

Fear to Love: Fear Could Explain Women's Attraction toward Male Serial Killers

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Abstract

My research aims to factor fear in the explanation of women's romantic attraction toward male serial killers while considering the case of a high-profile serial killer, Theodore Robert Bundy. Bundy gained an unfortunate amount of fame following the kidnapping, rape, and murder of 30 women. Much of this fame constitutes romantic gestures exhibited by the female population. The reality opened doors to scientific research, many of which based the public infatuation on personality traits, fantasy-oriented behaviors, and belief systems. None recognized fear associated with the serial killer responsible for the phenomenon. This literature review will look at fear as a contributor to romantic interest in individuals, much like Bundy, under four approaches: 1) the fear appeal generated from media coverage of the serial killer and the extended parallel process model influence (fear control) on the female audience, 2) the physiological arousal triggered in response to fear and love; using the similarity to introduce concepts of misattribution of arousal and excitation transfer theory, 3) the co-existence of fear and enjoyment in the explanation of recreational fear, and 4) the alternative biological explanation, supported by recent studies on the dual role of oxytocin (eliciting fear along with its previous known function as a love hormone). The approaches will extract support from grounded existing studies and reasoning by inserts of real-world examples from Bundy's case. The detailed conclusion of the review will follow, along with its possible implication in the field of research on attraction toward dangerous individuals, hybristophilia, while adding a new perspective.

Keywords: Fear, Romantic Attraction, Women, Serial killers, Ted Bundy, Fear Appeal, Extended Parallel Process Model, Fear Control, Physiological Arousal, Love, Misattribution of Arousal, Excitation Transfer Theory, Recreational, Enjoyment-driven, Oxytocin, Hybristophilia

Fear to Love: Fear could explain women's attraction toward male serial killers

True crime is a genre that tells the story of a real crime through different media such as books, films, podcasts, and television shows. True crime includes stories in which truth comes out stranger than fiction (Oxford Dictionary, 1948.). The gruesome and heinous acts depicted in a true crime can extend to kidnapping, torture, sexual assault, physical assault, rape, necrophilia, murder, and many more. The horrific nature of such a genre, in theory, would only repel the audience members; however, reality suggests otherwise. The appeal has an extensive impact on the viewers, increasing engagement and overall popularity. With the growth in media, true crime has spread internationally, increasing its intrigue. For Instance, Books like *In Cold Blood* holds desired place on the New York Times best-seller list (Vicary & Fraley, 2010).

Past studies have dissected this trend to work out possible explanations. A brief examination of reader reviews of true crime books on Amazon.com and related web sites highlights a sex difference in regards to preferences, with women being more drawn than men to this genre. Based on scientific efforts, it is now a fact that women, as compared to men, prefer and enjoy true crime books over other books based on violent topics. This finding has importance because of its mysterious nature, for women are more repelled by the thought of gruesome experiences, like touching a dead body. Despite this fact, women claim their

fascination with books containing accounts of females being tortured, raped, and killed (Vicary & Fraley, 2010).

While fascination could be considered a broad term, a more specific studied trait is the romanticization of violent offenders, much like serial killers by the female population (Isenberg, 1991). A popular example supporting this notion is Joe Goldberg, a fictitious serial killer in the psychological thriller Netflix series, *You* (Krieger et al., 2018). The show follows a male book manager, Joe Goldberg, whose frequent crushes develop into a sinister obsession. In the name of "Love," he goes beyond as to stalk and kill anyone that comes in his way. What amazed me was the attention the character received for his monologue, handsome appearance, and charming persona. The show not only attracted large-scale attention but also posed as a trending topic on social media sites like Tiktok, Twitter, and Instagram. After a detailed analysis of Tiktok and Twitter posts trending soon after the release of the show, the most popular perceptions about the character appeared to be comedic, relatable, or romantic (Lynch, 2020). Several tweets retained high engagement encouraging Goldberg's comedic thoughts and fanciful encouragement of communication with his victims. These posts received hundreds of thousands of likes and retweets, indicating concord amongst the show's viewers. The above-mentioned case was a modern perspective on society's everlasting glamorization of serial killers. This trend, however, can be dated back centuries. "It seems plausible not only that murder has ancient roots in human history but also that fascination with murder does as well." (Vicary & Fraley, 2010, pg.85).

Hybristophilia

This public infatuation has long been investigated by many researchers. Hence for the exploration of this subject, the term coined for the phenomenon is hybristophilia. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2007), hybristophilia is the sexual interest and romantic attraction towards criminals. Many theories have been curated to explain this phenomenon. One study showed a romantic preference for factor one psychopathic traits (lack of guilt, empathy, remorse, and shallow affect) over other personality disorder traits. Women with cluster B personality disorders endorsed romantic interest for men with extreme personality traits (Watts et al., 2019). According to an unpublished research paper by a student of Mary Baldwin University, Social Learning Theory and Social Reaction Theory could explain how these women observe the media attention paid to these dangerous men as a way to gain their own fifteen minutes of fame (Jones, n.d.). Katherine Ramsland, forensic psychologist at DeSales University, states that some women fantasize that they can change a serial killer (Wong, 2017). While these are possible explanations, the field is still open to speculation.

