

LIFE / SOCIETY & CULTURE / SOCIAL ISSUES

The serial killers' crimes: Assumptions about Modus Operandi (Part 17)

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Serial killer is executed 3-16-05

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Serial murder as a research topic came about in an unusual way. As if a horn were blown to call all researchers and inform the citizenry, serial murder was first defined in the title of the 1983 U.S. Senate Hearing on **Serial Murders: Patterns of Murders Committed by One Person, in Large Numbers with No Apparent Rhyme, Reason, or Motivation** (U.S. Congress, 1984). The nature and extent of the problem was largely unknown, and for that reason, FBI Director Webster cited the most relevant statistical data from the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports* for 1981: Of the more than 20,000 murders, 15.5 percent of the cases were committed by strangers; in almost 30 percent, the relationship between killer and victim was unknown. In almost 18 percent of the murders, the motive was unknown and in 28 percent, the murder was not solved and no one had been arrested for the crime. In addition, the need for a "system to track and analyze serial murders" stemmed from the concerns of local law enforcement agencies across the nation that serial murder was increasing (1984, p.4).

The most problematic issue to come out of this hearing on serial murder was the lack of knowledge about serial murder patterns on the one hand, and on the other, the decision to fund a solution to the problem of serial murder based on premises about those patterns, the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP). This is a national computerized program that was to collect and store all aspects of the investigation of similar “pattern murders” nationwide, and to notify (or link up) local law enforcement agencies presently unaware of similar crimes occurring in other jurisdictions. The system depended upon two beliefs about serial murderers – that they cross multiple jurisdictions and “invariably work with the same M.O. – but they move on before the pattern becomes apparent. With VICAP the M.O. pattern would literally leap out of the computer,” true crime author Ann Rule testified (U.S. Congress, 1984, p. 24).

The belief that serial murderers do not change their methods – which includes how they commit the crime and dispose of the body – could have been readily tested by the supposed originator of the VICAP concept, **Pierce Brooks**, or its avid supporters, e.g. Bundy investigator, **Robert Keppel**, **Steven Egger** or the FBI profilers. Instead of doing the type of descriptive research that was done in the present study, where a sample of cases are selected and the methods are described for each case and patterns analyzed for the sample as a whole, authors/researchers tend to go into grisly depth on a single case or make conclusions on the basis of anecdotal evidence. Whatever the methods may be, researchers believe they reflect all “typical” **serial killers**, the methods seemingly reminiscent of Hollywood’s version of a drooling sex pervert, that the methods can be counted on to remain constant (so that patterns can be computerized), and that there is some psychological significance to all that the killer does.

The literature offers only one means of solving the problem of the absence of physical evidence in cases like serial murder that often go unsolved, and that is the FBI's technique of analyzing and interpreting *psychological* clues left at the crime scenes.

The FBI's response to unsolved, bizarre murders follows from the premise that a murderer's acts reflect a psychological problem from which patterns may evolve. These patterns may (somehow) represent the killer's characteristics (Levin & Fox, 1985).

FBI Agents Ault and Reese ((U.S. Congress, 1984, p. 59) stated that officers "should" become proficient in the use of psychological assessments of crimes. They referred to the "fact" that there are certain intangible clues left behind by an aberrant killer which are difficult to detect by the "untrained officer," which are impossible to collect (as contrasted to physical evidence), and which may be of "inestimable value" in solving a crime.

The psychological assessment of a crime scene is done for the purpose of developing a profile. Certain types of "evidence," such as fear, rage, irrationality, and, supposedly, love, are detected

and interpreted at the crime scene. Agents Ault and Reese ((U.S. Congress, 1984, pgs. 59-60) state that this "fact" about intangible clues left at the crime scene (and used in profiling) is based upon "nothing more" than the comprehension of "current principles of behavioral sciences. . . ."

There are no such principles in behavioral science because behavioral sciences rely solely on observable information or behaviors, cognitions, that which can be collected and which anyone can see. In behavioral science, it is the behavior that is important, not it's symbolic meaning or other subjective interpretations, including motivations. The FBI has created a magical universe where nonexistent "psychological evidence" can only be seen by some kind of obscure training unavailable to the vast majority of police and this noncollectible evidence is used in place of facts that can be verified. The result is an amazing lack of progress, as Petee and Jarvis, an academic and an FBI agent, admitted as late as 2000 (p. 215): No one has researched "what kind of patterns exist in regard to serial offending" and whether "knowledge of these patterns can be used to aid law enforcement in their investigation of serial crime."

Instead of studying how killers dispose of the bodies, one FBI agent was quoted (Porter, 1983, p. 47) as saying:

“ A person who covers up the body with clothing, or hides it, is saying that he feels pretty bad about what he's done. . . . If he moves the body so it will easily be found, this may show that he has some feeling for the person. He doesn't want them exposed to the elements. He wants them to have a funeral and decent burial.

Serial murderers, it would seem, are downright kind!

In the next article, this study's findings on the methods of serial killers will be reported. Stay tuned. . .

SUGGESTED LINKS

- **Bulging prisons, petty offenses**
- **The serial killers' crimes: How they obtain their victims, continued (Part 16)**
- **The serial killers' crimes: How they obtain their victims (Part 15)**
- **The crimes of serial killers: Are there victim-types? (Part 14)**
- **The crimes of serial killers: Motives, continued (Part 13)**



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