apprehended earlier in their criminal career than individual serial killers (approximately within two years) due to tension in the interpersonal dynamic, e.g. jealousy, domestic violence, or power struggles that weaken the union (Furio 2001). Often, it is the weaker individual who fails to get rid of evidence or gives up his or her partner when questioned by the police (ibid). In this theory, this betrayal of a significant other can be explained by a set of conflicting needs within the individual. Other fundamental needs operate alongside the need for human relatedness such as the need for autonomy, power, and security. Sometimes, a “trade-off” between needs takes place, and the need for connection is trumped by, for instance, the need for autonomy or security. For example; in cases of partnerships where the submissive individual is abused by the dominant individual, the need for security and being out of harm’s way may be superseded by the need for human connection for a while, especially in cases where the team has become isolated, and contact to other significant others is limited or nonexistent. However, when experiencing severe threats to the self, e.g. fearing for one’s life or fearing serious prosecution, the individuals may be motivated to break the connection with the significant other as a self-protective response.

### **A meta-theoretical model**

To illustrate how the theoretical insights can supplement each other, a meta-theoretical model of commonalities and differences in central issues is presented. By combining theories of individual development and learning with a theory of interpersonal knowledge processing, lacking or vague definitions of a key concept in one theory can be supplemented or elaborated on by the other theories. Further, different descriptions and applications of similar concepts contribute to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of serial killer collaboration as it allows the researcher to consider the elements of the phenomenon from different perspectives.

Table 1

A meta-theoretical model of commonalities and differences

	<b>Social Learning</b>	<b>Trauma Control Model</b>	<b>The Relational Self</b>
Neuro/bio/physiological factors discussed	No.	Yes, as possible contributing factors.	Not explicitly discussed. Chronic applicability and the readiness of certain constructs may be influenced by innate factors.
Cultural context or influence	Not explicitly discussed. Concern of society taken into account	Yes, social/environmental settings + socio-cultural facilitators	Yes, generic social/cultural expectations and shared knowledge
Motivation	Overcoming humiliation	Externalizing trauma into (sexual) aggression	Not explicitly discussed. Threats to the self + beliefs about ideals and oughts
Subjective interpretation of events	Yes, must internalize and recognize humiliation as motive	Yes, negative coping	Yes, if-then situations are subjectively defined/carry subjective meaning
Frequency of events that impact the level of anticipatory response discussed	Yes, experience of only nonreward situations leads to anticipatory frustration	Yes, societal characteristics e.g. violence + the number of traumatizations has an exponential effect	Yes, in the form of readiness in chronic accessibility
Internal conflict	Yes, failing to confront the originator + the need to make it right vs. lack of witnesses	Yes, trauma vs. regaining control	Yes, between different needs/motives and the basic need for human connection
Occurrence of transference discussed	Yes, cues that were present during the humiliating experience become associated with the experience itself + victims are selected based upon resemblance.	Not explicitly discussed. Individuals are unable to cope with stress in situations that resemble the traumatic situation.	Yes, as a mental representation of a significant other, activated in the encounter with a new person
Unconscious elements or analogies	Yes, blocked aggression in cases of humiliation + predictive cues	Yes, suppression, dissociation and blocking of traumatic events + predictive cues	Yes, non-conscious mental representations of significant others + non-consciously registered cues
Possibility of change/treatment discussed	Yes, theoretically, homicidal behavior can be unlearned	No.	Not explicitly discussed. The mental representation of a significant other can change slightly over time + the sense of self varies across significant-other-relations
Need for human connection	Yes, approval from persons of importance	Not explicitly discussed. Effects of negative or lacking connection outlined	Yes, basic human connection with significant others
Break of human connection discussed	Yes, humiliation + non-reward situations	Yes, rejection	Yes, conflict of needs + threat to the self

## METHOD AND MATERIALS

In this paper, the interpersonal dynamics of collaborating serial killers will be examined through a qualitative, comparative case-study approach. Serial murder, especially partnered serial murder, is a difficult phenomenon to study quantitatively. Due to the secluded nature of the killings, it is impossible to make observations of the actual committing of these crimes (Singer & Hensley 2004). Further, it is not possible to design an experimental setting in which one can manipulate variables in order to study the motive and development of serial killers. According to Winters (2015), a comparative approach can be used to test a hypothesis that is designed to apply to more than one case. As the aim of this study is to develop an integrated theory of serial killer collaboration as a

phenomenon, a comparative study that includes studying similar cases in order to find their causes is the most suitable approach.

