

Youth Who Kill: A Case Study Approach

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

in the

Criminal Justice

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

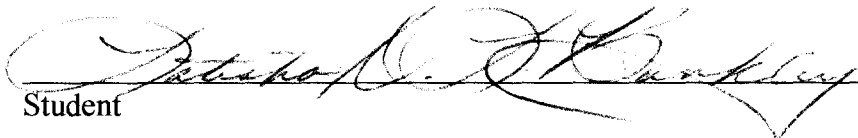
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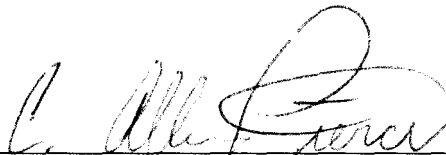
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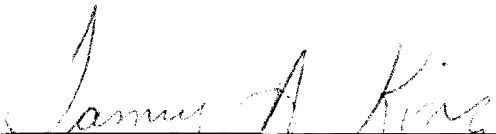
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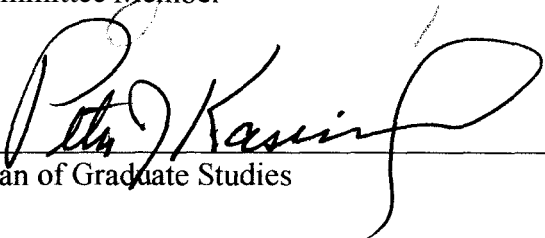

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ABSTRACT

This study explored various demographic, socioeconomic, and psychological characteristics of juvenile killers. It was assumed that, in addition to extrinsic and environmental influences, a lack of empathic skill is a major contributor to homicidal behavior by youth. A case study approach was used, focusing on the youth that committed homicides in Youngstown, Ohio. Other methods of research were also used to explore the hypothesis that empathic skill has a negative relationship with homicidal behavior.

In addition to the use of archival data as a means of research, questionnaires were used in interviews with offenders who committed homicide. The first questionnaire was comprised of 31 questions regarding the personal lives of the participants. The second instrument was Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index, a multi-dimensional measure of empathic skill. The final questionnaire was composed of eight questions that attempted to gauge the participants' perspectives on their particular crimes.

Results showed that the participants in the current study share various characteristics common to juvenile killers, including the absence of a father in the home, unfavorable home environments, and criminogenic **friends** and family members. However, results of Davis' instrument demonstrated that the participants have a moderate degree of empathic skill, giving weak support to the study's hypothesis. Implications for **future** research and treatment possibilities were discussed that might add insight into, and help prevent homicidal behavior by youth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people and agencies for their assistance in making this study possible:

My thesis committee: Dr. C. Allen Pierce, who provided the brainstorm and editing for my work; Dr. James Conser who gave me an insurmountable amount of inspiration and drive to complete this paper; and Dr. Jane Kestner who provided insight from her discipline.

Dr. Tammy King, who accompanied me on my visits and gave unlimited amounts of her time and expertise.

Steven Van Dine and all participating staff at the Ohio Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

All the participating staff at the Mahoning County Courthouse in Youngstown, Ohio.

Lt. Jimmy Hughes and all other participating staff at the Youngstown Police Department.

Prison wardens and staff of all participating institutions including, Trumbull Correctional Institution, Belmont Correctional Facility, Southern Ohio Correctional Facility and Lebanon Correctional Facility.

David Burch, who gave me endless support and patience throughout the entire span of my graduate studies.

My family and friends that gave me lots of love and support throughout my life.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

When the HIV virus first appeared in America, nobody gave much attention to finding a cure for a disease that seemingly affected a certain segment of the country's population. Ignoring the problem resulted in an epidemic that now has the potential for **affecting** and killing any individual in American society. Researchers have now begun to attempt to find a cure and develop methods to prevent the virus **from** spreading and causing deaths in even larger proportions.

American society did not approach the problem of violent crime sweeping across the nation, claiming just as many victims, with much gravity initially either. Like the AIDS epidemic, many people believed violent crime only **affected** certain populations. Nobody gave it much attention until it seemed that every American was a potential victim of violence. Everybody, from politicians to the American citizen, supported quick-fix solutions that were ineffective at reducing the alarming increase in violent crime. Consequently, homicide in some American cities also reached epidemic proportions, making now the time to find a more effective, lifesaving cure.

Part of the problem of finding effective solutions lies in the fact that the criminal justice system takes on too much of the responsibility. It is very well known that every crime has various aspects to it. Things like the nature of the crime, the personality of the perpetrator, the precipitating events, and other aspects all play a role. The solutions that

the criminal justice system offer, like longer sentences or lowered age limits for judicial waivers, cannot completely and effectively address each of these aspects.

This is particularly true in cases that involve young perpetrators. Simply locking them up and hoping that the experience of incarceration will change their deviant ways is not enough. Something obviously is happening in the lives and minds of youth that decide to resort to taking the life of another human being. Something is making it possible for them to disregard all conventional restraints, such as morality and empathic understanding, and kill. Further, something significant has to be happening in communities where juveniles commit homicides as **often** as deaths result from the epidemic of AIDS.

Some people believe that violence has pervaded American society, so much that it has desensitized Americans to violence and rendered them incapable of appreciating the value of human life. This is evidenced by the violence seen in homes, on television programs, even in schools, giving the impression that violence is an everyday occurrence. In such a desensitized society, it is no wonder that youth have the capacity to kill.

The statistics show that more juveniles had been doing just that. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1995), juvenile arrest rates for violent crimes increased 38% between the years of 1988 and 1991; arrest rates for murder and non-negligent manslaughter increased 84% during the same time. In addition, researchers report that by 1991, juveniles were responsible for about one in five violent crimes. Furthermore, statistics show that, of the more than 1.5 million juveniles arrested annually, 34,000 are arrested for aggravated assault and 2,000 are arrested for murder

(Regenery, 1985). Interestingly in 1994, white males aged 14 to 17 years old committed 15.6 murders per 100,000 while the rate for their black male counterparts was 139.6 per 100,000. Researchers predicted that if these trends continue to worsen, juvenile arrests for violent crimes would double by the year 2010 (OJJDP, 1995).

Unfortunately, the statistics for some American cities provided an even more gruesome picture. For instance, Youngstown, Ohio, a city with a population of about 87,000, had a homicide rate of more than 60 per 100,000 in 1991. The national rate for that same year was less than 10 per 100,000. In 1992, Youngstown was the only case in Ohio's metropolitan counties where the rate of juvenile offenders (15.07 per 100,000) surpassed the rate of adult offenders (10.78 per 100,000 (OCJS, 1997)). What is particularly interesting is that in 1991 and 1992, more than half, 54% in 1991 and 62% in 1992, of the homicide perpetrators were between the ages of 15 to 23 years of age (YPD, 1993). Such facts lead one to wonder what has been happening in Youngstown, Ohio that so many people, particularly youth, have resorted to taking another human being's life. The intent of the present study is to examine the lives and minds of several youth that have been convicted of homicide to gain insight into why youth kill.

Need

Since it remains unclear why these juveniles resort to killing, an effective solution to the problem has not yet been found. Much of the burden to solve this problem has been placed upon the Criminal Justice system. However, the many aspects of the problem make

the "get tough" approach, used by the system, ineffective. Alternative solutions to the problem are needed. Once the question of "why" has been answered, forming more effective solutions to the problem and reducing the number of deaths resulting from homicides by youth may be easier.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore various demographic, socioeconomic and psychological characteristics of young killers in Youngstown, Ohio, which may have contributed to their reliance on homicide for resolving conflicts. In particular, the level of empathic skill of the youth is examined to see if they lack the cognitive and emotional capabilities necessary for the inhibition of aggressive behavior.

Hypothesis

In the current study, it was thought that the youth interviewed would possess many characteristics common to juvenile murderers. In particular, it was believed that they lacked empathic skill, showing that a negative relationship exists between empathic skill and homicidal behavior.

Theory

Many theoretical perspectives explain the nature of crime and criminals. Some are biological in orientation, and others look at environmental influences. Some theories

combine two or more approaches. Ultimately, it is the combination of theoretical perspectives that provides the most complete understanding of all aspects involved.

Some of the best explanations concerning crime and criminals are criminological in nature. Nevertheless, criminological theories, like most theories, fail to explain all aspects of criminal behavior. Consequently, a combination of theoretical perspectives is examined to provide a multi-faceted explanation of juvenile homicide. Three of the theories mentioned are criminological and include Self-Control Theory by Gottfredson and **Hirschi**, Differential Association Theory by Edwin Sutherland, and Social Learning Theory by Ronald Akers. The fourth theory mentioned is Schachter's Two-Factor Theory of Emotion, a more physiological perspective. In the remainder of this section, the issue of how homicidal behavior is developed and manifested in juveniles is addressed, using the four theories mentioned above.

Gottfredson and **Hirschi's** Self Control Theory is based on the premise that individuals who have low self control are highly likely to commit crime. They postulate that for an individual with low self-control to commit a crime, the right circumstances must be present. According to them, what accounts for a person having low self-control is ineffective or incomplete socialization, especially ineffective child rearing (Akers 1994).

According to the Self-Control theory, aggressive behavior results from an individual's inability to control aggressive impulses. Because of ineffective child-rearing practices, the person is not taught appropriately to control certain instinctual impulses. Consequently, he finds the ability to ignore or suppress inhibiting forces that control the

urge to act aggressively. Once the right circumstances present themselves, the absence of self-control permits the individual to engage in aggressive behavior.

In relation to juvenile homicide, the Self-Control Theory may be a very plausible explanation. According to the theory, juveniles engage in homicidal behavior because they lack the self-control necessary to inhibit them from committing such acts. They have been raised ineffectively by parents who are characterized as unattached to their children, permissive or inconsistent about their discipline styles, and not providing good supervision. Consequently, when the opportunity presents itself, it is very likely that the child will engage in homicidal behavior.

This theory seems able to explain various types of homicide as well. Whether the crime is premeditated, or a crime of passion, the youth's amount of self-control ultimately determines his course of action. Since the child has been ineffectively socialized, it is very likely that he is not equipped with alternative ways of dealing with conflict. His inability to control his emotions will permit him to behave homicidally, no matter whether he commits the crime today or later. If he had possessed self-control in the first place, he would have come up with a different, less violent way of handling the situation.