Literature Gap

One literature gap observed in the current literature on hybristophilia is that no study considers the emotion of fear in the investigation. Fear was a dominant emotion at the time of Bundy's murder spree. According to a recent survey, the case of Ted Bundy had its largest impact on society in 1979 by causing people to become scared and frightened (Terranova, 2020). Additionally, women fear becoming the victim of a crime more so than men (Vicary & Fraley, 2010).

Surveys conducted during a serial killing spree in Baton Rouge, Louisiana revealed that about 56% of subjects reported experiencing an increase in the fear of crime with regards to the serial killer. This increase was most likely reported by females and younger people (Lee & DeHart, 2007). These studies are backed up by evidence from newspaper clippings from the 1970s describing the fear that gripped Utah and Florida during Bundy's killing (Figure 1).

Fear Grips Young Women After N. Utah Killings

By BILL BERCHAM
Associated Press Writer
SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Fear appears to be spreading among women in Utah's most populous area in the wake of a recent series of suspected abductions and two known slayings, possibly by the same assailant.

At least one other teen-aged girl is believed to be an abduction victim, officers say, and a search of casework along Utah's Wasatch Front was conducted during the weekend for bodies and other clues in the incidents. The male bodies of both slain girls were found in such company.

Salt Lake County Sheriff's Capt. Pete Hayward is seeing officers who, based on such things as types of wounds and the nature of the area where the bodies were found, believe there is a connection.

"We've got a real tail out there," Hayward said last week.

Hayward and police in the suburban areas of Midvale, Murray and Bountiful say they are getting numerous calls from frightened women seeking protection.

CARRY GUNS

"Many of them have asked me for permission to carry guns," reported Midvale Police Chief Louis S. Smith, whose own 17-year-old daughter Melissa was one of the two girls found raped, beaten and strangled within the past 10 months.

"They've called us at all times of the day and night, and some of them have asked me personally to their homes, or they've come to my house. They're all frightened and this community is very concerned," he said Monday.

Murray Police Chief Calvin Gillan said he has sent detectives to reassure young women at schools on how they can get their insurance when a crime.

"I'm sure they're worried," he said.

"We see more house lights left on at night, and women are not out alone as much as they used to be. Some call us for advice and we readily give it in return," he said.

Hayward heads a two-county investigation into the death of Miss Smith, whose body was found Oct. 23. He said he is constantly asked to supply information for women wanting protection.

IN GROUPS

"There's a great deal of concern about these cases by more people than I've seen before," he said. "People, not just the women, are walking more in groups, others who used to

walk from one place to another either aren't going now or are going in groups; others tell us they have their families pick them up instead of going it by themselves."

While officers were investigating Miss Smith's death, the body of Laura Anne, 17, of Salters, Utah, was found last week.

Another 15-year-old, Debra Kett of Bountiful, disappeared Nov. 6, and authorities say she may have met with foul play. She was last seen attending a high school play with her parents, and officers discuss the possibility of her being a runaway.

During the weekend, Salt Lake County officers said they were looking for Nancy Wilson, 15, who has been missing for about six weeks.

Denise Bellock, 21, told Salt Lake County officers last week she believed the man who stabbed her in her backyard also tried to abduct her the weekend before.

BARKING DOGS

She said a man demanded she go with him in her car. She said she refused and "kicked the man in the groin," three days later, police said, the man investigated barking dogs in her yard and was stabbed in the shoulder by a dark-complexioned man who walked away.

In Utah County, south of Salt Lake City, officers are working on at least nine reported rapes in the past two years. Last week, a Brigham Young University senior, Gerald W. Rickner, 21, Shelton, Wash., was heard over for trial in one of the cases.

Police said they had questioned him about an unrelated suspected shooting death last March 11 of a woman he once dated, Barbara Jean Rocky. Her rape body was found in a ravine to the west of Salt Lake City, but no charges have been filed in that case.

The attempted abduction of a 16-year-old girl was reported by a Murray girl less than two hours before Miss Kett disappeared, lead officers believe the incidents are related.

JET WITH 97 PASSENGERS MAKES NICE AIRPORT LANDING, BUT . . .

SALT LAKE CITY (UPI) — A Frontier Airlines jet glider almost made it to Salt Lake International Airport Monday night, landing just four miles short of the runway.

The flight carrying 97 passengers and a crew of five momentarily landed at Salt Lake Airport No. 2. There were no injuries and the passengers were issued the four remaining miles to the larger airport.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the main runway at both airports are numbered "34," but the international's runway is 10,000 feet long compared to only 5,000 feet for the secondary field which services mainly private aircraft.