Singer and Hensley (2004) argue that case studies are the preferred approach in three situations: When studying how and why a phenomenon occurs; when the investigator has little or no control over events; and when the phenomenon is contemporary and within a real-life context. As the research question in the current paper involves a study of what dynamics that characterize collaborating serial killers, a case-study approach is preferable. In addition, studying this phenomenon leaves the researcher with no control over the events what so ever, and, as established in the introduction, serial murder is as real and contemporary a problem as ever. Thus, a case-study approach was applied for this study. When dealing with uncommon events, such as partnered serial murder, it is crucial to cast a broader net when gathering case histories in order to identify common characteristics that would otherwise have been overlooked due to the time-gap between occurrences (Singer & Hensley 2004). However, when examining this phenomenon, qualitative data is also problematic and has its limitations; particularly in regard of analyzing interpersonal dynamics based on self-reports, or establishing the accuracy of certain life events that are not documented but relies solely on testimony from self-reports or secondary sources such as family members, class mates, and other acquaintances.

### **Delimitation of material**

The current study will focus on cases that fall under the category of hedonistic serial killers. The reason for this is threefold: First, the largest population of serial killer teams is defined as sexually sadistic lust killers; therefore, it is important to address this subtype first. Second, the study of serial murder is generally difficult and has limitations. Studying a subtype of serial murder is even narrower and leaves only a limited amount of available case material (Homant & Kennedy 2014); therefore, examining the largest population of collaborating serial killers is preferable in terms of accessible data. Finally, sexually and sadistically motivated homicide is the most aggressive, personal, and humiliating type of homicide. It is incomprehensible how and why an individual, let alone two, decides to commit a crime so heinous that it has been proclaimed the portrayal of evil (Stone 2010), not once but several times and without any intention of stopping. It is necessary to address, examine, and even try to understand the *development* and *dynamic* of these individuals in order to prevent this type of crime in the future.

### **Cases**

The selection of cases is based on archival data as it allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon from both a cross-sectional and longitudinal perspective (Winters 2015). One source of data for the analysis is a database of male and female murderers in which all publically available information about the crimes are gathered and stored, including detailed lists of life events, newspaper articles, biographies, court documents, and police interviews; however, ethical considerations regarding the quality, adequacy and relevance of available data must be made as the case material may not be comprehensive for the purposes of the current study and may have important constituencies missing (Webster et al 2013). Relevant literature and case studies have further provided a foundation for case selection. Five cases were selected for this study. All are high-profile cases of partnered serial murder. The selection of cases is based on the amount of information available about the early life of the individuals. The cases vary in

terms of gender distribution, country, victimology, and time but have the common characteristic that they operate in pairs. Numerous collaborating murderers were identified for this study but were excluded, either due to a limited amount of information about their early life, because the collaboration consisted of more than two individuals, or because they did not fit the FBI's definition of the serial murderer. An overview of the cases is provided in the model below.

Table 2  
Model of cases.

	<b>Ian Brady and Myra Hindley</b>	<b>Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono</b>	<b>Frederick and Rosemary West</b>	<b>Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka</b>	<b>David and Catherine Birnie</b>
Case known as	“The Moors Murderers”	“The Hillside Stranglers”	“The Gloucester House of Horrors”	“The Ken and Barbie Killers”	“The Moorhouse Murders”
Country	Greater Manchester, England	California, USA	Gloucestershire, England	Ontario, Canada	Freemantle, Australia
Years active	1963-1965	1977-1978	1967-1987	1990-1992	Oct.-Nov. 1986
Gender	Male, female	Male, male	Male, female	Male, female	Male, female
Number of victims	5+	10	11-13+	3+	4
Victim type	Children/adolescents	Young women mid-teens to early twenties, mainly prostitutes	Girls and young women	Attractive teenaged girls	Women from mid-teens to early thirties
Gender of victims	Male, female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age of victims	10-17 years old	12-28 years old	16-21 years old	14-15 years old	15-31 years old
Method of murder	Cutting the throat + strangulation + one victim murdered with an axe	Strangulation + experimenting with lethal injection, electric shock, carbon monoxide poisoning	Strangulation+ suffocation	Accidental poisoning + Strangulation	Strangulation + stabbing with knife + one victim murdered with an axe
Crime characteristics	Photographing and audiotaping, torture + return to the burial place and take pictures	Kidnapping, rape, torture	Rape, torture, mutilation, dismemberment, incest	Videotaping the crimes + rape	Rape + photographing

## **ANALYSIS**

In this section, excerpts from the five cases of collaborating serial killers are compared in order to illustrate how key concepts from social learning theory, the trauma control model, and relational self theory can contribute to the understanding of the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration. A detailed overview of individual histories is provided in the appendix.

### **Intrapersonal development**

When examining the interpersonal dynamics that characterize serial killer collaboration, it is crucial to include the individual life histories of the offenders as the intrapersonal development is reflected in these interpersonal relationships. In order to outline the intrapersonal development of the case persons prior to meeting their partner, the cases have been analyzed with focus on experiences of traumatization, humiliation, and rejection. Further, possible neurobiological and sociocultural influences of cognition have been examined as well by taking into account all registered and presumed head injuries, mental deficits, and facilitators.