The Differential Association Theory, developed by Edwin H. Sutherland, assumes that criminal behavior is learned through social interaction. Through interaction with others within intimate personal groups, values favorable to violation of the law are learned and balanced against those values that are favorable to conformity to the law. Moreover, if the person is exposed first, more frequently, for a longer period, and with greater

intensity to law-violating values, then he is more likely to deviate from the law.

In relation to aggressive behavior, the Differential Association theorists would assert that, through interaction with close, intimate others, the individual comes to learn how to behave aggressively. Because of being exposed to the values, behavior and other aspects of aggression in aggressive individuals, a person learns to value and display aggressive, antisocial behavior. The frequency, duration, and intensity with which the individual is exposed to values that condone aggressive behavior determine whether he acts aggressively.

Advocates of the theory of Differential Association would characterize juvenile homicide as a learned behavior. Through intimate interaction with deviant people, youth learn criminal techniques, motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes. The role of the family and peers are considered in this theory, since they are the people from whom most individuals learn their values concerning law-abiding behavior. In particular, the role of gang participation and **criminogenic** family members seem crucial since most of them probably have values that deem homicidal behavior an appropriate form of conflict resolution.

The Social Learning Theory developed by Ronald Akers, focuses on four major ideas: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation. According to Akers (1994), individuals are more likely to engage in criminal behavior "...when persons differentially associate with those who expose them to deviant patterns, when the deviant behavior is differentially reinforced over conforming behavior, when

individuals are more exposed to deviant models, and when their own definitions favorably dispose them to commit deviant acts (106).”

Aggressive behavior, according to the Social Learning Theory, is learned through differential association with individuals who deem it an appropriate form of conflict resolution. Close and intimate individuals provide models of aggression that are differentially reinforced because of frequent, intense, and enduring exposure. Consequently, the individual learns to approve of aggressive behavior as well.

In relation to juvenile homicide, the Social Learning Theory may be a more thorough explanation than the others mentioned are. Besides attributing juvenile homicide to differential association, it also integrates ideas from behavior learning theory. According to this theory, juveniles learn homicidal behavior not only through interaction with intimate others, particularly family and friends, but also through imitation and reinforcement of definitions favorable to criminal behavior. During their lives, youth constantly are provided with models that, intentionally or unintentionally, taught that violence is the way to resolve conflicts. Neighbors, teachers, the media, and particularly family and friends all provide definitions and behaviors imitated by the youth. The definitions and behaviors the youth is exposed to first, for a longer period and more frequently are the definitions and behaviors they are more likely to imitate. This is especially true if the definitions and behavior are learned from persons with whom the youth have more important or closer relationships. In addition, if these definitions and behaviors seem to **glorify** and promote violent behavior, then it is very likely that the youth

will engage in violent behavior.

The three theories discussed, thus far, have all attributed the manifestation of aggressive and homicidal behavior to environmental, i.e., more external influences. The Self-Control Theory looks at ineffective child rearing practices. Both the Differential Association and the Social Learning Theories focus on the relationships people share that ultimately lead to the learning and imitation of aggressive behavior. However, the fourth theory mentioned, Schachter's Two-Factor Theory of Emotion, provides a different, more internal explanation of how aggressive and homicidal behavior is manifested.

Schachter's Two-Factor Theory of Emotion generally states that anger and angry aggression have a dual source, cognition and excitation. According to this theory, an individual experiences a cognitive incapacitation under high levels of arousal, which leads the person to behave impulsively. Schachter (1964) asserts that it is the interaction between these two components, cognition and excitation, which accounts for emotionally antagonistic behaviors.

With aggression, the cognitive disruption decreases the probability of aggressive impulses being inhibited, by that increasing the probability of aggressive action. Without superior cognitive capacities during periods of excitation, the individual must resort to more archaic, instinctual responses, such as the typical fight or flight response, when confronted with threatening situations. Thus, according to this theory, an explanation of homicidal behavior must consider the roles that cognition and excitation play. The assumption would be that when an individual becomes excited due to anger, the cognitive

capacities that normally guide behavior are disrupted.

This seems very plausible if one considers how difficult it is to think clearly and logically during emotional arousal, particularly when angered. A person has almost to force himself to stop and think during states of high arousal to prevent behaving impulsively. However, when cognition fails to guide behavior in this way, the person is essentially forced to resort to more impulsive behavior, like homicide. Considering the fact that young people do not possess as sophisticated cognitive capacities as adults, youth would be more likely to resort to impulsive behavior during periods of high levels of excitation.

Overview

The remainder of this study consists of four chapters. Chapter Two contains a review of pertinent literature about youth that commit homicide. In Chapter Three, the methodology used, including how data was obtained and method of analysis, is described. Chapter Four contains a discussion of the results of the data analysis. Finally, the last chapter includes a summary and conclusions, and suggestions for future research based on the current study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Juvenile Homicide

Between the years of 1986 to 1991, the number of murders committed by youth aged 18 to 24 years old increased by 62%. The number of murders by juveniles aged 14 to 17 years old between those years increased 124% (Fox & Pierce, 1996). Homicides by juveniles increased to such an extent that people including politicians, the media, and others have labeled youth violence a major public health emergency. Research by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (1997) reported that juvenile arrest rates for violent crime have steadily increased since 1991 and peaked in 1994. By 1995, homicide became the second leading cause of death among males aged 15 to 34 years and the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. (Hutson et al, 1995).

After 1994, the rates steadily declined, with the juvenile arrest rate for murder decreasing by 30% to its lowest rate in the 1990s. However, the 1996 juvenile violent crime arrest rate still exceeds the 1987 rate by 50%. This rise and fall of homicide rates is characteristic of how violent crime tends to fluctuate over time, and demonstrates that youth violence is still a very pertinent issue needing to be addressed.

The experience of Youngstown, Ohio has been an illustration of the fluctuating tendency of violent crime. The rate of homicide in this city intermittently increased until 1991, where it reached a phenomenal level of more than 60 per 100,000. The national

rate for that same year was less than 10 per 100,000. Note, however, that the city only has a population of about 85,000.

Then, Youngstown experienced a phenomenal increase in homicides beginning in 1991 where the city's homicide rate tripled in one year (i.e., from a rate of 20 to a rate of 61 per 100,000). This placed Youngstown's homicide rate fourth in the country. Moreover, despite the fact that the city's population continued to decline between the years of 1991 to 1996, its homicide rate continued to be at least four times the national average.

What is particularly interesting, as research by the Mayor's task Force of Youngstown, Ohio showed, is that in 1991 and 1992, more than half (i.e., 54% in 1991 and 62% in 1992) of the homicide perpetrators were between the ages of 15 to 23 years of age. By 1998, black youth accounted for more than half of the homicides committed in Youngstown. Then, as with the rate of violent crime in general, Youngstown's homicide rate began to show signs of decrease in years following 1996, and has, thus far, remained relatively low (YPD, 1999). Nonetheless, the city's homicide rate continues to be greater than four times the national average, and the environmental conditions believed to be the major contributing factors to homicidal behavior in this city remain constant.

Research by the Mayor's Task Force (1993) has also identified the social and economic conditions of Youngstown as major contributors to the homicidal behavior of its community's youth. For instance, they report that economic hardships have become an integral part of life in Youngstown with the loss of thousands of high paying factory jobs.

Family disintegration has also been part of the problem. In Youngstown's Black community alone, nearly half (44%) of the households are headed by a single parent, with single, female parents heading a little less than half (40%) of the households.

Youngstown's situation is only one illustration of the problem of juvenile homicide. The city's fluctuating rate of homicide gives evidence that homicide is a problem that will continue to resurface if it is not effectively addressed. The “get tough” approach being used by the criminal justice system, although causing youth to be incarcerated for long periods of time, does not address the various facets of homicidal behavior. A multi-faceted approach is necessary to understand, predict and control the various dimensions of violent crime, particularly homicide by youth. The literature reviewed below provides a multi-dimensional explanation and includes research from varied disciplines.

Causal Factors

Biological Factors

Busch et al (1990) explored the assumption that the homicidal youth they looked at had physical abnormalities that played a major role in the juveniles' homicidal behavior. They found that most of these youth suffered from problems ranging from psychomotor epilepsy and EEG abnormalities to limbic and reticular activating system disorders. Physical abnormalities are often cited as the reason these youth can overcome inhibitions

and commit homicide, but they cannot completely address the many dimensions of homicide. In addition, researchers who focused on biological and neurological problems in homicidal youth consistently limited their studies to examining only these physical abnormalities. Alternate characteristics, such as gang participation and personality traits, were excluded in their studies, but served as the major focus of other research.

Family Factors

The exploration of the parental role in the homicidal acts of youth has pervaded the works of many researchers. For instance, Gottman & Katz (1989) looked at the role of marital discord. They characterized the parenting style of people that have marital distressed as cold, unresponsive, angry. In addition, parents with marital discord tend to have difficulty setting limits and structuring the environments of their youth. This and other inappropriate forms of child rearing seem to predispose children to the acceptance of violence for resolving **conflicts**. By being treated in a cold and angry manner, children learn to treat others the same. As James Sorrells (1980) said, "Children undoubtedly learn more from what they observe than from what they are told (319)."

In a study of five murderous children, **Sargent(1962)** assumed that these youth were part of a family conspiracy in which the children carried out the unconscious wishes of their parents. Duncan and Duncan (1971) and Lander and Schulman (1963) concluded that parent-child relationships, which were non-nurturing and destructive, might lead to the child behaving homicidally. In Sendi and Blogren's (1975) study of adolescent accused

of committing murder, they found that several of the youth experienced parental brutality and seduction by a parent. In addition, it was concluded that these youth came from an unfavorable home environment where they experienced a considerable amount of stress. The stress included other parental contributors such as abuse, neglect, and the absence of one or both parents from the home.

The absence of parents in the home has also been identified as a contributing factor to the incidence of homicide by youth. Regardless of the reason for the parent's absence, the absence of one or both parents at any given time has consequences conducive to youth engaging in homicidal behavior. For example, feelings of rejection, abandonment often result from a parent's absence. This is particularly true in cases of divorce or separation where youth might end up feeling resentment and bitterness about the loss of one or both parents. Without effective, non-destructive ways of dealing with these negative feelings, the youth might resort to homicidal behavior.

