# Criminal Analysis

## Detailed Overview

Wayne Williams was born in 1958 in Atlanta, Georgia and was the only child of two schoolteachers, Homer and Faye Williams. He was enrolled to Fredrick Douglas High School, where he graduated with an honors degree. He was then admitted to Georgia State University where he remained for one year before he dropped out. His major interests were electronics, radio, and media, which enabled him to build his own radio station in the basement of his parents’ house. Being an aspiring music producer and radio presenter, Williams scouted for local talent and often made huge losses by making music demos for local artists with little or no talent. He was often seen spending his time at local radio stations, WAOK and WIGO where he had made friends with several presenters. Williams also doubled as an amateur photographer, taking pictures of crime scenes and accidents, which he sold to local newspapers. He owned a police scanner that enabled him to reach the scenes before the first responders. His obsession with listening in on police conversations through the scanner improved his skills of impersonating police officers and was once arrested for doing so in 1976, although no charges were filed (Turner, 2013).

The disappearance of Edward Hope Smith, who was 14 years of age, on July 21, 1979 marked the start of the Atlanta Child Murders. Four days later, Alfred Evans, also 14 years old, disappeared. Their bodies were found in a wooded area. One was shot while the other was asphyxiated. A series of gruesome murders had started, with 29 young African Americans being murdered within a period of 22 months. The Atlanta Police Department and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, which were looking into the killings, sought the help of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) due to resource constraints, even though the crimes were outside of the FBI’s jurisdiction. The joint task force that was formed to investigate the murders concluded that there was a single perpetrator due to similarities in the victims, who were all African Americans who disappeared in broad daylight in public locations, their bodies were found in desolate locations, and there was no apparent motivation for the murders (Turner, 2013).

The killer’s change of tactic, from dumping bodies in deserted areas to dumping them in the Chattahoochee River, forced members of the joint task force to stake out all the 14 bridges that crossed the river. On May 22, one of the surveillance teams heard a splash in the early hours of the morning and saw a car speeding off across the bridge. The team pursued the car and stopped it. In the driver’s seat was Wayne Williams. Williams claimed that he was going to audition another singer out of town, but this alibi did not hold because the address and phone number he provided turned out to be nonexistent. Lacking any probable cause, the officers allowed Williams to leave. The discovery of the body of yet another young African American, Nathaniel Carter, downstream a few days later drew more attention to Williams. A medical examiner ruled the cause of death to be ‘probable asphyxia’ but did not authoritatively declare it strangulation and could not determine the time of death. However, the examiner stated that it was possible for the body to have been thrown from the top of the bridge (Turner, 2013).

Williams was summoned and questioned by the police. Suspicions around him increased after he failed multiple polygraph tests. Williams insisted that he was innocent and even had a press conference outside his parents’ house. A few witnesses claimed to have seen scratches and cuts on Williams’ arms and face around the time when the murders occurred. A search warrant was issued to obtain hair and fiber samples from Williams’ home, car, and dog to be compared to those found on the victims. The FBI forensics laboratory concluded that the fibers were a match, with 98 percent accuracy. Williams was arrested on June 21 and charged with the murders of Jimmy Payne and Nathaniel Carter. After his incarceration, the police department announced that 22 of the 29 child murders had been solved (Polk, 2010).

While there have been numerous controversies surrounding this case, as well as allegations that the defense team was treated unfairly, this case appears to be consistent with the existing theories of criminal behavior. Williams’ environment and his character portray a person who could do anything to achieve and one who consistently lied, even making up remarkable stories about himself. In line with Freud’s psychodynamic theory, Williams’ failure as a music producer may have eroded his ego and allowed his id of instant gratification to take control of his actions. A few aspects of Williams’ character and life also conform to the psychological and sociological approached to criminality.

## Causes of Crime

### Social and Environmental Causes

Violence and other forms of anti-social behavior are usually attributed to social and environmental aspects, including poor education, poverty, and family instability. \*\*\* defines the social environment as the immediate social relationships, cultural settings, and physical surroundings within which individuals function and interact. Accordingly, the environment moulds people’s behavior based on particular values, beliefs, and morals that are instilled in them during childhood, which then form a system through which individuals make decisions throughout their lives. While there are other factors that indeed compel people towards deviant behavior and crime, the social and environmental factors also play a significant role, although such causative factors are usually more discernible in juvenile delinquents that in adult offenders (Carpenter & Nevin, 2010).