#### *Traumatization and humiliation*

Several case life histories reflect the developmental elements of the single serial murderer as accounted for in social learning theory and the trauma control model. Four case persons experienced traumatic/humiliating situations in the forms of physical and/or sexual abuse during childhood and/or adolescence: As a child, Myra Hindley was frequently beaten by both of her parents, and her father would “leather her” if she did not fight back the children that harassed her (Lee 2010). Rosemary West was repeatedly beaten and raped by her schizophrenic father, who later became a client while she worked as a prostitute (Sounes 2001), and both Frederick West (Sounes 2001) and David Birnie (Laurence 2014) were suspected victims of incest. Four case persons witnessed physical and/or sexual abuse of others in the home on a regular basis: Myra Hindley witnessed and intervened in numerous violent fights between her parents. David Birnie came from a highly dysfunctional family in which chronic alcoholism, promiscuity, and possibly incest took place in the open (Laurence 2014). Paul Bernardo witnessed his adoptive father physically abuse his mother and sexually abuse his sister (Furio 2001), and Frederick West witnessed his father sexually abuse his sisters (Sounes 2001).

#### *Rejection*

Seven case persons experienced some degree of parental rejection due to being adopted or being placed in foster care with relatives: Born to a single mother unable to provide for him, Ian Brady was unofficially adopted by a local couple as a baby. However, his mother stayed in touch with the couple and Brady eventually figured out that he was her biological son (Berry-Dee & Morris 2009). Myra Hindley was sent to live with her grandmother after the birth of her younger sister, Maureen, at the age of four (Lee 2010). Catherine Birnie’s mother died giving birth to her brother, and at age 2 she was sent to live with her grandparents because her father could not cope (Laurence 2014). Kenneth Bianchi was born to an alcoholic prostitute who gave him up for adoption shortly after his birth (Schwarz 2004). At age 16, Paul Bernardo, found out his mother had had an affair and that his father was not his biological father; he started to refer to his mother as a whore and she would call him a bastard (Bardsley 2001). In his late teens,

Frederick West was sent to live with his uncle and aunt after his mother and close family had disowned him when they found out he had molested several children; the rejection left West bitter (Sounes 2001).

Five case persons experienced rejection or humiliation in school or by their peers: Although well-liked by some of the girls, Myra Hindley was not popular with the boys her age and they would tease her and call her nicknames due to her poor background and unfeminine appearance (Lee 2010). Ian Brady was unpopular among his peers in school; his disinterest in sports earned him a reputation of being a “sissy”, and as an adult his colleagues found him tedious and avoided him (Berry-Dee & Morris 2009). Due to the rumors about his dysfunctional family, David Birnie was ostracized in school and never had many friends throughout his life (Furio 2001). Catherine Birnie’s childhood was characterized by isolation and loneliness as other children were not allowed to play with her (ibid). Kenneth Bianchi married his high school sweetheart shortly after graduating, but after 7 months his wife left him without an explanation (Schwarz 2004).

### *Neurobiological factors*

Four case persons may have had neurobiological predispositions or suffered head injury that contributed to their deviant development: On two occasions Frederick West suffered head injury; once in a motorcycle accident and once in a fall from some stairs (Sounes 2001), after the second injury, friends and family noticed a change in personality as he became more aggressive. As a child, Ian Brady would throw temper tantrums and repeatedly bang his head into the floor (“Ian Brady Biography” 2015). Rosemary West suffered prenatal exposure to electro shock therapy as her mother was treated for severe depression; the effects are unknown but Rosemary was considered a “slow” child and would sit and rock her head back and forth for hours (Sounes 2001). Kenneth Bianchi received multiple diagnoses as a child, including passive-aggressive disorder, compulsive lying, and petit mal seizures (brief loss and return of consciousness, Schwarz 2004).

### *Animal cruelty and sexual offenses*

Four case persons tortured or abused animals as adolescents: Both Paul Bernardo and Ian Brady were known to torture smaller animals (Lawton 1999; Harrison 1986). David Birnie worked briefly as a jockey where he physically harmed the horses (Laurence 2014), and Frederick West claimed he was taught bestiality by his father (Wansell 1996). Four, possibly five, out of six men in the study had committed sexual offenses prior to the meeting with their partner: Angelo Buono violently raped several of his girlfriends and sexually abused his 14 year-old stepdaughter (Schwarz 2004). Frederick West also had a criminal history of rape and child molestation (Sounes 2001). Paul Bernardo raped a number of women prior to his meeting with Karla Homolka (Bardsley 2001), and David Birnie broke into an elderly lady’s home and attempted to rape her (Laurence 2014). Despite no convictions of sexual assault prior to the serial killings, Kenneth Bianchi continues to be a suspect in the unsolved “alphabet murders” where three young girls were raped and killed near Bianchi’s hometown, Rochester in the 70’s (Schwarz 2004). None of the women in the study had committed any reported crimes prior to meeting their partner.