Lack of Supervision

A lack of supervision also results from parental absence. Whether the parent is gone to work, or gone because of divorce, the youth does not receive strong family support. As a result, as Fox & Pierce (1996) assert, negative socializing forces become more powerful than the positive influences of family, church, and community. One negative influence to which Hutson (1995), Zagar (1990) and others partially attributed the incidence of juvenile homicides is participation in a gang. According to these

researchers, participation in a gang fosters an acceptance of violence as a way of life in some youth. Through the course of associations with other gang members, youth learn the values and attitudes that deem homicidal behavior an appropriate form of conflict resolution. As a result, homicide becomes a naturally occurring phenomenon.

Drugs and Alcohol

Often, drugs and alcohol are also cited as major contributors to homicidal behavior. It is well known that drug and alcohol use leads to a decrease in inhibitions and rational thinking. Drug use on the part of the parents often leads to inconsistent discipline styles, unstable economic conditions, and lack of supervision. The parents' actions teach the youth that drug use is an appropriate form of handling **stressful** situations, while modeling inappropriate coping methods for the youth. Youth, in turn, imitate the behavior of their parents. For both the parents and the youth, drugs provide an altered sense of reality that allows them both to escape **stressful** conditions and feelings. Moreover, because drug use has the advantage of suppressing inhibitions, youth often use drugs in the commission of other crimes, particularly homicide. Drug induced states also allow youth to escape feelings of responsibility and distance them **from** their victims.

In addition, drug markets contribute to homicide by youth. Youth often get involved in drug dealing to support themselves, and oftentimes their families, and to obtain the material goods, like cars and expensive clothing, that drug money buys. With involvement in the drug market comes increased availability of guns, another contributor

to homicide by youth (Trestor & Tabor, 1992). Researchers assert that a gun psychologically distances youth **from** their victims, thereby making the act of homicide easier to commit (Prothow-Stith, 1991). Plus, as Fox & Pierce (1996) asserted, youth are more willing than adults are to pull the trigger because of immaturity. In the absence of mature cognitive capabilities, youth fail to **fully** consider the consequences of their behavior and allow impulse to guide their actions.

Personality Factors

Some studies of have focused on intrinsic variables, such as personality traits, playing a major role in some youth's homicidal behavior. Of particular interest are those studies that attributed homicidal acts by juveniles to emotional deprivation and lack of internal controls. Some researchers (Smith, 1965; Pfeffer, 1980; Adams, 1974; Satten et al, 1960) concluded that certain environments prevent the development of normal impulse controls and emotions, like empathy. For example, they found that a home where a lack of security and warmth, parental rejection, the presence of repeated violence and abuse, and prolonged or recurrent absence of one or both parents exist creates environments conducive to the inhibition of internal impulse controls in their children.

These conditions lead to youth feeling helpless and distressed, by that causing youth to need to deal with **confusing** feelings. The resulting stress has the propensity to be exacerbated by adverse situations with which youth are confronted. In the absence of internal impulse controls, the youth resort to impulsive behavior. The current study was

premised on this assumption. It was assumed that a lack of empathy, caused by the above-mentioned conditions, is a major factor contributing to youth resorting to homicidal behavior. Consequently, the following section is devoted to reviewing literature dealing with empathy.

Empathy

The term empathy has had varied use in research. Izard et al (1984) understood empathy as "...the processes responsible for one's having a feeling more appropriate to another's situation than to one's own situation" (103). Similarly, Dymond (1949) described empathy as "...the imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling and acting of another and so structuring the world as he does" (127). Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) noted the importance of recognizing that empathy is made up of two components: a cognitive role taking process, in which the observer recognizes the other's feelings, and an emotional response that occurs as a result of the observer sharing the other's feelings. In the present study, empathy was understood as the ability to imagine oneself in the situation of another and experiencing a vicarious emotional response because of observing the other's situation.

Research concerning empathy cites various factors that seem to play a significant role in whether or not a person develops the ability to experience empathic emotions. Zahn-Waxler and Barret (1991), for example, found that the nature of the bond or relationship between a parent and child coupled with parental discipline and control

strategies affect the child's ability to learn and understand how their actions affect others. Similarly, Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1990) concluded that parental depression, marital discord, and parental maltreatment all serve as risk conditions that, if present in a child's environment and learning experiences, might hamper the development of empathy in the child. More importantly, they reported that the second year of life is a critical period for the development of empathic, pro-social behavior.

Gottman & Katz (1989) asserted that, in particular, marital discord negatively affects a child's ability to regulate emotional states. They postulated that maritally distressed persons have a cold, angry, unresponsive parenting style that is low in limit setting and structuring. This particular parenting style leads to the inhibition of the child's ability to control inappropriate behavior and refocus his attention. Consequently, the child has difficulty with responding to angry impulses in an appropriate manner.

Beyond examining factors that may promote or inhibit the development of empathic concern, research on empathy has also focused on how it affects behavior. However, research that directly links empathy to homicidal behavior is scarce. Considering the fact that homicide is a form of violent aggression, the studies mentioned here are ones that explore the relationship between empathy and aggression and the relationship between empathy and juvenile homicide.

The assumption of much of the research done on empathy and aggression is that empathy is a mechanism that may serve to inhibit aggressive behavior toward others. For instance, Baron (1971) used Milgram's procedure of a "teacher" administering shocks to a

"student" and found that empathy, combined with the observer being able immediately to see and hear the pain they caused by shocking the student, made it less likely that the observer would engage in aggressive behavior. Feshback and Feshback (1969) also found, in their study of two groups of school-aged children, that empathy serves to cancel aggressive behavior before the object of aggression suffered serious injury.

In another study, Richardson et al (1994) concluded, in line with Schacter's theory, that aggression occurs as a result of the cognitive component of empathy being incapacitated during high levels of excitation. They asserted that provocation leads to a high level of excitation that is usually controlled by superior cognitive abilities that guide behavior. Those persons who possess high levels of cognitive, perspective taking capabilities are less likely to engage in homicidal behavior than are persons whose immature cognitive capabilities leave them to resort to impulsive behavior during adverse situations.

Accordingly, James Sorrells (1980) also attributed the incidence of homicide by youth to the youth's inability to empathize. His conclusions were drawn from Zenoff and Zient's (1977) study of juvenile homicide. Zenoff and Zient coined the term "nonempathic" to describe juveniles who are indifferent to others; kill wantonly during another antisocial act; have a peer group with similar antisocial values; and see people only for their own needs. "The question 'How will that person feel if you harm him?' has little meaning and almost no relevance to this group of juveniles (Sorrells, 1980, 156)."

In addition, Miller and Looney (1974) concluded that these non-empathic juveniles

might possess the capacity to "dehumanize" their victims. The idea of dehumanization may best be understood as a psychological defense mechanism that permits an individual to disengage self-generated consequences from censurable acts (Bandura, Underwood & Fromson, 1975). In essence, victims are regarded as objects void of human qualities, making the act of homicide easier to commit. According to Miller and Looney, children gain the capacity to dehumanize because of being treated violently or exploitatively by a parent and the presence of an inexplicably violent parent with the other parent being absent or passive. As a victim, the child "...does not perceive himself as being recognized as a person with feelings; ultimately, others are treated in the same way (191)."

Bandura (1990) asserted that in time of war, targets are seen as distilled military abstraction, stripped of their humanness, by that making it easier to kill them. Bandura (1990) also used the example of how victims at Nazi camps "had to be degraded to the level of subhuman objects so that those who operated the gas chambers would be less burdened by distress" (39). According to Sanford (1971), individuals who participate in the killing have become insensitive to the suffering of others or lost their capacity for empathy. Another example is the use of dehumanization during acts of sexual perversion. Goldberg (1995) postulated that a temporary cessation of empathic contact leads to the dehumanizing experience, allowing sexual conduct to temporarily overtake the individual's personality.

According to Straub (1989) we all use defense mechanisms, "but their use is intensified when there is severe internal conflict or external threat (24)." Bandura (1990)

also asserted that "[t]hese mechanisms of moral disengagement operate not only in the perpetration of inhumanities under extraordinary circumstances, but in everyday situations where people routinely perform activities that bring personal benefits at injurious costs to others (27)." In each instance, dehumanization allows the person to sever empathic connections, to alter their perception of the world and others, to avoid self-censure, and to perform despicable acts in which most individuals seem incapable of engaging.

Summary

The research discussed above focused on different facets of homicidal behavior. The literature concerning juvenile homicide was covered in the first section. Overall, the studies suggested that crime and criminals have various aspects. Yet, most concluded that the ineffective rearing and socialization of youth leads to the development of emotional instability. The more unstable the youth's environment was, the more likely it was that they would engage in murderous behavior.

In the second section, literature on empathy was covered. As with juvenile homicide, a lack of empathic skill was generally attributed to unstable environments and ineffective child rearing. Moreover, the studies suggested that empathic skill is a necessary mechanism for the inhibition of aggressive behavior. The idea of dehumanization was also discussed in relation to empathic skill, asserting that a lack of empathy allows for the ability to dehumanize. In essence, a lack of empathic skill was thought to be a major factor contributing to juvenile homicide; and it may be easier to

commit when the victims are dehumanized.

The materials covered in both sections combined gave a multi-faceted explanation of juvenile homicide. The youth in the current study were expected to provide information supporting the assumptions and conclusions of the literature reviewed above. Thus, it was necessary that the methodology of the study address the various aspects of youthful homicide identified by previous research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The current study examined several demographic, socioeconomic, and psychological characteristics of juvenile killers. It was the assumption of the study that the young men examined would display low levels of empathic skill and possess several of the previously mentioned characteristics common to juvenile killers. In the study, "empathy" was defined as the ability to imagine oneself in the situation of another and experience a vicarious emotional response as a result of observing the other's situation. To provide an understanding of how the study was conducted, various aspects, including the sample selected, instruments used to collect data, and method of analysis are covered in this section.