Scudler flight 17 touched down at 8:40 p.m., much to the dismay of baggage personnel who had to retrace suitcases and cargo for passenger getting off here or continuing to Broward and Missouri in Montana.

The flight originated in St. Louis and had stopped in Denver. The FAA said the twin-engine commuter jet would be fixed out probably today since the company requires clearance from the federal agency.

Bills Going Up For Natural Gas

SALT LAKE CITY (UPI) — The average monthly residential gas bill started going up Monday as the second stage of a three-step rate increase by Mountain Fuel Supply Co. took effect.

The Utah Public Service Commission approved the increase to cover the higher cost of natural gas purchased by the utility in Canada.

The third increase goes into effect Jan. 1 and the total will raise Mountain Fuel revenues by \$2.2 million. Theoretically the increases go entirely for the higher supply costs and do not show up as profits for the utility.

Kennecott Worker Dies in Accident

BINGHAM CANYON, Utah (UPI) — A 26-year-old Kennecott worker was killed Monday evening in an accident involving a shovel loader.

Frank Akia, Riverton, a lumberman from the Bingham Mine, died about 6 p.m. Saturday afternoon and the accident is under investigation.

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Figure 1. Newspaper clipping is taken from *The Ogden Standard-Examiner*, Utah (1974, December 3), pg.8.

The Present Literature Review

This research focuses on the emotional factor of fear in association with the serial killer while explaining a woman's attraction toward serial killers. The following sections will consist of theoretical frameworks of my hypotheses, consisting of four approaches, including Extended Parallel Process Model, Excitation Transfer Theory, Recreational Fear, and an alternative biological explanation, to explain how fear surrounding a serial killer can develop into romantic interests. The approach will be backed up by inserts from Theodore Robert Bundy's case study and evidence from grounded research papers.

Romanticizing Serial Killers: A Historical Context

There are several famous serial killers from the past who were subject to an overwhelming romantic attraction from a large female population. Richard Ramirez (1984- 1985) was an American serial killer whose crime spree took the life of 15+ victims in California. His trial was publicized through which he attained fame and attraction. Cynthia Haden, a female juror in his trial, fell in love with him while his crimes were exposed in front of her in the court.

Charles Manson (1967-1969) was a cult leader, whose members committed several murders. Women were attracted to his looks and his promise of giving them a sense of belonging. Susan Atkins, a Manson girl, wrote in her book *Child of Satan, Child of God* (1977), “my desire for his attention was an obsession” (Jones, n.d.).

Theodore Robert Bundy

Theodore Robert Bundy was believed to be an active killer from 1961 to 1978, but his first known murder came about on February 1, 1974, the murder of a twenty-one-year-old popular student at the University of Washington, Lynda Ann Healy. His murder spree continued in Washington, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, and Florida, taking the lives of 30 victims. All of his victims were females having an eerie resemblance to his ex-fiancé Diane Edwards, a beautiful educated woman with brunette hair parted in the center (Pearson, 2021).

Bundy's victims were mostly found naked and subjected to various injuries

bludgeoning, rape, pre and post-mortem sexual assault, removed clothing, bite marks on victim breast, genitalia, buttocks, slashing wounds to breasts and genitalia, dismemberment, necrophilia, sadistic behavior: assaulted victims and confined them for periods of time (1-3 days) prior to killing them. Other: Took body parts and items of personal effects from victims (McClellan, 2006, pg.28).

Over the course of his trials, Bundy escaped twice from custody. On January 1978, during his second escape, he broke into the Florida State University sorority house, and bludgeoned Margaret Elizabeth Bowman to death by firewood (Parker, 2018). He then snuck into 20-year old Lisa Levy's room. He beat her up, strangled her, bit into her left buttocks, and sexually assaulted her. Bundy proceeded to attack Karen Chandler and Kathy Kleiner, but both were saved when an event occurred, and he had to run away (Smith, 2021). His youngest and last victim, Kimberly Leach, was a 12-year-old girl abducted from her junior high school in Lake City, Florida (Terranova, 2020).

Following these gruesome crimes, Bundy was ultimately found guilty in July of 1979 for the murder of both Bowman and Levy. He was also convicted of attempted murder for the attacks on Karen Chandler, Cheryl Thomas, and Kathy Kleiner and was sentenced to death by the electric chair. On February 1980, he was found guilty of the kidnapping and murder of Kimberly Leach and executed on January 23, 1989 (Terranova, 2020). Despite his violent crimes, Theodore Robert Bundy rose to fame and received tremendous public attention. On May 1, 1979, Florida Supreme Court authorized the use of recording equipment in courtrooms across the state. Hence, Ted Bundy's trial was televised nationwide. Though Bundy initially was against such publicity, he quickly used it to his advantage by being charismatic, intelligent, and confident on screen. Many newspapers took on Ted Bundy's case as a trending story, publishing many articles covering his murders and trials like those in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Newspaper Clipping taken from Des Moines Tribune, Iowa (1979, August 28), pg.24.