### *Facilitators*

At least two case persons made use of sociocultural facilitators that influenced the nature of their killings: At age 12, Ian Brady took an interest in Nazi Germany. He

continued to read about the subject and later included Myra Hindley in his fascination with books such as *Mein Kampf*, *Crime and Punishment*, and the works of de Sade, which he used to justify the torture and killing of his victims (Lee 2010). David Birnie suffered from a severe porn addiction and had to have sex several times a day to satisfy his needs (Kidd 1993).

### **Interpersonal dynamic**

As established above, the intrapersonal development of collaborating serial killers is reflected in the interpersonal dynamics that characterize these partnerships. In this section, the interpersonal dynamics are examined with focus on the need for human connection, social expectations of roles and dominance, and transference. Further, it is examined how conflicting needs affect the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration.

#### *The need for human connection*

There are indications that seven case persons experienced the need for human connection in the forms of approval, understanding, and encouragement of their deviant fantasies as primary motivation to form a partnership. Ian Brady identified himself with the protagonist in *Crime and Punishment* and used the novel as a justification for his fantasies. Later, Brady argued that he had "reached the stage where, whatever came to mind, get out and do it" and that he "led the life that other people could only think about" (Steel n.d.). Brady would even test Hindley's loyalty and acceptance of his theories, for instance by telling her she was going to be the getaway driver in a bank robbery and then watch her support his (fake) plan by taking driving lessons and buying guns (Berry-Dee & Morris 2009). David Birnie wanted to possess a sex slave and Catherine Birnie not only accepted his fantasy but also agreed to actively support it by participating in the capture and killing of the victims (Furio 2001). Paul Bernardo, whose fantasies of rape, virginity, and dominance had previously been met with rejection, experienced support and encouragement from Karla Homolka who also participated in the rape and murder of the victims (Bardsley 2001). Homolka even agreed to assist Bernardo in raping her younger sister as a Christmas gift, because Homolka herself was not a virgin when they met (Furio 2001). Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi shared a hatred of women and both enjoyed sadism. Bianchi was initially impressed by Buono's lifestyle due to the many young girls and prostitutes that surrounded him (Furio 2001). Frederick and Rosemary West shared an interest in deviant sexual relations, including incest, bondage, and acts of sadism; also, they enjoyed voyeurism and exhibitionism as Frederick would observe Rosemary have sex with clients through a peephole in the wall (Sounes 2001).

The remaining three case persons seemed to experience the need for human connection in the forms of approval and belonging as primary motivation for forming a partnership. Myra Hindley described herself as being "obsessed" with Ian Brady who ignored her for almost a year before they made contact. She wrote about him in her diary every day and went by his house in hopes that he would pay her attention. Ian Brady was her first lover and she would do anything to please him; among other things, she changed the way she dressed and let him take pornographic pictures of her. When Brady told her there was no God, she stopped going to church. When he told her he hated children, she started hating children, and when he included her in his fantasies of murder and rape, she did not question them, because she found him smarter and more cultured than her (Lee 2010). Similar to Hindley, Karla Homolka was also obsessed with Paul Bernardo; she

was desperate to keep him happy out of fear that he would abandon her, which he had made clear that he would if she did not comply (Banwell 2011). Homolka also dressed, styled her hair, ate, and thought the way her partner told her to. Homolka would even let her Bernardo take pornographic pictures of her and videotape the couple having sex with young virgin girls to please him (Furio 2001). Learning that Homolka was not a virgin when they met had left Paul Bernardo very displeased. Therefore, Homolka accepted the idea of Bernardo taking her little sister's virginity as compensation in hopes of regaining his approval (ibid). Catherine Birnie had been lonely and isolated throughout her childhood adolescence. Growing up, David Birnie was her only friend and Catherine Birnie was extremely emotionally dependent on him and did whatever he wanted her to do (Kidd 2000). Catherine Birnie even stated in court that there was nothing she would not do for David Birnie (ibid).

### *Generic social and cultural expectations of dominance*

All five cases indicated that social and cultural role expectations influenced the interpersonal dynamics in terms of dominance to some extent. Despite their almost equal involvement in the crimes, Angelo Buono, the oldest, was the more dominant partner (Hickey 2012) and provided a role model for Bianchi with his already violent and misogynist lifestyle (Furio 2001). In three out of the four mixed-sex teams, the relationships were primarily dominated by males; in the case of Frederick and Rosemary West, the distribution of dominance was less obvious; Although Frederick West on at least one occasion used their "secret" against Rosemary to keep her from leaving, it was later speculated if, in fact, Rosemary West was the dominant partner which would explain why Frederick West attempted to take responsibility for all the crimes while Rosemary denied all involvement (Bardsley n.d.).