Sample and Population

The term "juvenile" was used synonymously with "youth" to describe offenders ranging in age from 14 to 23 years old. They were selected using data from the Youngstown Police department, which identified the various perpetrators of homicides committed in Youngstown, Ohio. The records also identified the crime for which they were arrested and the surrounding circumstances of their crimes. From these records, a preliminary list of offenders was compiled. Three distinguishing factors determined which youth were chosen. They must have been charged with involuntary manslaughter,

voluntary manslaughter, aggravated murder, or murder. They must have been aged 14 to 23 years at the time of the offense. Plus, the crime must have occurred in Youngstown, Ohio between the years of 1991 to 1996. This period of time was chosen because of the increase in homicides committed in the city. The increase resulted in homicide rates at least four times the national average every year during that time.

Records from the Mahoning County Courthouse, in Youngstown, were also used to narrow the list of offenders chosen to participate in the study. In addition to the information provided by the police records, these records identified the crime the youth was finally convicted of and the length of their prison sentence. All youth were actually convicted of, not just charged with, the crime of involuntary manslaughter, voluntary manslaughter, aggravated murder, or murder; except for two offenders who received plea bargains that reduced their conviction to complicity to commit one of the above-mentioned crimes.

Initially, thirty of the youngest offenders were to be selected. Instead, because of limited funding and time, and difficulty in coordinating the schedules of three researchers, a convenience sample of twenty-three youth was selected. Offenders were aged fourteen to twenty-three years old, convicted of one or more of the above-mentioned crimes, and incarcerated in facilities who housed the most number of selected offenders were chosen; yielding a sample of twenty Black young men and three Caucasian young men.

Instruments

Besides the use of archival data for research, questionnaires were used in interviews with the participants to **identify** various demographic, socioeconomic, and psychological characteristics of the juveniles. Three different questionnaires were used. A description of each is provided below.

The participants' demographic and socioeconomic variables and other personal information were assessed using a questionnaire composed of thirty-one questions (See Table 3.1). Each of the questions asked for information regarding the youth, their parents, and their family and friends. The youth's answers to these questions allowed for the exploration of their past and present influences that may have lead to the manifestation of their homicidal behavior.

Table 3.1

Demographic and Socioeconomic Variables

Previous research has identified various characteristics common to juvenile murderers. In the current study, a combination of these characteristics was examined. A list of those variables is provided below.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. current age | separated, if applicable |
| 2. age at first formal arrest | 13. parental drug/alcohol use |
| 3. age at the time of the offense | 14. parental control, discipline, and punishment |
| 4. race | 15. parental maltreatment and abuse |
| 5. number of prior arrests and convictions | 16. marital discord between the parents |
| 6. nature of prior arrests and convictions | 17. employment history of parents |
| 7. highest grade level completed | 18. criminogenic family members (family members who have had significant |
| 8. participants' drug/alcohol use | 19. involvement with the Criminal Justice system) |
| 9. participants' relationship with father | 20. financial status of family |
| 10. whom the participant lives with at the time of arrest | 21. ordinal position |
| 11. age of mother at participants' birth | 22. gang affiliation |
| 12. age of participant when parents divorced or | 23. access to guns |
-

Davis's (1980) Interpersonal Reactivity Index was used to assess the youth's level of empathic skill. It is a multidimensional measure of empathy, containing four seven-item sub-scales designed to assess separate facets of empathy (See Table 3.2). The first sub-scale, the *perspective taking* (PT) scale, measures one's "tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life (Davis, 1994, 57)." The *empathic concern* (EC) scale assesses one's "tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others (Davis, 1994, 57)." The *personal distress* (PD) scale measures one's "tendency to experience distress and discomfort in response to extreme distress in others (Davis, 1994, 57)." The final sub-scale, the *fantasy* (FS) scale "measures the tendency to imaginatively transpose oneself into fictional situations (Davis, 1994, 57)." Both the perspective taking and the fantasy sub-scales measure cognitive capabilities, while the personal distress and the empathic concern sub-scales measure affective capabilities.

Participants were required to indicate the degree to which the statements contained in the instrument applied to them. Davis' original instrument included a five-point scale running from 0 (does not describe me well) to 4 (describes me very well), but it was found that the youth in the present study had difficulty **classifying** their responses into more than three categories (i.e., "yes", "depends", and "no"). As a result, the original instrument was altered to correspond to the responses of the participants. Instead of using the **five**-point scale, respondents chose the appropriate point on a three-point scale running from zero (does not describe me well) to two (describes me very well).

Table 3.2

Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index

Directions: Please indicate the degree to **which** the following items describe you using the appropriate point on a scale from 0 (does not describe me well) to 4 (describes me very well).

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me. (FS)</p> <p>2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)</p> <p>3. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (PT) (R)
Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (EC) (R)</p> <p>5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel. (FS)</p> <p>6. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)
I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. (FS) (R)
I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (PT)
When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them. (EC)</p> <p>10. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)</p> <p>11. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective. (PT)</p> <p>12. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me (R). (FS)</p> | <p>13. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD)(R)</p> <p>14. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (R)</p> <p>15. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. (PT) (R)</p> <p>16. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters. (FS)</p> <p>17. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)</p> <p>18. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (EC) (R)</p> <p>19. I am usually pretty effective in dealing emergencies. (PD) (R)</p> <p>20. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)</p> <p>21. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. (PT)</p> <p>22. I would describe myself as a pretty soft- person. (EC)</p> <p>23. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character. (FS)</p> <p>24. I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)</p> <p>25. When I'm upset with someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. (PT)</p> <p>26. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me. (FS)</p> <p>27. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)</p> <p>28. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place. (PT)</p> |
|---|---|

In Davis⁷ study, the “[i]tems indicated by an (R) were first reversed (0=4, 1=3, 3=1, 4=0), and then responses to the items making up each sub-scale were separately

summed (Davis, 1994, 57).” In the present study, items indicated by a (R) were first reversed (0=2, 1=1, 2=0), and then scored in the same manner. Scores could range from zero to fourteen, depending on responses to seven items in each of the four sub-scales. According to Davis (1980), "both the internal (alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .78) and the test-retest (from .61 to .81 over a two-month period) reliabilities are acceptable (57).” "Davis and Franzoi (1991) also report substantial test-retest associations for the IRI scales over even longer periods (from .50 to .62 over a two-year period during adolescence (57).”

The third questionnaire was comprised of questions concerning the youth's crime. The questions were designed to assess his perspective on what happened, why it happened, and whether he has been affected by the whole situation. Table 3.3 shows the list of questions asked.

Table 3.3

Interview Questions
1. Do you admit to committing the crime for which you are incarcerated?
2. What was your relation to the victim before the incident?
3. How did you feel about the victim right before the incident occurred?
4. Did you feel provoked, and if so, why?
5. How did you feel about the victim as the incident was occurring?
6. How did you feel as you pulled the trigger/stabbed the victim?
7. Did you feel guilt or remorse once you realized the victim had died?
8. Did the <i>gun</i> help you to feel removed from the situation?

Design

The method of conducting interviews was almost the same at every correctional institution visited. A table was placed in a small room, between the researchers and the offender. Offenders were retrieved **from** their quarters and interviewed one at a time, except at one institution, where all of the youth waited in a large visiting area together; and the interviews took place across the room, one at a time. All questions on each of the three questionnaires were asked orally. To provide consistency in the presentation of the questions and to control for researcher bias, all were asked and recorded by the same researcher.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, the subjects signed a consent form, indicating their voluntary participation in the study. To further promote voluntary and truthful participation, the subjects were given the option of terminating the interview at any time without penalty. They were also told that the information they disclosed would be kept confidential, including their identity. In addition, the subjects were not told the nature of the study until the end in an attempt to control for social desirability.

During each interview, the questionnaire that assessed demographic and socioeconomic information was presented first. After completing that questionnaire, Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index was administered. Every interview ended with each subject responding to the questionnaire concerning his perspective on his crime.

Testable Hypotheses

This study was being conducted under the assumption that a lack of empathic skill is a major factor in the ability of young adults to engage in homicidal behavior.

Consequently, it was thought that the youth would possess most the characteristics common to juvenile murderers mentioned above, particularly a lack of empathic skill.

These assumptions lead to the hypothesis that a negative relationship exists between empathic skill and homicidal behavior.

Analysis

Data collected for this study was descriptive in nature, and the primary method of analysis was qualitative. The data for each questionnaire was deserving of different methods of analysis, since each tapped into a different aspect of the crime. For instance, measures of central tendency and frequency distributions were obtained for all demographic and socioeconomic variables to see which characteristics the youth possessed and shared.

Information obtained through the use of Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index was initially analyzed using both frequency distributions and measures of central tendency. Then, the sample was divided into three age groups. Group one consisted of offenders aged 14 to 17. Group two consisted of offenders aged 18 to 20 years. Group three was comprised of offenders aged 21 to 23 years. It was thought that perhaps the youth might differ on some of the variables, according to age. To detect if any significant differences

in means existed, T-tests, Chi Square, and Analysis of Variance were used.

The only method of analysis used for the answers given for the third questionnaire was a frequency distribution. The information provided in this questionnaire only served to enable the researcher to draw more accurate conclusions from the analysis of the information from the first and second questionnaires. The integration of information obtained from all three questionnaires gave a more complete understanding of what may have lead to the subjects' homicidal behavior.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study was premised on the assumption that juvenile murderers share many characteristics, particularly the inability to empathize. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that a negative relationship exists between empathic skill and homicidal behavior. The presentation and analysis of all results are discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section includes results of the questionnaire that assessed the subjects' demographic, socioeconomic, and other personal information. To provide a better understanding of the information as it is being presented, data about the subjects, their parents, and their family and friends is grouped separately. The second section contains results of Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index. In this part, data is grouped according to which facet of empathy was being measured, the cognitive or the affective. The results of the questionnaire designed to gauge the subjects' perspective on the circumstances of their crimes are detailed in the third section. The results of all three questionnaires combined provided insight into various facets of the subjects' personality characteristics and environments that may have been conducive to homicidal behavior.

Presentation of Results

Demographic and Socioeconomic Information

Twenty of the twenty-three subjects interviewed were Black (87%), three were Caucasian (13% (See Table 4.1)). Their mean age, currently, is 22 years and 2 months old, with a

Table 4.1
Subjects' Race

Race	Frequency	Percent
Black	20	87.0
Caucasian	3	13.0

standard deviation of 3.6 years. Their mean age at the time of their homicide offenses was 19 years and 1 month old, with a standard deviation of 2.3 years (See Table 4.2). In addition, 15 (65%) of the participants did not graduate from high school (See Table 4.3).