Soon after his second escape, the FBI decided to add Bundy to the most wanted list and share posters and newspaper articles (Figure 3) for increased publicity and assistance (Terranova, 2020).

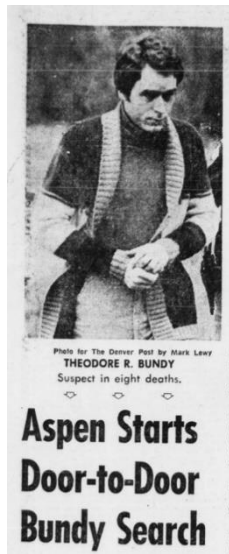


Figure 3: Newspaper clippings are taken from *The Denver Post*.

His high profile status stemmed from the large-scale media coverage and later enticed sexual attraction among women. During Bundy's trial hearing, the female population would gather outside the courtroom. Many came dressed up in ways that would closely resemble his victims. According to an interview taken by CBS, many women addressed him as an intelligent and charming individual, while casting doubt on his guilt. Many wanted to marry him, and some believed that they could help Bundy. One of his living victims, Carol DaRonch, was even questioned if she had identified the correct man in her line-up (Pearson, 2021). A woman named Carole Ann Boone, who was testifying on his behalf during cross-examination, legally married him on February 9, 1980, and had a little girl. But just three years before Bundy's execution she filed for divorce (Terranova, 2020).

This obsession is still practiced today, with countless movies and docuseries published that are based on his life. The entertainment industries have been publishing these forms of entertainment for decades. A recent example is the movie, *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (Berlinger, 2019). The movie heavily romanticizes Ted Bundy, by casting a handsome actor, Zac Efron, to play his character. This undermines the educational purpose of the artist, leading to an overall glorification (Strutz, 2022). Another example are the Tumblr blogs based on the serial killer that post made-up scenarios for his romanticization (Lynch, 2020)

Extended Parallel Process Model

A fear appeal is defined as a persuasive communication that arouses fear in order to promote preventive and self-protective measures (Ruiter et al., 2014). The current literature on the subject bears inconsistencies, with multiple frameworks proposed to explore its effectiveness (Lewis et al., 2007). The latest and most credible theory is the Extended Parallel Process Model, which not only explains why a threat appeal might prove successful but also why they fail. The factors explored in its research are perceived threat, efficacy, fear control, danger control, and outcomes. As the perceived threat is high when efficacy is low, people will do the opposite of what is recommended, resorting to fear control, by adopting maladaptive behaviors. Accordingly, fear appeal is successful when it depicts a significant and relevant threat, and when it presents effective responses that could undermine the threat (Witte & Allen,

2000). This predicted pathway proves relevance to the current literature since it could explain women's attraction toward Theodore Robert Bundy in the 1970s.

During Bundy's murder spree, the newspaper followed a specific trend reporting the missing cases while focusing on the mysterious nature of the killer, further advocating a state of alert. Upon Bundy's escape, the FBI took the approach to share posters (Figure 4) and publicize the active state of the armed killer (manipulated detail), to promote a desirable behavior of public lookout and assistance (Terranova, 2020).



Figure 4: Newspaper clippings are taken from *The Denver Post*.

Following Bundy's conviction, the televised trial was authorized because people knew a lot about the case. Also, public had a right to know the sort of information shared in the courtroom as the justice (or lack thereof) unfolded. This followed the model of a public opinion campaign or propaganda efforts; in this case, using proven facts (Terranova, 2020). These are areas of persuasion which use such a "scare" technique (Higbee, 1969). While for some it resulted in chanting "Burn Bundy Burn" on the day of Bundy's execution, for others it took a rather unusual turn, justifying why some behavioral scientists advocate the use of threat appeal with great caution (Lewis et al., 2007).

Perceived Threat

To understand the complex nature of the fear-persuasion relationship, it is best to identify the specific threat and target audience, specifically the perception of the threat (Lewis et al., 2007).

Susceptibility

According to the Oxford dictionary (1948), susceptibility is the likelihood to be harmed by a particular thing. "Meta-analytical evidence suggests that both severity and susceptibility are positively related to message acceptance" (Lewis et al., 2007, pg. 207).

In the 1970s the information covered in newspapers consisted of the description of victims, educated females with brunette hair parted in the center, increasing susceptibility among the female population. News outlets warned women, especially those with dark hair to be on guard, and the recommendation that followed the caution were for women to avoid walking alone and to be watchful of who they talked to. For Instance, ABC news introduced a new segment following the abduction of Georgann Hawkins in Seattle, Washington, urging the female population to always use their front doors and walk in groups as a precautionary measure (Pearson, 2021). This information is important since susceptibility causes people to focus on the recommendations (Ruiter et al., 2014).