One of such social factors that may contribute to criminal behavior is family, particularly due to the intense influence it has on individuals’ lives. A family not only satisfies one’s fundamental and supplementary needs, but it is also responsible for transmitting values and morals that socialize individuals and instill survival patters. The variance in family situations is what makes some people predisposed to crime while others are not. According to Samenow (2012), a normal family is typified by structural completeness, economic security, moral conformity, cultural conformity, functional adequacy, and physical and psychological normality. Although no family can have all these qualities, the most essential aspect is the degree of incidence of these traits. Subsequently, issues such as extremely strict or lenient discipline, physical abuse, parental rejection or neglect, lack of control,, and instability have been observed to have an effect on the consequent criminality. Wayne Williams came from a rather stable family two working parents. There are no reports of family instability regarding Williams’ parents. Nevertheless, being an only child, Williams may have grown up without much contact with peers, which may have driven him into isolation. Further, Williams’ persistent lying may be indicative lenient discipline from his parents.

The “levels of education have been determined to be significant in the manifestation of criminal behavior” (*Sociological and Environmental Factors of Criminal Behavior,* n.d.) Accordingly, academic achievement is usually predictive of behaviors that uphold the morality and values of a society due to its interrelation with other variables, including high self-esteem, financial success, and an internal locus of control. While the primary notion is that individuals with high IQ have lower propensity for crime that those with low IQ, it is also true that school attendance plays a significant role in shaping behavior. The numerous interactions that occur in school determine an individual’s character in later stages of life. Although Williams was a bright student who graduated with an honors degree from Fredrick Douglas High School, dropping out of the university in his first year may have contributed to his deviant behavior. Further, the subsequent lack of financial freedom that Williams’ suffered, as shown by his unsuccessful career as a music producer and an amateur photographer, may have triggered feelings of frustration and disgruntlement, which may have led to his criminality.

### Psychological Causes

Crime may also be the result of psychological factors. The psychodynamic theory, for instance, proposes that people’s personality is a product of certain unconscious mental processes that develop during childhood. Sigmund Freud argued that human personality is made up of the id, the ego, and the superego. The id, which is responsible for biological desires, including sex, food, and other so forth, is inclined towards instant gratification while being in complete disregard for others’ needs. This notion, which is known as the pleasure principle, is used to explain criminal conduct. The ego develops as an individual grows and makes up for the desires of the id by controlling one’s actions behavior and maintaining them within the boundaries of societal expectations, a notion known as the reality principle. Finally, the superego is a product of moral values and standards of the society, parents, friends, and significant parties, and passes judgment on individuals’ actions. The ego’s role, therefore, is to mediate between the id’s instant need for gratification and the superego’s strict morality. In Williams’ case, one can argue that he committed crime due to his underdeveloped superego, which may have resulted from the lack of sufficient socialization on moral values (Samenow, 2012). Further, the theory holds that criminals are typically aggravated and frustrated due to their unhappy or miserable childhoods. Williams’ parents may have dedicated little time to loving and nurturing him, which may have created feelings of neglect and weakened his ego.

Raine (2014) also suggests that impulsiveness is a crucial predictor of criminality. A poor ability to control behavior may be characterized by restlessness, clumsiness, hyperactivity, short time horizons, inability to plan ahead, ignorance of consequences before taking actions, low self-control, high affinity for risks, and a poor ability to postpone gratification. Indeed, longitudinal studies have revealed that boys who exhibit restlessness or lack of concentration in class, the most daring, and the most impulsive on psychomotor tests between the ages of eight and ten had a tendency of engaging in crime in later stages of life. Research has also shown that restlessness, poor concentration, and being daring are predictors of both “official convictions and self-reported delinquency.” Williams can be characterized as an impulsive, daring, and risk-loving person who could do anything regardless of the consequences as demonstrated on two occasions, dropping out of school and impersonation a police officer. He also had a poor ability of planning ahead as shown by his decision to quit school to go into music production even though he know nothing about that business. This impulsiveness may have contributed to his later criminal behavior, in line with the Wilson-Herrnstein theory that suggests that conscience acts as an inhibitor of criminality and is built through social learning processes. Parents’ reinforcement or punishment of transgressions during childhood therefore, plays a significant role (Samenow, 2012). Nevertheless, the theory suggests that the differences between individuals depend on whether their conduct is influenced by immediate or delayed consequences, with the former having a higher propensity for crime. Williams’ criminality can also be explained through various cognitive theories, such as the Huesmann-Eron cognitive script model and Lawrence Kohlberg’s moral development theory.