The mean age of the subjects when first formally arrested was 16 years and 4 months old, with a standard deviation of 4.1 years. The mean number of times they were arrested for their crimes was twice. Nearly a third (30%) of the subjects had never been arrested prior to their current homicide charges. There was no one offense that

Table 4.2
Subjects' Age at the Time of the Homicide

Age	Frequency	Percent
15 years old	2	8.7
16 years old	1	4.3
17 years old	2	8.7
18 years old	5	21.7
19 years old	3	13.0
20 years old	4	17.4
21 years old	2	8.7
22 years old	2	8.7
23 years old	2	8.7
$x=19.08$ years, $s=2.29$ years		

Table 4.3
Subjects' Highest Grade Level of School Completed

Grade Level Completed	Frequency	Percent
8 th	1	4.3
9 th	4	17.4
10 th	2	8.7
11 th	7	30.4
12 th	7	30.4
1 year of college	0	0.0
2 years of college	1	4.3

characterized the subjects' arrests. Accordingly, the majority (65%) of the subjects had no prior convictions, and the mean number of times they were convicted for their crimes, including the current homicide charge, was one, with a standard deviation of two times.

A look at the home environment of the subjects as children provided information about early environmental influences. For instance, the majority of the subjects (61%) reported having poor to non-existent relationships with their fathers (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.4
Subjects' Relationships with Their Fathers

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	5	20.8
Very Poor	5	20.8
Poor	4	16.7
Average	3	12.5
Good	4	16.7
Excellent	1	8.4

Over 50 percent of their parents were never married, and seven of the 11 parents who were married divorced before the subject was 14 years of age. Ten (44%) of the subjects characterized their parents' style of discipline as strict, and one (4%) saw it being abusive (See Table 4.5). In addition, almost half of the subjects (48%) disclosed either that their

parents fought often to frequently, or that they could not say how often because of the father's absence in the home (See Table 4.6). Whether the fights were verbal or physical, however, is unknown.

Table 4.5
Discipline Style of the Subjects' Parents

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	1	4.3
Lenient	2	8.7
Appropriate	9	39.1
Strict	10	43.5
Abusive	1	4.3

Table 4.6
Marital Discord of the Subjects' Parents

Category	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	26.1
Seldom	6	26.1
Often	2	8.7
Frequently	2	8.7
Unable to Say	7	30.4

Other information provided a different perspective of the youth's early home life. For example, eighteen (78.3%) of the subjects reported having a good to excellent relationship with their mothers (See Table 4.7). Eighteen of them reported that their mothers never indulged in drugs or alcohol (See Table 4.8), and 57 percent (13) of their fathers never used them (See Table 4.9).

Table 4.7
Subjects' Relationships with Their Mothers

Category	Frequency	Percent
Non-existent	0	0
Very Poor	0	0
Poor	1	4.3
Average	4	17.4
Good	16	69.6
Excellent	2	8.7

Table 4.8
Mothers' Drug Use

Category	Frequency	Percent
Never	18	78.3
Seldom	3	13.0
Often	1	4.3
Abused	0	0.0
Unable to Say	1	4.3

Table 4.9
Fathers' Drug Use

Category	Frequency	Percent
Never	13	56.5
Seldom	1	4.3
Often	2	8.7
Abused	2	8.7
Unable to Say	5	21.7

In their most recent home environment, the subjects reported sharing a home with anyone from their girlfriends to their grandparents (See Table 4.10). Two (9%) of the subjects lived with both of their parents at the time of the homicide. None lived with their fathers and four (17%) lived with their mothers in a single parent home. The rest (74%) of the subjects reported living with people other than their parents, or lived alone. Information regarding the early and recent home lives of the subjects provided insight into what sorts of influences existed in their immediate environment. A more complete understanding of all the environmental influences came from looking at the factors outside the home. For instance, 70 percent of the subjects reported using a range of drugs, from alcohol to cocaine (See Table 4.11). Twenty-two (96%) of them associated with friends and family members who have had significant involvement in the Criminal Justice System (See Table 4.12). Eight (35%) of them were part of a gang, either in the

Table 4.10

With Whom the Subjects Lived at the Time of the Homicide

Relationship	Frequency	Percent
Father	0	0
Mother	4	17.4
Sibling	0	0
Friend	0	0
Significant Other	5	21.7
Self	8	34.8
Others	2	8.7
Grandparents	2	8.7
Both Parents	2	8.7

Table 4.11

Subjects' Drug Use

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	7	30.4
Marijuana	13	26.1
Alcohol	10	13.0
Crack/Cocaine	0	0.0
Combination of Drugs & Alcohol	7	30.4

Table 4.12

Subjects' Criminogenic Family and Friends

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	1	4.3
Family Member(s)	1	4.3
Friend(s)	3	13.0
Both	18	78.3

past or the present (See Table 4.13). In addition, the majority of them (96%) had at least one friend or family member killed; and **87** percent of them had easy access to guns.

Table 4.13

Subjects' Gang Affiliation

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	15	62.5
Bloods	2	8.7
Crips	4	17.4
Other	2	8.7

Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index

Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index assessed four different dimensions of

empathy, perspective taking, empathic concern, personal distress, and fantasizing. The perspective taking and fantasizing scales of the instrument tap into the cognitive, role-taking abilities of a respondent. The empathic concern and personal distress scales attempt to measure a person's affective outcomes.

The instrument was composed of 28 questions, with seven questions pertaining to each of the four dimensions of empathy. On the original instrument, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which the statements contained in the instrument described them, using the appropriate point on a scale from 0 (does not describe me well) to 4 (describes me very well). Because the subjects in the current study were unable to **classify** their responses into more than three categories, the original instrument was altered. Instead of using a five point scale, the subjects indicated the degree to which the statements described them using the appropriate point on an altered scale from 0 (no, that does not describe me well) to 2 (yes, that describes me well).

Like Davis' original instrument, the score was determined by, first, reversing the items indicated by a (R) (0=2, 1=1, 2=0). Then, the responses to the items making up each of the sub-scales were summed separately. Scores could range from zero to fourteen, depending on the responses to the seven items in each of the four sub-scales. A score of 0 to 4 indicated that the subject had a low level of empathic skill. A score of 5 to 9 indicated a medium degree of empathic ability. A score of 10 and above demonstrated a high level of empathic skill. In the following section, the results of the instrument are discussed. It was assumed that the participants would score low on all four sub-scales, supporting the hypothesis that a lack of empathic skill has a positive relationship with homicidal behavior.

The perspective taking scale measured a person's ability to understand the perspective of others in everyday situations. The subjects, on average scored medium on

this sub-scale, indicating that they are able to understand the perspective of others (See Table 4.14). The fantasy scale, the other measure of cognitive outcomes, assessed one's

Table 4.14
Subjects' Empathy Scores

Sub-scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perspective Taking	8.7	3.8
Fantasy	6.9	3.5
Personal Distress	4.3	2.9
Empathic Concern	11.5	2.0

ability to imagine one's self in fictional situations. On average, the subjects scored in the medium range on this sub-scale, indicating that they are able place themselves in fictional situations (See Table 4.14).

A person's ability to experience distress in response to extreme distress in others was gauged by the personal distress scale. The subjects, on average, scored low on this scale, showing that they have difficulty experiencing distress in response to extreme distress in others (See Table 4.14). The other measure of affective outcomes, the empathic concern scale, assessed a person's ability to experience feelings of sympathy and concern in response to distress for unfortunate others. On this sub-scale, they scored in the high range, indicating that they are good at experiencing feelings of sympathy in response to observing the situation of unfortunate others (See Table 4.14). Overall, the subjects scored medium on all sub-scales, except one, showing that they are capable of

empathic understanding.

The Subjects' Perspectives

The final questionnaire assessed the subjects' perspective on their crimes. The questions were designed to provide additional information about the circumstances surrounding their crimes that might allow for some insight into what might have influenced their homicidal behavior. The results of the subjects' responses to the questions are discussed below.

About half (49%) of the subjects admitted committing the homicide for which they were incarcerated. The majority (70%) of the subjects was incarcerated for Murder (See Table 4.15).

Table 4.15
Subjects' Current Homicide Conviction

Category	Frequency	Percent
Aggravated Murder	4	17.4
Murder	12	52.2
Voluntary Manslaughter	0	0
Involuntary Manslaughter	5	21.7
Complicity (to commit one of the above crime	2	8.7

Nearly half (48%) of the subjects were friends or associates of their victims, with the exception of one subject who killed a family member.

The majority (74%) of the subjects committed their crimes with a gun. Five (22%) of them deny having a weapon at the time of the incident. Fifteen (65%) of the subjects said they felt distanced, or everything went blank, as the actual event was occurring. Eight (35%) said they felt no remorse or guilt, with 15 (65%) of them reporting that they felt some remorse or guilt.

Interpretation of the Results

The results of all three questionnaires, the questionnaire assessing demographic and socioeconomic variables, Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index, and the questionnaire on the subjects' perspectives, provided insight into different facets of the subjects' crimes.

The results also identified characteristics of the subjects' personalities and the environmental influences, that may have contributed to their homicidal behavior. Some of the results strongly support the assumptions and hypothesis of the study, while other results give weak or no support. For instance, it was found that the participants grew up in unstable environments conducive to the inhibition of the development of empathic skill.

The subjects' inconsistent scores on Davis' instrument, however, make it difficult to conclude that empathy was a major factor in their homicidal behavior. The support offered by the results and the study's limitations are discussed below.

The responses to the questionnaire that assessed the subjects' demographic and socioeconomic influences yielded results that support the idea that youth that engage in homicidal behavior share many of the same influences. Some of these influences included the absence of the father, the presence of criminogenic family and friends, the use of drugs and alcohol, and the accessibility of guns.

The subjects' responses to the questions designed to measure empathic capabilities yielded results that were not strongly supportive of the assumption that the subjects would demonstrate a lack of empathic skill. On both of the cognitive scales, the subjects' responses indicated that they are able, to a moderate degree, to take on the perspective of others. The results of the affective scales showed that the subjects have a tendency to experience feelings of sympathy or concern for unfortunate others, but they have difficulty experiencing distress or concern in response to extreme distress in others. Overall, they demonstrated that they are moderately capable of empathic understanding.