Message Content

Most of the content aired on television nationwide or published in newspapers were accounts of physical injury to Bundy's victims. The gruesome details of his crime grabbed the attention of a large group of audience, for fear-based appeal is considered more attention retaining than other approaches (Lewis et al., 2007). Also, there is some evidence that the use of film, or slides with verbal description leads to significant amount of fear (Higbee, 1969) .

A sex difference is also observed with the strong physical threat being more effective for female participants than males (Lewis et al, 2002). With this, it can be concluded that the perceived threat was high, especially for the female population, which resulted in fear arousal. The greater the threat, the greater the fear arousal, and thus, engagement in the message through the depiction of susceptibility (Witte, 1992).

Fear arousal is defined as an unpleasant emotional state triggered by the perception of threatening stimuli (Higbee, 1969). In a recent study, society in 1979 described being most frightened by Bundy's case (Terranova, 2020). This can be further justified by newspaper clipping in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Newspaper clipping is taken from *The Tampa Tribune, Florida* (22 Feb 1978, Wednesday) , pg.32.

The reason females adopted maladaptive behavior was because of low response efficacy, since the position of recommendation is ineffective, and requires efficacy of the recommendation to facilitate the persuasiveness of appeal (Higbee, 1969).

Response Efficacy

Response efficacy refers to a person's belief that the recommended step will avoid the threat. According to the APA Dictionary (2007), self-efficacy is an individual's perception of their ability to achieve a certain result. In Bundy's case, while the self-efficacy was substantial the response efficacy was considerably low. One reason for this proposition was the fact that the recommendation did not provide a safe ground for the female population, regardless of the caution, the murder spree continued. Safety in staying indoors was refuted by the fact that many women were attacked in the safety of their apartments and dorms. Furthermore, the efforts of the women would be ultimately undermined, as the police believed and also wished for another case, given that they had no leads at the time (Berlinger et al., 2019).

The 1970s in America was often known to be the decade of the worst serial killers. In addition to Ted Bundy, the crimes of John Wayne Gacy, the Manson Family Cult, David Berkowitz, and many more were present. In 1970, over one hundred criminals were reported; this growth continued till the 1980s. The women's rights movement - active in the 1970s- was a further indication of the degree of injustice, women's victimization, and a state of helplessness (Terranova, 2020). With this, the televised trial was likely a failed attempt by the court to influence the women's perception of Bundy, as the enemy.

This consideration of the threats along with a feeling of helplessness, might pull the individual to engage in defensive and risky behavior (Goldenberg and Arndt, 2008).

Fear Control and Response

To control the overwhelming fear sourcing from high threat, high fear and low efficacy, people consciously or unconsciously deny the threat, react against the threat, or engage in risky behavior (Witte, 1992). This outcome was visible in Bundy's case when women believed in his innocence and denied Carol DaRonch's claim, a survivor of Bundy's attack; some even plead for his innocence, Women claimed their romantic interest in him, while addressing him as an intelligent and charming individual, believing they could change him (Pearson, 2020). The most unusual behavior was females coming to court looking like his victims with brunette hair and center parting (Jones, n.d.).

Excitation Transfer Theory

According to Schachter and Singer (1962), all emotions share a common physiological ground, and a prime way to differentiate between them is to seek information from contextual clues. The Two Factor Theory of Emotion assumed that an emotional state is made up of two components: (a) physiological arousal and (b) cognitive labeling of the arousal. Hence, it can be concluded that despite the presence of strong arousal, one cannot correctly identify the nature of emotion unless it is correctly attributed, opening possibilities for misattribution. This phenomenon was further explored under the term Excitation Transfer Theory by Zillman (1971), according to whom, the excitatory reaction following a stimulus continues and resultantly intensifies the reaction to another stimulus. However, a determinant of this theory is the limited salience present in the initial stimulus, which can be manufactured if a short recovery time is inserted between the two arousing stimulus (Reisenzein & Gattinger, 1982).

This paradigm has been used by many researchers in both laboratories and natural settings. For example, it was discovered that the physiological arousal generated as a result of cycling increased sexual arousal towards an erotic film (Zillman et al., 1972). A similar study

found an increase in attraction towards a female experimenter under the impact of startle-induced arousal (Deinstbier, 1979). Subjects listening to a graphic or humorous tape later exhibited sexual attraction towards a video of a female confederate (White et al., 1981). The arousal produced while walking on a scary suspension bridge influenced the later engagement of the subjects with the female interviewer present in the field setting. Subjects walking across the suspension bridge were more likely to call the female interviewer to enquire about personal aspects than those walking on a wide bridge (Dutton & Aron, 1974). The most recent study discovered that subjects rated their romantic partner more sexually attractive after an aroused ride on a roller coaster. Furthermore, the subjects riding alone rated a photograph of the opposite sex as being more sexually attractive, while indicating dating desirability (Muston & Frohlich, 2004).

