

“The Killing Fields”

By Gareth Patterson

Published in Personality March 12, 1999 For me and many of the people who contact me to offer their support, killing innocent animals for self-gratification is no different from killing innocent people for self-gratification. By extension, then, trophy hunting--the repeated killing of wild animals--should surely be viewed as serial killing. And in the same moral light humanity's thinking is, I feel beginning to approach such a level of morality.

What are the comparisons between trophy hunting and serial killing?

To attempt to answer this question, I did some research into the gruesome subject of serial killing. I learnt firstly that serial murder is a grotesque habit which analysts regard as addictive. Serial murder, I learnt, is about power and control--both linked to the killers' longing "to be important." It appears when the serial killer commits the first act of murder, he experiences feelings such as revulsion and remorse, but the killing--like a dose of highly addictive drug--leads to more and more murders until the person is stopped. Researchers have discovered that serial murderers experience a cooling-off period after a killing, but as with a drug craving, the compulsion--the need to kill--builds up again until the killer heads out again in search of another victim.

Trophy hunters are mostly "repeat" killers. This is further fueled by the elite SCI trophy hunting competitions.

It has been calculated that in order for a hunter to win these competitions in all the categories at the highest level, he would have to kill at least 322 animals. Pornography is perceived by analysts as a factor that contributes toward serial killers' violent fantasies--particularly "bondage-type" pornography portraying domination and control over a victim. Hunting magazines contain page after page of (a) pictures of hunters, weapon in hand, posing in dominating positions over their lifeless victims, (b) advertisements offering a huge range of trophy hunts, and (c) stories of hunters' "exciting" experience of "near misses" and danger.

These pages no doubt titillate the hunter, fueling his own fantasies and encouraging him to plan more and more trophy hunts. Trophy hunters often hire a camera person to film their entire hunts in the bush, including the actual moments when animals are shot and when they die.

These films are made to be viewed later at will, presumably for self-gratification purposes and to show to other people--again the longing "to be important" factor? This could also be seen as a form of trophy which mirrors in some respect pornographic "snuff" videos known to be made by some serial killers. Other serial killers have tape-recorded the screams of their victims, which were kept for later self-gratification.

This is a strong urge to achieve perceived "heroism" in serial murderers. This is linked to the individual's craving for "self-esteem." Student Robert Smith, for example, who in November 1996 walked into a beauty parlor in Mesa, Arizona, and shot five women and two children in the back of the heads, said of his motivation to kill: "I wanted to become known, to get myself a name."

Multiple killer Cari Panzram (among whose victims were six Africans he shot in the back "for fun" while working for an oil company in Africa) once stated of his actions: "I reform people." When asked "How?" he replied: "By killing them." Panzram also liked to describe himself as "the man who goes around doing good."

The “Stockwell Strangler” of South London in the mid-1980s who told police he wanted to be famous is another example of how the serial killer clearly confuses notoriety for fame. Are the trophy hunter’s killings linked to the serial killer’s addiction to murder, to achieve what is perceived to be heroism, to deep-rooted low self-esteem, to wanting to be famous - the “name in the trophy book”?

Certainly one could state that, like the serial killer, the trophy hunter plans his killing with considerable care and deliberation. Like the serial killer he decides well in advance the “type” of victim - i.e. which species he intends to target. Also, like the serial killer, the trophy hunter plans with great care where and how the killing will take place - in what area, with what weapon.

What the serial killer and trophy hunter also share is a compulsion to collect “trophies” or “souvenirs” of their killings.

The serial killer retains certain body parts or other “trophies … for much the same reason as the big game hunter mounts the head and antlers taken from his prey … as trophies of the chase,” according to Colin Wilson and Donald Seaman in *The Serial Killers*, a book on the psychology of violence.

In *The Serial Killers*, the authors wrote about Robert Hansen, an Alaska businessman and big-game enthusiast who hunted naked prostitutes through the snow as though they were wild animals, then shot them dead. Hansen would point a gun at his victim, order her to take off all her clothes, and then order her to run.

He would give his victims a “start” before stalking them. The actual act of killing his victims, Hansen once said, was an “anti-climax” and that “the excitement was in the stalking”. How many times have I heard trophy hunters describing their actions in similar terms? “No, hunting isn’t just about killing,” they say. “It’s also about the stalk, the build-up to the kill”.

Hansen was a trophy hunter, who, according to Wilson and Seaman, had achieved “celebrity by killing a Dall sheep with a crossbow”. He also trophy hunted women but, as a married man with a family, he couldn’t put his human trophies next to those elk antlers and bear skins in his den.

As an alternative, Hansen, it was revealed, took items of jewelry from his victims as “trophies” and hid these in his loft so that, as with his animal trophies, he, the hunter, could relive his fantasy-inspired killings whenever he wished to.

According to Wilson and Seaman, Jack the Ripper cut off one victim’s nose and breasts and “as if they were trophies, displayed them on a bedside table, together with strips of flesh carved from her thighs”. Jewelry, body parts, clothing such as underwear and so on, are all known “trophies” of the serial killer.

One serial killer flayed his victim and made a waistcoat from the skin as a “souvenir” or “trophy”.

What could the non-hunting wives, girlfriends, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers and children reveal of the nature and behaviour of a hunter in the family? Could they reveal that the hunter had a very disturbed childhood?

Almost half the serial killers analysed during behavioural research were found to have been sexually abused in childhood. Environmental problems early in life manifest in many cases in

violence such as cruelty to animals. Maybe they have a frustrated craving for “self-esteem”, a deep desire to be recognized, a resentment against society? All these factors are some of the known links to the profile of the serial killer.

Lastly, serial killing has been described as a “20th-Century phenomenon”. The same could be said of Western trophy hunting in Africa.”