Further exploration of the issue at hand was possible by looking at the results of the questionnaire that assessed the subjects' perspective on their particular crimes. For instance, almost half (48%) of them said they felt no provocation prior to the incident. Almost half (48%) of them had a prior relationship with their victims. The fact that they are able to kill **friends** with out prior provocation demonstrates that when faced with conflict, these youth do not have superior cognitive or affective capabilities that would normally inhibit such behavior.

Statement of Significance

Tests of significance were performed to see if any of the socioeconomic, demographic, or personality characteristics were significantly different. In addition, age groups were divided and tests of significance were performed. Participants were grouped in either group 1 (consisting of participants aged 15 to 17 years), group 2 (made up of participants aged 18 to 20 years), or group 3 (comprised of participants aged 21 to 23 years) to see if any significant differences existed between them based on age. Results of the tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the participants.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the support the results give to the study's assumptions and hypothesis, it is difficult to generalize the results to a larger population. The selection of the sample was not randomly done, and this was one of the major limitations of the study. Although each participant selected was suitable for the study, the participants were chosen primarily because of their proximity to the researchers. Consequently, the sample chosen was not representative of all the juvenile killers in Youngstown. In addition, the fact that a case study approach was used limits the ability of the current study's results to be generalized to a larger population. The results may be indicative of the problems of youth in Youngstown, but the results still are unable to be representative of all youth who commit homicide.

Various methods were used to promote the greatest validity of the participants' responses. However, at one institution, the participants that finished interviewing went back to sit with the group of offenders who had not been interviewed yet. All eight of them had the opportunity to discuss the questions; seven of the eight had the opportunity prior to being interviewed. In addition, some of the participants' responses may have been affected by already being incarcerated for a number of years for their homicidal behavior. The participants had time to reflect on their crimes and actions, and they may have based their responses on their current thinking. The interest of the study was the participants' past beliefs and **influences** that enabled them to engage in homicide.

The following methods were used to enhance the validity of the results of the study. For example, the same questions being presented consistently by one researcher helped control researcher bias. The assurance of the confidentiality of the participants' responses and the option to withdraw at any time without penalty served to promote **truthful** participation. In addition, although the participants agreed to participate in the

study prior to the occurrence of the interviews, they did not discover the true nature of the study until the end of the interviews, helping to control for social desirability in their responses.

Summary of the Results

Overall, the results of the study supported the assumption that there are demographic, socioeconomic, and other personal influences common to juveniles who engage in homicidal behavior. Some of those influences included the **neglectful** absence of a father in the home, the presence of **criminogenic family** members and friends, and the use of drugs and alcohol by the subjects. However, the results did not strongly support the hypothesis that a negative relationship exists between empathic skill and homicidal behavior.

The four sub-scales of Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index attempted to provide insight into this relationship by tapping into the various dimensions of empathic skill. Perspective taking, fantasy, personal discomfort, and empathic concern were the four dimensions of empathy being assessed by the four sub-scales of the instrument. The subjects' scores on the scales that assessed cognitive outcomes, the perspective taking and fantasy sub-scales, consistently showed that the subjects are able, to a moderate degree, to take the perspective of others into consideration. The subjects' scores on the scales that measured affective outcomes, the personal distress and empathic concern sub-scales, demonstrated that they have a tendency to experience sympathy, but have difficulty vicariously experiencing personal distress.

The results of the third questionnaire gave a more complete understanding of the subjects' experiences. The subjects' responses to the questions showed that, if they felt they had to or wanted to, these subjects had the capacity to kill again. They felt that their

actions were an acceptable means of resolving their conflicts. The results of this questionnaire combined with the results of the other two questionnaires gave support to the assumptions of the study, but did not strongly support its hypothesis. In the next chapter, the results as they relate to theory and implications for **future** research are discussed.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Various demographic, socioeconomic, and psychological characteristics of juvenile killers were explored in the present study. The intent of the study was to understand what might have contributed to the participants' reliance on homicidal behavior as a means of conflict resolution. The study was premised on the idea that, of the many characteristics that juvenile killers share, the diminished capacity to empathize is the major contributing factor to youth engaging in homicidal behavior. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that the participants in the current study would lack the ability to empathize.

The assumptions, premises, and hypothesis of the study stemmed from earlier literature. The literature came from various disciplines and gave a multi-faceted explanation of homicidal behavior. The research concerning juvenile homicide examined the various environmental influences and personality traits common to juvenile killers. The literature on empathy gave insight into environmental influences that inhibit the growth of empathy, and the role of empathy in relation to aggressive and homicidal behavior.

The methodology of the study aimed to assess what influences the homicidal behavior of juvenile killers. The study was exploratory in nature, and various research methods were used to gain insight into the mind and lives of youth that kill. For instance, a case study approach was used, focusing on the homicides committed by youth in

Youngstown, Ohio. The number of homicides committed by juveniles in this city was phenomenal and provided a very good pool of potential participants.

The review of archival data was another method of research used in the current study. Information obtained from police and court records helped determine which subjects were suitable for participation in the study. The records provided information about the subjects and their crimes, such as the subjects' age, the crimes for which they were arrested and convicted, and the surrounding circumstances of their crimes.

The selection of participants was based on three main factors. The participant must have been between the ages of **14** and 23 years old at the time of his offense. The offense must have occurred in Youngstown, Ohio between the years of **1991** and **1996**. In addition, the participant must have been convicted of involuntary manslaughter, voluntary manslaughter, murder, and aggravated murder.

After the sample of juvenile killers was selected, three different questionnaires were used in interviews with the participants chosen. The first questionnaire consisted of 31 questions that assessed demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the participants and their environments. The second instrument was Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index, a multi-dimensional measure of empathic skill. It tapped into four different dimensions of empathic skill, perspective taking, fantasy, personal distress, and empathic concern. Eight questions made up the final questionnaire, which was used to assess the offenders' perspectives on their own crime. All three questionnaires gave a more complete understanding of the internal and external influences of the offenders that

might have led to their homicidal behavior.

Conclusions

A combination of the results of the study indicated that the assumptions on which the study is premised have validity. In accordance with an assumption of the current and other research, the results from the first questionnaire showed that the participants demonstrated a number of characteristics common to juvenile killers. Some of these characteristics included an unfavorable home environment, the presence of criminogenic family members, and friends, and the use of drugs and alcohol by the participant.

The focus of the study was the participants' empathic capabilities. It was assumed that they would lack empathic **skill** as a result of being raised in unfavorable environments. Results from Davis⁷ Interpersonal Reactivity Index, an instrument composed of four subscales that tap into the various dimensions of empathic skill, indicated that the participants did not completely lack empathic skill. They are fairly capable of taking on the perspective of others, but have difficulty experiencing feelings of distress in response to extreme distress in others.

The final questionnaire's results showed that the participants felt that the use of violent behavior was a necessary and acceptable means for resolving their **conflicts**. Even though they said they felt remorse for the families of their victims, they felt that during the conflicts they were confronted with, their homicidal behavior was necessary. A discussion of the implications of these results is contained in the next section.

Discussion

Various theories have been offered as explanations of homicidal behavior on the part of juveniles. Even though some theories provided excellent explanations of particular aspects of the problem, most theories **often** failed to completely address all aspects of juveniles' homicidal behavior. Consequently, a multi-faceted explanation of the behavior was necessary for a complete understanding of all the factors that contribute to a youth engaging in homicidal acts.

The purpose of the current study was to explore some of these contributing factors. The study was premised on assumptions and results yielded from previous research. One such finding is that youth that engage in homicidal behavior share various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Some examples include, parental rejection, absence of one or both of the parents in the home, and marital discord. Sendi and Blogren (1975) found that the adolescent murderers they examined came from unfavorable home environments, where ineffective child rearing predisposed the youth to the acceptance of violence as a means of resolving conflicts. Examples of an unfavorable home environment were found in the present study as well.

For instance, as a majority (**61%**) of the subjects' responses indicated, their fathers did not provide them with nurturing paternal relationships. Instead, they experienced abandonment, rejection, and negligence by their fathers. Their fathers' absence and rejection also affected the relationship that their parents shared, thus subjecting the youth

to marital discord between their parents.

Examples of marital discord in the present study include the fact that over half (52%) of the participants reported that their parents were never married. Seven of the 11 subjects' parents who were married divorced before the youth were **14** years of age. Some of the participants disclosed that their parents fought to varying degrees, thereby unintentionally or intentionally providing examples of violence. Not only did they provide models of violence to be imitated, those parents also demonstrated that violence was an acceptable form of conflict resolution. As **Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow (1981)** asserted in previous research, being exposed to their parents' marital discord also led the participants to becoming angry and distressed.

Another example of unfavorable home environments identified by the current and previous research was poor parental supervision. As a result of one or both of the parents' absence at any given time, the participants were essentially **left** to defend and care for themselves. In addition to the absence of some fathers from the home, some of the youths reported that their mothers were absent because of working a job. These absences resulted in the parents' inability to effectively control and guide the youth.

Moreover, as **Fox and Pierce (1994)** report, the parents' poor supervision allowed for unstable environments where negative socializing **influences** grew more **powerful** than positive forces of family, school, community, and church. One such negative socializing influence is gang participation. Despite the fact that **15** (65%) of the participants denied ever having participated in a gang, it is possible that they were influenced by associations

with gang members in their community.

This is particularly true of youth that have weak family support. Fifteen of the present study's participants did not graduate high school. Things like non-nurturing relationships with one or both of their parents and lack of supervision lead the youth to find acceptance and protection elsewhere. Often, participation in a gang or hanging out on a corner with a group of friends fosters feelings of acceptance and protection in the youths that their parents⁷ have failed to provide.

The participants' more recent home environments also included examples of unfavorable home environments. For instance, **17 (74%)** of the participants reported living with persons other than their parents at the time of the offense, and **4 (17%)** lived with their mothers in a single parent home. As Goetting (1989) concluded in her research of homicidal youth, the changing of residential guardianship is a source of instability often experienced by homicidal youth. In the process, the youth are separated from their parents and moved to environments conducive to emotional instability and lack of supervision. Ultimately, these changes led to emotional conflicts within the youth that had the potential for influencing homicidal behavior.