### *Victim-preference, victim-acquisition, and method of murder*

In all five cases, the interpersonal dynamic in the partnerships was reflected in the victim-preference, victim-acquisition technique, and method of murder. In the case of Bernardo and Homolka, the victims were consistent with Bernardo's fantasy of targeting young virgins. Homolka would usually gain the trust of the young girls and then lure and/or drug them whereupon Bernardo would join in (Furio 2001). Similarly, Myra Hindley would, either alone or with Ian Brady, lure children into her car by telling them she needed help finding a lost glove. With the social roles in mind, the presence of a woman may have made it less threatening for the young victims to get in the car and also, Hindley already knew some of the victims so they did not hesitate to accept a lift from her (Lee 2010). The victim-preference of Brady and Hindley will be discussed in the following section. Both Frederick and Rosemary West and David and Catherine Birnie at times used their status as a couple to make their luring of victims less obvious; both couples offered young women a lift and made them feel more safe with another woman in the car (Furio 2001). Further, the victims of David and Catherine Birnie only served to fulfill the fantasies of David Birnie, while Catherine Birnie had nothing to gain from the killings except her husband's happiness and approval. The interpersonal dynamic in Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi's partnership is reflected in their killings as they were equally involved in the luring, rape, and murder of their victims (Schwarz 2004). In all five cases, the killing methods were similar to the methods associated with a single male serial murderer i.e. a variety of up-close methods, e.g. strangulation, as part of the ritual (Gurian 2011).



### *Transference:*

In at least two cases, transference influenced the interpersonal dynamics of the partnership as Myra Hindley and Rosemary West transferred characteristics about a previous significant other onto their partners. Myra Hindley explained that Brady resembled her father in many ways; both were strong, dominant personalities who lived independent of their families, and they both ignored her (Lee 2010). Rosemary West was physically and sexually abused by her father throughout her childhood. As a teenager, she fixated on “fatherly” figures with sexually dysfunctional desires and had sexual relations with older men before meeting Frederick West who was 12 years her senior (Furio 2001). In terms of victim-preference, at least three case-persons may have transferred experiences of humiliation and rejection onto their victims: Kenneth Bianchi experienced rejection by his birth mother, an alcoholic prostitute who gave him up for adoption. In his late teens, his wife would reject him by leaving him without a warning which left him devastated. Bianchi became very jealous and possessive of his next girlfriend who eventually gave him a venereal disease because she was afraid to tell him that she had been raped (Schwarz 2004). All these events resulted in a hate toward women (which Bianchi confirmed when apprehended, *ibid*) and thus may explain his victim type (young women). Paul Bernardo found out that he was the product of his mother’s affair and started hating her and calling her a whore (Bardsley 2001). Later, Bernardo became obsessed with virginity, which was reflected in the targeting of young teenaged girls. Ian Brady’s interest in children can be connected to Hickey’s (1997) and Hale’s (1993) notion that the occurrence of trauma has a larger impact in the formative years of an individual. Experiencing humiliation and rejection from his peers in school resulted in a hate toward children which explains the targeting of children and adolescents of both sexes (Berry-Dee & Morris 2009).

### *Conflicting needs:*

Four cases indicate that an internal conflict of needs weakened the interpersonal dynamic which indirectly led to the apprehension of the collaborating serial killers. According to Karla Homolka, she suffered continuous physical and psychological abuse from her husband. At one point, Homolka was beaten so severely by Paul Bernardo that she had to be hospitalized. A few days after the incident, Homolka’s family finally persuaded her to leave Bernardo and she moved in with her aunt and uncle. After being questioned by the police, Homolka admitted to her aunt and uncle that Bernardo was the serial killer and rapist the police were looking for which led to the apprehension of the couple. Homolka testified against Bernardo for leniency (Bardsley 2001). In the case of the Birnies, their last victim escaped while David Birnie was out and Catherine Birnie had fallen asleep. The victim ran for help and the Birnies were apprehended. Catherine Birnie later stated that she had no longer cared whether the victim escaped or not because her fear of having to witness another murder similar to the last (the victim was killed with an axe) trumped her fear of how David Birnie would react when he found out she had let a victim escape (Kidd 1993). Further, the conflict may have involved Catherine Birnie’s increasing jealousy of the victims as well (Furio 2001). In the case of Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi, the need for autonomy seems to be a key element. During the investigation of the Hillside murders, Bianchi went to Washington to live with his girlfriend and son. In Washington, Bianchi murdered and raped two women but left pubic hairs on the scene that later connected him to the Hillside case. While in custody, Bianchi bragged about the murders and included Buono who was arrested shortly after. After a failed

insanity plea, Bianchi witnessed against Buono for leniency (Schwarz 2004). In the case of Frederick and Rosemary West, the unraveling of their murderous activities began when their children were removed from their custody based on accusations of child rape. When the authorities noticed that a child was missing, rumors of the daughter, Heather, being buried under the patio surfaced and the police began to dig up the garden where numerous victims were found (Soune 2001). When facing charges, Rosemary West denied knowing anything about the murders and unsuccessfully tried to portray herself as another victim of her husband; however, surviving victims, including Frederick West's daughter, Anne Marie witnessed against her in court (ibid).