### Biological and Genetic Causes

Numerous twin, adoption, and family studies have been conducted over the years to determine the effect of genetic heritability and other biological factors on criminality, albeit with varying degrees of approval and acceptance by psychologists due to the difficulty in differentiating between the effects of nature and nurture in the study settings. Nonetheless, there is consensus that criminal conduct, particularly with regard to chronic criminal behavior, is partially genetically predisposed. Mednick, Moffitt, and Stack (2009) argue that these genetic factors may be inherited, could result from gene mutations during conception or fetal development, or could be the product of an individual’s environment. One of the potential biological causes of Williams’ behavior may be the level of neurotransmitters in his brain. Studies have revealed the variance in the levels of three neurotransmitters, including serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine, may contribute to crime and anti-social behavior. Further, research has indicated a relationship between hormones and human aggressiveness, such as the levels of testosterone, deviance, and violence in human beings. According to Eysenck and Gudjonsson (2013), the nervous system may also have an effect on individuals’ inclination towards crime. He argues that frontal dysfunction as atypical feature of violent offenders while most sex offenders suffer from the dysfunction of the temporal lobe. In general, the assertion is that brain abnormalities may also contribute to criminal behavior. Environmental factors, such as drug use, nutrition, head injuries, and parental criminality, may also produce biological changes that compel people to commit crimes. However, none of these biological aspects can be directly linked to Williams due to the absence of such data.

## Type of Offender

Wayne Williams is a convicted murderer and a suspected serial killer. He received two life sentences for two murders and circumstantial evidence shows that he could have killed 27 more people, though he was charged with those murders. By definition, a serial killer is a person who murder three or more people over a span of time, usually over one month, typically in gratification of an abnormal psychological need, and with a significant cooling off period between the murders. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) defines a serial killer as one who commits two or more separate murders and usually, though not always, acts alone. While psychological indulgence is the primary motive for such murders, most of which entail sexual contact with the victims, other motives may include thrill-seeking, attention-seeking, anger, or financial gain. The acts are usually attempted or completed in a comparable fashion, with the victims having common traits, such as age, gender, appearance, or race. Serial killers may be classified as either visionary, mission-oriented, hedonistic, or controlling (Waller, 2010).

In general, serial killers exhibit varying degrees of psychopathy and mental instability, were abused by a family member, emotionally, sexually, or physically, and have a tendency of engaging in partialism, necrophilia, or fetishism. Further, most of these individuals portray a combination of the Macdonald triad of behaviors that predict future criminality, including setting fires, sadistic activities, and bed-wetting. Most of them were socially isolated or bullied during childhood or adolescence, are involved in petty crimes like theft, fraud, and vandalism, tend to work in menial jobs and have trouble maintaining their jobs, and usually have average or below average IQ. There are however exceptions to these criteria. Rehabilitating such offenders is difficult due to their mental states. One cannot fully determine whether medical interventions can completely restore the offenders to normalcy. In addition, studies show that the abnormalities in core parts of their brains make it impossible for them to understand punishment. They are not bothered by stigmatization, are indifferent to societal expectations, and do not approve the condemnation of their deviant ways. Rehabilitation, therefore, becomes difficult for such people. Reward-based methods of treatment have achieved some degree of success with such people in institutional settings (Waller, 2010).

Rehabilitation for such individuals is a difficult endeavor. First, a person like Wayne Williams, he is bound to stay in prison all his life. Therefore, he would not see the need for being rehabilitated because he does not have a chance of associating with people in the outside world. Secondly, the type of rehabilitation for such a person is another issue. How best to rehabilitate a serial killer is the question here because no one really knows what goes through their mind or if they will change their perception because they are locked up their whole life. Rehabilitation for such a person is dependent on the person and his attitude towards it. In addition, there is the question of the resources to rehabilitate a person like him. Which types of resources are required in rehabilitating a serial killer and are they affordable. Moreover, the question of the need to rehabilitate a serial killer who has been jailed for the rest of his life also creates a difficulty in the sense that it is it really necessary or is it a waste of public resources.