In addition to unfavorable home environments, peers and friends are also major sources of influence for homicidal youth. As Differential Association, Social Learning and Self Control theorists assert, violence is learned through close association with persons who deem violence an appropriate form of conflict resolution. Associations with friends and peers who accept and display anti-social behavior often provide an additional source

of negative influence that reinforces the poor influences of the parents. Plus, the attitudes, values, and behavior of parents, friends, and others provide examples of violence that are imitated by the youth. Moreover, as self-control theorists assert, when the right circumstances present themselves, individuals with low self-control are more likely to behave impulsively.

The young participants in the current study provided support for the three theories. During the course of their interviews, all but one of the participants reported having criminogenic friends and family members who have had significant involvement with the Criminal Justice System. Many of the participants alluded to how almost all of their friends are currently incarcerated, awaiting trial, or expecting to be incarcerated. All but one the participants disclosed having a friend or family member killed. The participants also discussed living in an environment where drugs and guns were glorified accessories for the youth that lived there. They seemed to believe that imprisonment or death was their unavoidable fate. As one participant remarked, "Its⁷ the kinda' life [we] live".

Negative **influences**, such as ineffective child rearing practices and association with criminogenic friends and family members, are also believed to be major contributing factors to the inhibition of normal emotional development. As Schreiber (1992) found, ineffective child rearing practices in the past lead to a disruption in the process of affect attunement and social referencing that is compounded by the continual presence of adverse situations in the present.

In accordance, the Self-Control theorists assert that incomplete socialization,

especially ineffective child rearing, leads to the inhibition of self-control. When the right circumstances present themselves, the individual with low self-control is unable to control aggressive impulses, and is more likely to engage in criminal behavior than individuals with self control. Schreiber's findings and the premises of self-control theorists suggest that a disruption in the development of emotion **inhibits** an individual's ability to regulate his aggressive impulses. Moreover, the individual's ability to control aggression is **further** inhibited when adverse situations confront the individual.

The premises of Schacter's Two-Factor Theory of Emotion support this theory as well. According to his theory, aggression has a dual source, cognition and excitation. He asserts that cognition is temporarily disrupted during periods of high levels of arousal, thus allowing impulse to guide behavior. It is the interdependent relationship these two share that accounts for whether someone engages in aggressive behavior.

The current study was premised on these assumptions, leading to the hypothesis that a lack of empathic skill was the major contributing factor to the homicidal behavior of its young participants. Empathy, in the current study, was understood as the ability to take on the perspective of others and experience a vicarious emotional response as a result of observing the others' situation. As Davis (1994) asserts, cognitive, perspective-taking activity and emotional reactivity are the two mechanisms that enable empathy to inhibit aggression. The ability to cognitively take on the perspective of others increases an aggressor's understanding and tolerance of the other's perspective. As a result, the likelihood of an aggressor reacting aggressively is lessened.

In conjunction with the cognitive, **role-taking** ability, the ability to vicariously experience an emotional connection with a person as a result of observing that person's situation also decreases the likelihood of aggressive behavior. Observing the distress cues of a victim leads an aggressor to either share a victim's distress, or to be concerned for the victim's welfare. In either instance, the observation of the other person's distress leads to a decrease in the likelihood of the aggressor reacting aggressively.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index, a multi-dimensional measure of empathy, was used as the measure of empathic skill for the participants in this study. It tapped into four different dimensions of empathy, perspective taking, fantasy, personal distress, and empathic concern. The perspective taking and fantasy sub-scales assessed the participants' cognitive, role-taking abilities. The personal distress and empathic concern sub-scales measured the participants' ability to vicariously experience distress in response to distress in others.

The fact that Davis' original instrument had to be altered is noteworthy. The instrument had to be changed because of the participants' difficulty in expressing their feeling states into more than three different categories. Davis' original instrument required them to rate their feelings using five categories. Based on the theories and findings of others mentioned here, the participants' difficulty in expressing their own feeling states seems predictive of difficulty with **taking** on the perspective of others. If they have problems gauging their own feeling states, they probably have difficulty imagining what other people experience.

Results using the instrument demonstrated that the participants in the current study are fairly capable of empathic understanding. On the two sub-scales that measured cognitive abilities, the perspective taking and fantasy scales, the participants scored in the medium range. While these scores are not extremely low, they indicate the participants' difficulty with taking on the perspective of others. The participants also had low scores on the personal distress scale, but scored high on the empathic concern scale. The scores are a little **confusing** at first, because it appears that the implications contradict one another and make it hard to say the degree of difficulty the participants have with experiencing feelings of concern in response to distress in others. Nonetheless, the results provide some support for the study's hypothesis.

For example, it is noteworthy to mention that the two sub-scales were designed to measure two different dimensions of empathy. The personal distress scale assessed the participants' ability to experience distress in response to observing extreme distress in others. The empathic concern scale, on the other hand, measured the participants' ability to experience feelings of concern for unfortunate others. The difference between the two dimensions can be seen in some of the participants' responses to the questions in the third questionnaire.

Fifteen (65%) of the participants expressed some sort of guilt or remorse. **Yet**, many of them said they did not feel remorse or guilt for what they had done. What they reported feeling guilt or remorse about was the pain they caused the mothers and families of their victims. This probably stemmed from seeing the emotions of the mothers of their

friends and family members who have been killed. Having seen the pain that it caused the participants' own family and friends, the participants sympathized for the family and friends of their victims.

What may have accounted for the participants scoring lower on the personal distress scale was the fact that they felt they were in life or death situations. Because they were more concerned for their own lives, they allowed themselves to place less concern on the welfare of the victims. This, consequently, lessened the amount of distress the participants felt in response to observing their victims' distress.

For instance, 70% (16) of the participants reported that they "could not remember" or that "everything went **blank**" when asked how they felt as they pulled the trigger or stabbed the person. This gives evidence of the participants' efforts to lessen their level of distress. By forgetting, or blocking out, the actual moments of their crimes, they distance themselves from their responsibility and the distress they caused their victims, thereby lessening the guilt or remorse the participants felt. The forgetting of the actual moments of the crime also suggests that cognition failed to guide the participants' behavior during their adverse situations. Instead of cognitively rationalizing the situation and choosing an alternate resolution, they resorted to more impulsive behavior, homicide.

The fact that the majority of the participants could not remember the specifics of the moment coupled with their admission to only feeling guilt and remorse for the pain they caused the victims' families also supports the idea that the participants might have dehumanized their victims. The capacity to dehumanize during the commission of

censurable acts depends on one's ability to repress feelings of guilt and **justify** behavior by projecting blame on the victim. In addition, as Miller and Looney (1974) assert, dehumanization is only possible if the concept of violent behavior is acceptable. As the responses of the participants indicated, they exhibited an acceptance of violence, projected blame elsewhere, and tried to repress their guilt. Consequently, dehumanization of their victims was a mechanism that could have allowed them to disregard the value of their victims' lives and commit homicide. The violent nature of our society as a whole tends to foster disregard for the value of human life and provides more and more youth with ways to excuse their anti-social behavior. Now is the time to find effective solutions to the problem, before the lives of more citizens are lost to homicidal youth.

Treatment Possibilities

As discussed above, the results of the current study supported the assumptions of earlier research that focused on other contributing factors to the incidence of juvenile homicide. The results also showed that young the participants had, to a moderate degree, empathic capabilities. Overall the results demonstrated that juvenile homicide is a multi-faceted problem that should be approached with multi-faceted solutions. Based on these findings, suggestions for solutions to the problem need to include ideas and practices of professionals from varied disciplines.

For instance, as found in earlier research, the current participants' discussions of their home lives made it clear that they had a lot of negative influences surrounding them.

In order to begin addressing this facet of juvenile crime, researchers must focus on preventive measures. Things like neighborhood centers, clubs and organizations should be made readily available to youth, particularly those youth that have weak family support. Providing them with places where they can constructively spend their time and experience positive socialization may decrease the tendency for youth to find acceptance in negative groups, like gangs. This may in turn foster more pro social behavior in youth.

The role of ineffective child-rearing and socialization on the part of the parents has constantly been scrutinized because of findings, such as the current findings, that place a lot of responsibility for the homicidal behavior of youth on the parents. Social service professionals may want to provide easy access to programs that teach effective and appropriate child-rearing methods, promote independence and provide financial support for endeavors that aim to help parents raise their family's quality of life. A lot of today's youth have single parent homes where the mother is the sole provider. They often live in impoverished conditions and unstable environments that are conducive to the inhibition of emotional stability for them and their parents. It seems that they would benefit from having outlets where they are able to get help with identifying what their problems are and effective ways to address those problems.

Once the youth has committed crime and has been placed in the custody of local authorities, treatment must take place from the moment of custody. Youth should not just be locked up, hoping that the experience of incarceration will change their deviant ways. Criminal justice professionals need to work in conjunction with other social service

agencies in developing rehabilitation, or habilitation, programs for youth that focus on various aspects of the juvenile's behavior. As some of the youth in the current study indicated, prisons have become warehouses for criminals. Unfortunately, the offenders leave the prisons with the same negative attitudes, unmarketable job skills, and friends and family to whom they return home. Consequently, the approach used by criminal justice and social service professionals should encompass methods that address issues like their attitudes, job skills, and methods of conflict resolution.

For example, an assessment of the overall emotional stability of youth should be conducted any time youth come in contact with the criminal justice system. Knowing some of their internal conflicts may help to better understand why these youths are acting out in a criminal manner and what specific issues the youth have that need to be addressed. In particular, rehabilitative efforts should focus on methods that teach the youth how their behavior affects others, such as reality therapy. Techniques like reality therapy could help the youth to understand their responsibility for their actions and teach them the appropriate way to handle conflicts that arise.

One additional technique that may be used by professionals to curb the homicidal behavior of youth is to employ methods of behavior modification. The use of rewards and punishment consistently and appropriately is a basic method of behavior modification that aims to teach that a particular behavior is inappropriate or unwarranted. It did not seem like the youth in the current study received a whole lot of praise and rewards, or consistent punishments for their inappropriate behavior, in the environment from which

they came. Through the identification and reinforcement of positive, desirable behavior, it is learned what behaviors are unacceptable, and the consequences of inappropriate behavior. Ultimately, the person learns how their actions will affect the responses of others.