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this paper is to propose an integrated theory that explains the interpersonal dynamics that characterize serial killer collaboration. These interpersonal dynamics have been examined in a comparative case-study where five cases of collaborating serial killers were analyzed with focus on key concepts from social learning theory, the trauma control model, and relational self theory. The study finds that serial killer collaboration must ultimately be understood as a relationship between two significant others. The interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration are fundamentally characterized by a mutual need for human connection in the forms of belonging, approval, and shared goals, that has not been satisfied by previous significant others. Most of the individual life histories of the serial killers were consistent with the theoretical accounts of the development of the individual single killer in the sense that they experienced different kinds of trauma, humiliation, and rejection. Case persons that experienced a higher number of these negative events in the formative years are found to collaborate with a partner mainly to satisfy the need for human connection in terms of approval of deviant goals while case persons that experienced few or less serious negative events are more likely to collaborate with a partner in order to satisfy the need for belonging.

The interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration must further be understood within a sociocultural context where social categories, such as male and female, entail certain role expectations. These social role expectations seem to affect the distribution of dominance between collaborating serial killers. Most serial killer collaborations examined in this study (one case remains unclear) are dominated by a male, and in the case of male-male collaboration, the eldest male is the dominant partner. Further, the social role expectations are reflected in the killings in terms of victim-preference, victim acquisition technique, and method of murder. In all cases of serial killer collaboration, the victims match the preference of the dominant partner; the victim-preference of at least three case persons seems to have been transferred from early experiences of humiliation and rejection as their victims resemble the person(s) that originally traumatized them. In mixed-sex collaborations, the luring of victims typically involves the female partner gaining the trust of the victim, either by herself or in the presence of her male counterpart whereas the collaborating male serial killers were more equally involved in the luring, and finally; all collaborating serial killers used two or more methods of murder.

Interestingly, the study also finds that the interpersonal dynamics that encourage serial killer collaboration, i.e. the basic need for human connection, can be damaged by conflicting needs which may lead to the apprehension of the collaborating serial killers. Four cases illustrate how tension in the interpersonal dynamic, e.g. jealousy, domestic violence, power struggles, and fear of facing serious prosecution can result in a conflict of needs where the fundamental need for human connection is trumped by a situational need for felt security. Tensions between collaborating serial killers have previously been identified and described elsewhere (see for instance Furio 2001); however, in this study, the explanation of these tensions as conflicting needs in a significant other-relationship may provide useful information in relation to the purpose of this paper. Since no previous works provide an explanatory model of collaborating serial killers, it is difficult to determine the explanatory value of this integrated theory of serial killer collaboration compared to previous research. However, some findings are consistent with descriptive accounts of serial killer collaboration, including the finding of the female partner's involvement in victim-acquisition (Jenkins 1990; Miller 2014), the finding that the methods used in mixed-sex partnered serial murder resemble the methods used in single male serial murder (Gurian 2011), and the lack of criminal activity among the female partners prior to the killings (Furio 2001).

### **Limitations**

Due to limited public access to detailed information about serial killers in general, and to a subtype of serial killers in particular, the five cases of serial killer collaboration were selected for the study, based on the amount of information available about the life histories of the offenders. The five cases and their victims differ from each other in some respects but all consist of serial killers that operate in pairs. Six of the serial killers were male and four were female. Four cases consisted of two heterosexual individuals that were romantically involved and one case consisted of two heterosexual males. The murders took place in four different countries. The victims were all females, except for one case in which children of both sexes were targeted. The number of victims per case ranged from three to (at least) thirteen, and victim age ranged from ten to thirty-one years old. The backgrounds of the victims varied across cases and included prostitutes, children, and random women that were victims of convenience; some were acquainted to the killers but most were strangers. The collaborating serial killers used different methods to commit their murders, including stabbing, strangulation, suffocation, blunt force with an axe, and, in one case, experiments with lethal injection. The five cases are all considered high profile and often serve as textbook examples of collaborating serial killers. In order to gain a comprehensive overview of each individual life history, books, studies, biographies, and newspaper articles were cross-examined to ensure source reliability. However, the accuracy of these life histories is generally difficult to establish as many life events are not documented but rely heavily on statements from the implicated persons, including the serial killers themselves; at the same time, the serial killers and their significant others are valuable sources of information and offer unique insight into the motivations and needs that characterize serial killer collaboration. The limited number of cases is problematic in terms of generalizability. Still, the findings provided in the current paper contribute with new insights to a limited field that has otherwise received little attention within academia.

To date, there is no comprehensive theory that is able to explain the development and motivation of all serial killers. Thus, the integrated theory of serial killer collaboration proposed in this paper is drawing on explanatory models that are, in themselves, incomplete. Among the ten case persons included in this study, experiences of trauma, humiliation, and rejection were common, but the frequency of physical and/or sexual abuse is found to be less than assumed, considering the theoretical models of serial killer development. Only four case persons experienced physical or sexual abuse during childhood. Animal cruelty and use of sociocultural facilitators were not pervasive among the case persons; four case persons tortured or abused animals, and only two case persons used sociocultural facilitators. Further, neurobiological factors may have contributed to the deviant development of four case persons. Regarding displays of sexual aggression prior to the killings, this is present among all the male case persons, except for one. Considering that some serial killers have not experienced any traumatic events, childhood trauma theories are inadequate in explaining the homicidal tendencies that these individuals exhibit later in life (Homant & Kennedy 2014). Unfortunately, this theoretical shortcoming is repeated in the current model; in the cases of Karla Homolka and Angelo Buono, no traumatic or humiliating events are reported, and the developmental reasons for their deviant actions remain unexplained. Similarly, the case of Catherine Birnie does not report events that would be considered traumatic enough to explain her involvement in the realization of her husband's fantasies.