In short, romantic love may occur when we experience physiological arousal in the presence of opposite sex whom we find attractive. The romantic attraction can be heightened by an external physiological arousal that co-exists with exposure to a potential lover (Allen et al., 1989). This view can be applied to the case of Theodore Robert Bundy, for he was (and still is) considered attractive (McClellan, 2006; Terranova, 2020). In addition, the fact that the public infatuation only began after Bundy's appearance sheds light on how it was not the crime, but rather the physical appearance that led to an overall attraction and later romantic interest among women. The misattribution effect is possible if the arousal experienced by an individual is falsely deduced as a result of the stimulus qualities of the attractive other, in this case, Theodore Robert Bundy (White et al., 1981).

Initial Stimulus and Residual Excitatory Response

The arousal stemmed from the graphic images and details laid out in the televised Florida court trial. Examples were the blood stains on pillows, pictures of murdered females, evidence that the victims were sexually assaulted, and testimony of surviving victims of Bundy's attack. Arousal was also elicited as a result of Bundy's increased publicity following his escape as an armed individual (Terranova, 2020).

Another source of fear is the increased credence the public gives to television and newspaper reports of crimes; which has slowly become a constant worry of everyday life, especially for women (Ravenscroft et al., 2002). Considering these facts and the information provided in Message Content of first approach, we can conclude that fear may have been a dominant response in the 1970s.

Saliency

According to the APA Dictionary (2007), a salient stimulus is considered prominent stimulus that can be detected easily. For misattribution of arousal to take place, the initial stimulus should possess less saliency for the individual to falsely attribute the arousal to another stimulus. In the Dutton and Aron study (1974), no attempt was made to hide the source of arousal, when the subjects met the female confederate after a threat of electric shock. The experiment design was called to question in a recent study, which undermined the credibility of the findings, concluding that misattribution of arousal cannot be applied in the case (Allen et al., 1989). In this research, however, efforts are made to prove low-saliency of fearful stimulus.

A perspective explored is the integration of Schachter's theory (1962) and the ideas of Ellis (1974) and Beck (1979). According to Beck (1979), the reason for the individual's physiological symptoms is an underlying process of irrational thinking, also known as cognitive distortion, which is an automatic unconscious process developed as a result of earlier life experiences and the development of schemas (Reisenzein & Gattinger, 1982). A negative view

about the future was visible among the female population in the 1970s, given that they were more susceptible to the threat as mentioned in the Susceptibility section of first approach. Since the cognition is unconscious it could be said that the source of cognition is hidden too.

Furthermore, in general, women are more fearful of crimes, since they believe they are more likely to be the victims (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). According to a recent study, the fear of victimization remains hidden or at least submerged (Ravenscroft et al., 2002). This theory further supports my notion of low-salience.

Heightened attraction

The residual excitation from this unconscious arousal, under the paradigm of Excitation Transfer Theory, can intensify the emotional reactions to immediately present related or unrelated emotion-arousing situations (Zillman, 1971). The situation in Bundy's case was the attractive, charismatic persona, he maintained in his trials (Terranova, 2020). He also took diligent care of his appearance by dressing up casually (McClellan, 2006). Females indicated increased romantic attraction while stating that Bundy was charming and handsome, under the influence of the residual excitatory response. In a recent study, 64.9% of people either strongly or somewhat agreed that Ted Bundy was charismatic, while 84.12% said he was intelligent (Terranova, 2020).

This attraction is still viewed today with the release of the movie *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil, and Vile*, starring Zac Efron (Berlinger, 2019). The casting of Zac Efron, a conventionally attractive Hollywood actor, is a prime example of how Ted Bundy is viewed and romanticized by many. In a recent survey, 104 learned about Bundy from Netflix documentaries/productions and 102 from real-time news/television. 46% of subjects agreed in some capacity, that the media presented the correct portrayal of Bundy. Two findings were put forward : (a) a significant amount of subjects believed that the recent attention to Bundy by media is helping the entertainment industry to draw more attention to serial killers, (b) the movie is causing people to become paranoid and scared, similar to what it was like in the 1970s (Terranova, 2020). Due to overwhelming gap in literature, I have formulated a hypothesis that combines both these finding arguing that the media is attracting attention to Bundy by eliciting paranoia and fear in people.

Recreational Fear

This last approach highlights the behavior in the context of recreational fear, which is the understanding of fear as an enjoyable activity (Andersen et al., 2020). Researchers define recreational fear as a mixed emotional experience of fear and excitement. This simultaneous nature of emotions is also observed in outdoor recreation, where along with enjoyment, the fear of victimization is present, even if the risks are low (Ravenscroft et al., 2002). A similar observation was made among females and males when the subjects rated some level of delight as well as distress while watching a frightening film (Spark, 1991). Although the understanding is still lacking in terms of literature, some studies have devised possible explanations to justify the co-existence of fear and enjoyment.