## Apprehension

Wayne Williams does not depict many of the defining characteristics of serial killers. He was known to be a social person who engaged with other member of the community, particularly aspiring musicians. He did not have a history of committing crimes, except for a single incident in which he was arrested for impersonating a police officer but was never formally charged. More importantly, he did not exhibit any psychological abnormalities, or at least none were ever discovered. The only feature in common between him and known serial killers was the inability to maintain a stable income stream. Accordingly, criminal profiling could not have helped to identify Williams as a suspect. Indeed, save for the fact that DNA testing provided matching results for fibers found on Williams’ environment and those found on the victims, witnesses claims of seeing scratches on his hands and face, the incident with the police at the Parkway Jackson Bridge, and a wealth of other circumstantial evidence, Williams would not have become the primary suspect for the Atlanta child murders.

## Policy Implications

The identification and incarceration of criminal offenders is an important part of any society. Legal and policing structures should base their policies on case studies and proven research. The case of the Atlanta child murders is one of such incidences that may provide substantial contributions for policy decisions. Firstly, the police and judiciary should conduct scientific research on DNA testing to find a solution that would provide 100 percent accuracy. Williams was not convicted of the other 27 murders because the tests only provided accuracy of up to 80 percent (Polk, 2010). These murders still remain unsolved. While there have been tremendous accomplishments in DNA testing and the fact that virtually all states recognize DNA results in their judicial systems, there are some bureaucracies that may prevent such evidence to be admissible in court. Policy makers should come up with ways of providing clear actions when dealing with such evidence to avoid potential loopholes.

Secondly, the Atlanta child murders may have set a bad precedent for policy makers. It appears as though criminals can commit murders and still get away with them, so long as there is no physical proof. In such cases, policy need to be amended to include other scientific or psychological tests that can accurately depict one’s potential for committing crimes. Coupled with the polygraph tests, though they are not admissible in court, such methods can help in narrowing down the list of suspects, thereby increasing the rate of apprehension and potentially reducing crime levels. With regard to rehabilitation, research need to be done on how to treat psychopaths effectively. Incarceration is increasingly becoming extremely expensive for the American taxpayers.

With appropriate and effective ways of treating mentally unstable people who commit crimes, this financial burden can be significantly reduced. Further, there would be a need for civic education if such methods were actually found to enhance the process of accepting offenders back into the community. People need to understand the unique needs and circumstances of psychotic serial killers who would not have engaged in such acts if they were mentally stable. Finally, policy should be created to deter parents, family member, and other members of the society from creating psychotic monsters and releasing them into the society. Basing on available evidence that neglect or abuse during or childhood or adolescence are a major contributor to the situation, it is important to have policies that encourage people from avoiding actions that may lead to psychotic or sociopathic tendencies in the future.

When Wayne Williams was arrested and charged, there was no DNA testing, yet it was important at the time because a forensic scientist discovered two human scalp hairs inside the shirt that Patrick Baltazar’s body had. Police and the FBI had to testify using a microscope to show that the hairs were consistent with those of Williams. However, in 2007 after the discovery and wide usage of DNA testing, defense lawyers requested for its use and it proved handy in the case. As such, DNA testing can be used for such cases today to reach more consistent and accurate judgment.

## References

Carpenter, D. O., & Nevin, R. (2010). Environmental causes of violence. *Physiology & behavior*, *99*(2), 260-268.

Eysenck, H. & Gudjonsson, G. (2013). *The Causes and Cures of Criminality*. Boston, MA: Springer US.

Kamaluddin, M. R., Shariff, N. S., Othman, A., Ismail, K. H., & Saat, G. A. M. (2015). Linking psychological traits with criminal behaviour: A review. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry*, *16*(2), 13-25.

Mednick, S., Moffitt, T. & Stack, S. (2009). *The causes of crime : new biological approaches*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Polk, J. (2010). *DNA test strengthens Atlanta child killings case - CNN.com*. Edition.cnn.com. Retrieved 5 August 2017, from http://edition.cnn.com/2010/CRIME/06/09/williams.dna.test/index.html

Raine, A. (2014). *The anatomy of violence: the biological roots of crime*. New York: Vintage Books.

Samenow, S. (2012). *Inside the criminal mind*. New York: Crown Publishers.

*Sociological and Environmental Factors of Criminal Behavior*. Retrieved 5 August 2017, from https://www1.udel.edu/chem/C465/senior/fall00/GeneticTesting/enviro.htm

Turner, P. A. (2013). The Atlanta child murders: A case study of folklore in the black community. *Contemporary Legend: A Reader*, *1718*, 299.

Waller, S. (2010). *Serial killers - Philosophy for everyone: Being and killing*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.