### **Suggestions for further research**

Based on the discussed findings and limitations of this study, it is the intention that the findings in this paper will encourage future research and a continuous development of the theoretical framework of serial killer collaboration. The proposed integrated theory of collaborating serial killers needs further revision in order to successfully comprehend what individual factors that influence the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration. Further, the interpersonal dynamics between serial killer partners that are also lovers have not been examined separately in this paper despite the fact that four out of five cases were made up of heterosexual individuals who were romantically involved. Theories of attachment and bonding in adult relationships may contribute to a clearer understanding of this phenomenon (see for instance Fraley & Shaver 2000), and research on the victim-perpetrator paradox may provide useful explanations of the involvement of the submissive partner in particular (Banwell 2011).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Serial murder is indeed a phenomenon of international concern and more research is needed on the different subtypes of serial killers. This paper aims to explain the interpersonal dynamics that characterize the partnerships of collaborating serial killers. While most existing theories of serial homicide can include individual serial killer subtypes, such as female and homosexual serial killers, in their explanations, the study of serial killer collaboration has been neglected in academia. Thus, an integrated, explanatory theory that specifically covers the interpersonal dynamics has been developed in order to understand the nature of these killings and hopefully prevent them in the future. Although speculative, the

proposed theory builds on empirical studies of the development of serial killers and interpersonal relationships, respectively. Five cases consisting of ten collaborating serial killers have been analyzed and compared; first with focus on the individual development of collaborating serial killers and later with focus on how these individual life histories are reflected in the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration. The study found that serial killer collaboration must ultimately be understood as a relationship between significant others and that the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration are fundamentally characterized by a mutual need for human connection that has not been satisfied by previous significant others. Further, the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration must be seen in light of the sociocultural context in which they occur. Social categories, such as male and female, carry certain role expectations that are reflected in serial killer collaboration in terms of dominance, victim-preference, victim acquisition, and method of murder. Although the findings presented in the current paper can contribute with new insights to a field that has otherwise received little attention, certain limitations need to be addressed: First, the limited number and quality of cases is problematic with respect to generalizability and reliability; better access to detailed information about collaborating serial killers is needed in order to assess the usefulness of the proposed theory. Second, the existing models of serial killer individuals are, in themselves, insufficient in explaining serial killers that have not experienced any considerable traumas; as the proposed theory draws on these models, this theory is equally inadequate in explaining the development of collaborating serial killers that did not experience traumas, rejection, or humiliation in their formative years. Considering the strengths and limitations of the findings that are presented in this paper, the proposed theory is preliminary and calls for further research on the interpersonal dynamics in serial killer collaboration in order to continuously improve and develop the integrated theoretical framework.

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# APPENDIX

## Individual life histories of case persons

In order to provide the reader with an overview of the individual life histories of the case persons, five models are presented in the following. Based on elements from social learning theory and the trauma control model, these models comprise a list of registered events that characterize the lives of each individual prior to the meeting with their partner. The models include an item named “specific event(s)”. This item covers any registered events that indicate a process of escalation in criminal behavior and deviant patterns of thoughts or emotions, also referred to as “the criminal spin” (Ronel 2011). These events are included as they are frequently discussed in most of the case material available. For a cohesive overview of all five cases, see Furio (2001).

Table 1

Life history of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley

	<b>Ian Brady</b>	<b>Myra Hindley</b>
Date of birth	January 2 <sup>nd</sup> 1938	July 23 <sup>rd</sup> 1942
Raised by	Single mother, later adoptive parents	Parents, later grandmother
History of abuse	None	Regular beatings by parents until the age of 4. Father would later threaten to “leather” her if she did not fight back other children.
Parental substance abuse	None	Alcoholic father
Specific event(s)	Trip to Loch Lomond Moors +fascination with Nazi Germany	Death of a close friend, dropped out of school
Age of event	9 and 12 years old	15-16 years old
Problems in school	Unpopular with the local children	Truancy, teased by boys in school
Previous deviant behavior	Self-destructive behavior in the form of extreme tantrums that ended with banging the head into the floor repeatedly +torturing animals	Aggressive until adolescence + later, fellow students in her martial arts class avoided her as she was slow to loosen her grip during training
Previous crimes	Housebreaking, stealing, threatening with a flick knife	None
Age at first meeting with partner	23 years old	19 years old
Age at start of partnered killings	25 years old	21 years old