Implications for Future Research

The results of the current study support the assumptions on which it is based. For instance, it was assumed that emotional instability occurs as a result of unfavorable home environments and child rearing practices. It was also assumed that a lack of empathic skill leads to a greater likelihood of homicidal behavior. The participants demonstrated that they, indeed, had unfavorable home environments, criminogenic friends and family, but did not lack empathic skill.

Despite the findings of previous research, the current findings make it difficult to say to what degree a lack of empathic skill contributes to homicidal behavior. This difficulty is due mostly to the inconsistent scores on Davis' instrument and the nature of the study. The results of Davis' instrument were contradictory and made it difficult to **identify** a causal relationship between empathy and homicidal behavior.. The study was exploratory, and identified many other factors that contribute to homicidal behavior. So, **future** research could address this issue by taking a more in-depth look at the empathic skill of youth that are at risk for homicidal behavior and youth that have recently, within the year committed homicide. Talking to these youth right before or right after homicidal

behavior occurs would provide a better indication of the relationship that empathic skill and homicidal behavior share.

Future research could also focus on doing another study of homicidal youth that looks at a population more representative of the larger population of them. This may be accomplished through the use of longitudinal and comparative studies that give better insight into how homicidal behavior is developed, maintained, and manifested. As mentioned above, the current study's exploratory nature makes it difficult to discern the degree to which any of the contributing factors influence the homicidal behavior of youth. Research that looks at youth prior to contact with the criminal justice system and follows them throughout their lives provides better indications of what influences were present and conducive to aggression. In addition, comparing homicidal youth to youth that have not behaved homicidally may aid in discerning what particular factors predispose youth to homicidal behavior.

Another focus of **future** research could be ensuring that more consistent interviewing methods are used with participants at the prisons. In the current study, some of the participants had an opportunity to discuss the questions on the various questions prior to being interviewed, because of being placed in the same waiting room with participants who had already been interviewed. As a result, the responses of the participants who discussed the questions prior to being interviewed may have been biased. Future research should use a standard format for conducting interviews that is conducive to privacy and controls for biased responses. The greater the validity of the responses, the

easier it is to **identify** how best to address the homicidal behavior of youth.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF INSTITUTIONS VISITED

List of Institutions Visited for the Study

Belmont Correctional Facility

Lebanon Correctional Facility

Southern Ohio Correctional Facility

Trumbull Correctional Institution

APPENDIX B: INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE STUDY

Table 3.1

Demographic and Socioeconomic Variables

Previous research has identified various characteristics common to juvenile killer. In the current study, a combination of these characteristics was examined. A list of those variables is provided below.

1. current age
 2. age at first formal arrest
 3. age at the time of the offense
 4. race
 5. number of prior arrests and convictions
 - 6.** nature of prior arrests and convictions
 7. highest grade level completed
 - 8.** participant's **drug/alcohol** use
 9. participant's relationship with his father
 10. participant's relationship with his mother
 11. with whom the participant lived with at the time of arrest
 12. age of participant when parents divorced or separated, if applicable
 13. age of mother at participant's birth
 14. parental **drug/alcohol** use
 15. parental control, discipline, and punishment
 - 16.** parental maltreatment and abuse
 17. marital discord between the parents
 - 18.** employment history of the parents
 19. **criminogenic** family and friends (those who have had significant involvement with the criminal justice system)
 20. financial status of family
 21. participant's ordinal position
 22. gang affiliation
 23. access to guns
-

Table 3.2

Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index

Directions: Please indicate the degree to which the following items describe you using the appropriate point on a scale from 0 (does not describe me well) to 4 (describes me very well)

1. I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me. (FS)
 2. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)
 3. I sometimes find it **difficult** to see things from the "other guy's" point of view. (PT) (R)
 4. Sometimes I **don't** feel very **sorry** for other people when they are having problems. (EC) (R)
 5. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel. (FS)
 6. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)
 7. I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. (FS) (R)
 8. I **try** to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision. (PT)
 9. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel **kind** of protective towards them. (EC)
 10. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)
 11. I sometimes **try** to understand my **friends** better by imagining how **things** look from their perspective. (PT)
 12. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me (R). (FS)
 13. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD)(R)
 14. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (R)
 15. If I'm sure I'm right about **something**, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments. (PT) (R)
 16. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters. (FS)
 17. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)
 18. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (EC) (R)
 19. I am usually pretty effective in dealing emergencies. (PD) (R)
 20. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)
 21. I believe that there are two sides to every question and **try** to look at them both. (PT)
 22. I would describe myself as a pretty soft- person. (EC)
 23. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a **leading** character. (FS)
 24. I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)
 25. When I'm upset with someone, I usually **try** to "put myself in his shoes" for a while. (PT)
 26. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I **imagine** how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me. (FS)
 27. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)
 28. Before criticizing somebody, I **try** to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place. (PT)
-

Table 3.3

Interview Questions

1. Do you admit to committing the crime for which you are incarcerated?
 2. What was your relation to the victim before the incident?
 3. How did you feel about the victim right before the incident occurred?
 4. Did you feel provoked, and if so, why?
 5. How did you feel about the victim as the incident was occurring?
 6. How did you feel as you pulled the **trigger/stabbed** the victim?
 7. Did you feel guilt or remorse once you realized the victim had died?
 8. Did the gun help you to feel removed from the situation?
-

APPENDIX C: TABLES OF RESULTS

Demographic and Socioeconomic Information

Table 4.1
Subjects' Race

Race	Frequency	Percent
Black	20	87.0
Caucasian	3	13.0

Table 4.2
Subjects' Age at the Time of the Homicide

Age	Frequency	Percent
15 years old	2	8.7
16 years old	1	4.3
17 years old	2	8.7
18 years old	5	21.7
19 years old	3	13.0
20 years old	4	17.4
21 years old	2	8.7
22 years old	2	8.7
23 years old	2	8.7

x=19.08 years, s=2.29 years

Table 4.3

Subjects' Highest Grade Level of School Completed

Grade Level Completed	Frequency	Percent
8 th	1	4.3
9 th	4	17.4
10 th	2	8.7
11 th	7	30.4
12 th	7	30.4
1 year of college	0	0.0
2 years of college	1	4.3

Table 4.4

Subjects' Relationships with their Fathers

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	5	20.8
Very Poor	5	20.8
Poor	4	16.7
Average	3	12.5
Good	4	16.7
Excellent	1	8.4

Table 4.5

Discipline Style of the Subjects' Parents

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	1	4.3
Lenient	2	8.7
Appropriate	9	39.1
Strict	10	43.5
Abusive	1	4.3

Table 4.6

Marital Discord of the Subjects' Parents

Category	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	26.1
Seldom	6	26.1
Often	2	8.7
Frequently	2	8.7
Unable to Say	7	30.4

Table 4.7
Subjects' Relationships with their Mothers

Category	Frequency	Percent
Non-existent	0	0
Very Poor	0	0
Poor	1	4.3
Average	4	17.4
Good	16	69.6
Excellent	2	8.7

Table 4.8
Mother's Drug Use

Category	Frequency	Percent
Never	18	78.3
Seldom	3	13.0
Often	1	4.3
Abused	0	0.0
Unable to Say	1	4.3

Table 4.9
Father's Drug Use

Category	Frequency	Percent
Never	13	56.5
Seldom	1	4.3
Often	2	8.7
Abused	2	8.7
Unable to Say	5	21.7

Table 4.10
With Whom the Subjects Lived at the Time of the Homicide

Relationship	Frequency	Percent
Father	0	0
Mother	4	17.4
Sibling	0	0
Friend	0	0
Significant Other	5	21.7
Self	8	34.8
Others	2	8.7
Grandparents	2	8.7
Both Parents	2	8.7

Table 4.11
Subjects' Drug Use

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	7	30.4
Marijuana	13	26.1
Alcohol	10	13.0
Crack/Cocaine	1	0.0
Combination of Drugs & Alcohol	7	30.4

Table 4.12
Subjects' Criminogenic Family and Friends

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	1	4.3
Family Member(s)	1	4.3
Friend(s)	3	13.0
Both	18	78.3

Table 4.13
Subjects' Gang Affiliation

Category	Frequency	Percent
None	15	62.5
Bloods	2	8.7
Crips	4	17.4
Other	2	8.7

Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index

Table 4.14
Subjects' Empathy Scores

Sub-scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perspective Taking	8.7	3.8
Fantasy	6.9	3.5
Personal Distress	4.3	2.9
Empathic Concern	11.5	2.0

The Subjects' Perspectives

Table 4.15
Subjects' Current Homicide Conviction

Category	Frequency	Percent
Aggravated Murder	4	17.4
Murder	12	52.2
Voluntary Manslaughter	0	0
Involuntary Manslaughter	5	21.7
Complicity (to commit one of the above crimes)	2	8.7

APPENDIX D: HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH APPROVAL



Youngstown State University / One University Plaza / Youngstown, Ohio 44555-0001

July 28, 1997

Ms. Letisha Bunkley
c/o Dr. Tammy King
Department of Criminal Justice
CAMPUS

Dear Ms. Bunkley:

This is to notify you of the results of the July 31, 1997 Youngstown State University Human Subjects Committee review of your protocol HSRC#97-28 "Youths Who Murder: A Case Study Approach," which received full committee review.

The Committee determined that the protocol be approved, subject to the following condition:

- (1) that all references in the protocol and related communications be changed to reflect consistent use of terms representing confidentiality (as distinct from anonymity).

The Committee extends its best wishes to you in the pursuit of your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric C. Lewandowski'.

Eric C. Lewandowski
Administrative Co-Chair
Institutional Review Board

ECL/

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HSRC NUMBER 47-28

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Disposition Report

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Latisha Bunkley

PROJECT TITLE Youths Who Murder: A case Study
Approach

REVIEW DECISION:

EXEMPT

EXPEDITED

FULL COMMITTEE

1. _____

2. _____

FURTHER INFORMATION REQUESTED: _____

DISPOSITION:

APPROVED

APPROVED
(with restrictions)

NOT APPROVED


HSRC Chair or Committee Member