Fear as a Form of Play

The idea is that recreational fear provides a space in which individuals can show up willingly to have a low-cost and risk-free experience with fear. One aspect to consider in this playful form of exploration is the attractiveness of just-right level of uncertainty and surprise which promotes enjoyment (Andersen et al., 2020). This framework can once again be applied to Bundy's court trial.

One particular observation made during the trials was the presence of a large number of female spectators from all across the country (Jones, n.d.). Females shared their feelings of fear while addressing their fascination with Theodore Robert Bundy and internal motivation to attend every trial. The court in this context can be considered a safe public space, providing a fearful experience in a safe environment. One can call it a safe space because of the presence of other spectators and authoritative figures. A study discovered that women, in general, prefer areas with a lot of people around because it ensures greater safety (Ravenscroft, 2002).

The factor of uncertainty was dominant when a doubt arose that someone who seemed so put together could have done such horrific crimes (Pearson, 2021). These observations can be further justified with an interview by CBS News during the fourth week of Bundy's murder trial for the brutal slaying of two Florida State University sorority sisters in Miami. One girl claimed that it scares her to be in the same room as him but she is secured by the presence of others. Another expressed her fear while stating evident fascination (ArchiveNewsFootage, 2015).

In regards to Bundy's case, one can conclude that fear is a form of play. In extreme cases, the viewer, also referred to as 'Groupies' engaged playfully with the threat simulation, while dressing up as the victims (artificially dyed brown hair parted in the middle with hoops) (Commons, 2019).

Suspense

In regards to this approach, I hypothesize that fear could explain a women's attraction towards serial killers because of the enjoyment derived from the emotion. Suspense is a concept of interest because it adds support to the hypothesis of recreational fear. Under this concept, the cognitive unpredictability and emotional ambiguity between fear and hope is said to be self-rewarding, which fulfills both needs of affective and physiological arousal. These needs are different from a need for a happy resolution (Menninghaus et al., 2017).

A similar prediction could be made for the viewers of Bundy's trials and movies, given that most courtroom films carry suspense (Asimow & Bergman, 2021). The fearful experience of horrifying crimes displayed on screen maximized the suspenseful emotional arousal that viewers seek as self-rewarding (Menninghaus et al., 2017). This relation of fear, suspense, and rewarding arousal explains why Bundy's case became the first televised murder trial in American history, with the entire nation captivated by his charm and crimes (Pearson, 2021).

Benign Masochism

According to Rozin and others (2013), Benign masochism is the enjoyment derived from negative experiences that the brain falsely deduces as threatening. The realization that the brain was deceived, for there is no real danger leads to pleasure resulting from "mind over body". According to the theory, individuals enjoy the physiological arousal produced by the defensive mechanisms of fear, like heart pounding. This leads to the existence of simultaneous negative and positive affect while maintaining distance (Rozin et al., 2013).

Documentary, live footage, or tragedies produce some sort of pleasure when some spatial distance, sufficient to support the viewer's safety, is present (Menninghaus et al., 2017). This requirement was fulfilled by the televised trial in the 1970s, since the act of watching was harmless to the viewers; hence the mechanism can be effectively applied to explain women's attraction towards Bundy as an outcome of positively reacting to the physiological arousal produced by a frightening tale of the killer.

Another way distance can be maintained is when media contains elements of fiction which are different from the actual events (Menninghaus et al., 2017). With countless movies and documentaries published on the life of Theodore Robert Bundy, benign masochism could

explain the high audience engagement in series like *The Deliberate Stranger* (Stuart, 1986). My hypothesis can be justified by considering a featured positive review by a viewer on IMDB that says:

The Deliberate Stranger is scary as hell! I first saw this TV-movie when I was in college. I watched it in a floor lounge with some of the girls in my dorm. It scared all of us. There are a few factual and name changes (I caught them because I read both the Larsen book and Ann Rule's book, *The Stranger Beside Me*) but they don't detract from well-written and directed film (Murrayjohn2, 2003, p.10).

This is an example resembling the mechanism of benign masochism, where fear was experienced at a distance and maintained by personal safety and factual details, while deceiving the brain to interpret the content as highly threatening. The viewer goes on to say:

The movie hangs on the performance of the actor playing Bundy, and Mark Harmon delivers, boy does he! His performance as Bundy is absolutely bone-chilling in his ability to portray the switch from charming hunk to homicidal rage. The scene in the sorority house is one of the scariest I've ever seen in a TV-movie!"(Murrayjohn2, 2003, p.10)

This comment further supports my central hypothesis that fear could explain romanticization of serial killers, for the viewer clearly enjoys the presence of physiological arousal stemming from the character's fearful performance, addressing him as a charming hunk and a homicidal rage. In short, the experience of fear evoked by Bundy's portrayal on screen, yields a sense of pleasure which was evident with the connotation of language used and full rating (10/10) that followed the comment.