Sources: Furio, J (2001); Lee, C A (2010); Steel, F (n.d.); Harrison, F (1986)

Table 2

Life history of Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi

	<b>Angelo Buono</b>	<b>Kenneth Bianchi</b>
Date of birth	October 5 <sup>th</sup> 1934	May 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1951
Raised by	Parents, single mother and sister from age 5	Adoptive parents
History of abuse	None	None
Parental substance abuse	None	Alcoholic birth mother who was also a prostitute
Specific event(s)	Possibly the divorce of his parents, leaving him without contact to his father	Father dies + wife/high school sweetheart leaves him without an explanation
Age of event	5 years old	13 and 20 years old
Problems in school	Bad grades	Under-achiever in school, dropped out of college after 1 semester
Previous deviant behavior	Loathing women, bragging about raping and sodomizing girls from age 14, proclaimed his role model was a notorious rapist, perverse/sadistic sexual needs	Was diagnosed with petit mal seizures and passive-aggressive disorder as a child + Compulsive lying, ill-tempered, stealing
Previous crimes	Car theft, impersonating a police officer, assault, rape, sexually abusing his step-daughter, pimping	Petty theft, pimping, possibly rape and homicide (is a suspect in the unsolved alphabet murders in his hometown, Rochester)
Age at first meeting with partner	Unknown. Met again at 41 years old	Unknown. Met again at 26 years old
Age at start of partnered killings	41 years old	26 years old

Sources: Furio, J (2001); Schwarz, T (2004)

Table 3

Life history of Frederick West and Rosemary West

	<b>Frederick West</b>	<b>Rosemary West</b>
Date of birth	September 29 <sup>th</sup> 1941	November 29 <sup>th</sup> 1953
Raised by	Parents	Parents, later single father
History of abuse	Possibly witnessed sexual abuse of sisters by father, bestiality, and was sexually abused by mother	Repeatedly beaten and raped by father
Parental substance abuse	None	None, but mother was given ECT during pregnancy + schizophrenic father
Specific event(s)	Suffered severe head injury on two occasions (accidents). After the first incident he became prone to sudden fits of rage	Moving in with father
Age of event	17 and 19 years old	15 years old
Problems in school	Struggled academically	Bad grades
Previous deviant behavior	Bestiality, fits of rage, sadistic sexual preferences, voyeurism	Occasionally rocking her head back and forth for hours since childhood, served clients (including her father) as a prostitute in the family home, child cruelty
Previous crimes	Child molestation, accidentally ran over and killed a child, theft, rape	Accessory to rape
Age at first meeting with partner	27 years old	15 years old
Age at start of partnered killings	30 years old	18 years old

Sources: Bardsley, M (n.d.); Furio, J (2001); Sounes, H (2001); Wansell,G(1996)

Table 4

Life history of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka

	<b>Paul Bernardo</b>	<b>Karla Homolka</b>
Date of birth	August 27 <sup>th</sup> 1964	May 4 <sup>th</sup> 1970
Raised by	Mother and assumed father	Birth parents
History of abuse	Witnessed physical abuse of mother by father, and sexual abuse of sister by father + psychological abuse by mother calling him a bastard	None
Parental substance abuse	None	None
Specific event(s)	Found out Kenneth Bernardo was not his real father	No incidents registered
Age of event	16 years old	-
Problems in school	None	None
Previous deviant behavior	Torturing animals	None
Previous crimes	Rape, stealing money	None
Age at first meeting with partner	23 years old	17 years old
Age at start of partnered killings	26 years old	20 years old

Sources: Banwell, S (2011); Bardsley, M (2011); Furio, J (2001)

Table 5

Life history of David Birnie and Catherine Birnie

	<b>David Birnie</b>	<b>Catherine Birnie</b>
Date of birth	February 15 <sup>th</sup> 1951	May 31 <sup>st</sup> 1951
Raised by	Parents	Widowed father in South Africa, maternal grandparents in Australia from age 2, later father again
History of abuse	Possibly incest, very dysfunctional home-environment, witnessed promiscuity	None
Parental substance abuse	Chronic alcoholism	None
Specific event(s)	No incidents registered	Death of her 7 month old son + reuniting with David Birnie after 13 years apart
Age of event	-	32 years old
Problems in school	Rumors about his dysfunctional family	Other children not allowed to play with her, loneliness
Previous deviant behavior	Animal cruelty, sex and porn addiction, paraphilia, exhibitionist	Extremely dependent of David Birnie
Previous crimes	Rape, breaking, entering, stealing, unlawfully driving motor vehicles, being unlawfully on premises	Breaking, entering, stealing, unlawfully driving motor vehicles, being unlawfully on premises
Age at first meeting with partner	13 years old	13 years old
Age at start of partnered killings	35 years old	35 years old

Sources: Furio, J (2001); Kidd P B (2000); Kidd, P B (1993); Laurence, K (2014)