Furthermore, according to a recent study, an act resulting from sensation seeking is related to enjoyment stemming from negative experiences like fear (Rozin et al., 2013). This is important, since it could also explain the blogs dedicated to Theodore Robert Bundy, posting made-up scenarios romanticizing the killer (Lynch, 2020). The scenarios, in this case are the act of sensation seeking, which is related to the enjoyment of fear.

Discussion

This research provides a new perspective to the study of hybristophilia. Under the three approaches proposed, fear was considered as a primary contributing factor to the attraction of women towards male serial killers. By using the Extended Parallel Process Model, Excitation Transfer Theory, and Recreational Fear, a link was studied between fear and the romantic interest towards serial killers, much like Theodore Robert Bundy. This link is unique to the field and addresses the literature gap in the study of hybristophilia.

An important finding observed, is the inclusion of fear of crime and victimization in the explanation which can be generalized beyond the case mentioned. With the increase in reporting and screening of crimes through different forms of media, one can assume this fear is predicted to grow, especially among women. This research points at a peculiar negative consequence of the prevailing fear of crime, which is the public infatuation towards criminals. Knowing this, what could be made of the future? A society with lack of empathy towards victims and growing interest towards the violent offenders.

Limitations and Alternative Perspective

These approaches have a theoretical backbone but there are other perspectives that should be explored. One alternative approach looks at the biological aspect pertaining to the function of hormone oxytocin. A recent study in Northwestern discovered a dark side to the hormone. In addition to regulating sexual motivation, it was responsible for inducing fear. This dual nature is of importance because it could possibly explain the co-existence of fear and

sexual enjoyment explored in recreational fear (Paul, 2013). While the explanation holds credibility, the area lacks literature, for there are not many studies investigating this newfound role of oxytocin, which is a big limitation. Hence further research is necessary before role of oxytocin in hybristophilia can be deduced.

Another limitation regarding the same approach is the obvious gender bias observed in the sample. Most studies investigated Excitation Transfer Theory on males and not females. This is a major limitation in terms of generalizability and marks a significant gap in literature. It is necessary to address the gap with scientific evidence. The issue of generalizability extends throughout the literature with the use of case studies. While applying a case study, researchers should consider the possible drawbacks. However, by considering Theodore Robert Bundy the concern is subdued for he is a popular American serial killer, who set the stage of serial killing and what a serial killer could look like (Pearson, 2021). A large scale impact, one influencing the whole country would be the best option for new research.

Under the Excitation Transfer Theory, the explanation of salience could be questioned for its vague evidence and self-constructed proposition of cognitive distortion. Although Excitation Transfer Theory is an effective approach, to dodge limitation surrounding salience, another theory like negative reinforcement can be examined. This is necessary for Kenrick and Cialdini (1977) noted that there was a problem in using misattribution theory to explain findings such as those obtained by Dutton and Aron (1974) or those reviewed by Berscheid and Walster (1974). The same can be expected for the current research. However, this is only a possibility when the actual source of physiological arousal is present and salient for individuals. In this case the two-factor theory cannot explain that subjects will falsely label the source of arousal. Kendrick reviewed previous research indicating that humans find other members to be rewarding under aversive circumstances. For instance, a study shows that fearful subjects in stressful situations are made less fearful by the presence of others (Allen et al., 1989). This theory was coined as negative reinforcement and can replace excitation transfer, in case the framework for low salience is disproved in Bundy's context. Nonetheless, misattribution of arousal is an important explanation which carries significant scientific evidence and has potential in the field of research into hybristophilia. The current literature can lay the foundation for future research that can formulate new hypothesis or maybe justify my framework.

Future Research Directions

Given the huge literature gap in the study of oxytocin's dual role, it is suggested that the function of the hormone be investigated further to possibly explain the sexual attraction to serial killers in biological context. This could be done in a lab setting, where the roles of the hormone is studied in situation's that make the co-existence of love and fear possible, for instance while watching scary movie in the presence of an attractive individual.

Conclusion

This paper is interesting since it views women's attraction towards male serial killers a direct result of influence of fear. This idea is in direct contrast to how one primarily views the emotion of fear, which is a source to avoidance behavior (Ravenscroft et al., 2002). Under the concept of risk society, the fear of crime is a conscious trigger that modifies an individual's daily practice, this is especially true for women. It is similar to an invisible barrier limiting an individual's behavior. This paper contradicts this theory under special scenarios like in Theodore Robert Bundy's case, where fear instead of evoking avoidance behavior, induced romantic interest among women under the paradigm of Recreational Fear, Excitation Transfer Theory, and Extended Parallel Process Model. The approaches add a new perspective to the study of

fear and hybristophilia. In an interview in the 1980's with Dr. James Suxess, DIR. of psychiatry in Jackson Memorial Hospital, explained the phenomenon of hybristophilia as a mixture of fear, intrigue and in particular sexual attraction (ArchiveNewsFootage, 2015). The current literature review supports this idea with available evidence.

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