

LIFE / SOCIETY &amp; CULTURE / SOCIAL ISSUES

# Serial killer investigations (Part 22)

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N. London investigation of a beheaded woman

Photo by Oli Scarff/Getty Images

*Continued. It was found that the impetus for investigating the murders as a series was usually the behavior of the murderer: specifically, the murderer increased the frequency and brutality of their crimes so that police (and press) would have to take notice (see previously published Ritter articles in the Examiner.com, listed below).*

It was no coincidence that the Hillside Strangler, Kenneth Bianchi, who thought his first murders deserved more press attention, created panic and forced police to see the connections when he (and Angelo Buono) disposed of five additional bodies during the last week in November of 1977. As **Levin and Fox (1985, p. 143)** reported (without citing any source), the Hillside Stranglings, "true to form," became increasingly more brutal as the victim count rose. The

pattern noted by Levin and Fox for Bianchi occurred in many other cases. One example can be found in the earlier case in Michigan involving John Collins.

The first two murders in the Collins case occurred almost a year apart, and, despite the similarities, "It had not been reasonable to conclude a 'series' from such scattered incidents. Thus, the [second] murder had been logged only as a second homicide, not the second in some fearful progression" (Keyes, 1978, p. 95). The third murder further directed attention away from the idea of a series, for the killer had used different methods and the victim was different. [This may be because Collins had nothing to do with this murder; another man has been tried and found guilty.] This victim was shot and had not apparently been sexually assaulted. It was the fourth victim which, as Keyes noted, made everything seem different, even to the police, who began to talk about *the* murders. What had happened was that the killer had "brought everybody up short" by using an M.O. similar to the first murders-- and, by inflicting injuries in a multiple and more brutal manner, he had insured that the murders could not be ignored (Keyes, 1978).

A related way in which multiple murderers have directed the nature of the investigation occurred among cases which were eventually investigated as serial murders. It was found that several subjects of the present study essentially decided or determined which crimes would be linked and which would not-- and when. For example, Ted Bundy (who was talking in the third person about "the killer" in Michaud and Aynesworth, 1984, p. 125) said that the killer purposely departed from his M.O. at several points, as when he selected a dissimilar victim. The reason, he said, was so as " . . . not to fan the flames of community outrage or the intensity of the police investigation." Bundy also said that the killer had once committed a rape, on impulse, and had let the victim go afterwards. This was a risky thing to do, but, Bundy (Michaud & Aynesworth, 1984, p.133) explained, after debating with himself, that the killer decided

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***“ . . . he did not want to create a great amount of public furor because it would reduce the opportunity for victims later on and it would increase the possibility of eyewitness reports. And he knew enough about these circumstances that, in all likelihood, it wouldn't be reported. Or if it was reported, nothing much would be done about it. The***

***[police] wouldn't necessarily link it to the other [murders]. It would have been a simple act of rape of the type that is fairly common.***

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Bundy illustrated how intertwined the killer's behavior was with the investigation. He said that there was great anxiety after the first murder. "The tension was concentrated principally upon the progress of the police investigation. If nothing of any significance was disclosed in the newspapers," the tension was reduced (Michaud & Aynesworth, 1984, p.116). But after the first murder and the resolve not to do it again diminished, and "once it became clear that there was going to be no link made — or that he would not be under investigation..." Bundy said that all that mattered to the killer was not exposing himself to risk ever again (Michaud & Aynesworth). Referring frequently to the killer's knowledge of the criminal investigation process, Bundy also pointed to areas of common knowledge, such as the fact that badly decomposed bodies are identified through dental records. Bundy suggested that the killer has a purposeful desire to change his M.O.

Over 50 years ago in Germany, Peter Kurten was employing what can best be characterized as "premeditated variability," for, as he explained to the judge:

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***“ I hoped by changing the method to bring about the theory that there were several murderers at work. I hoped this would afford me still greater satisfaction. There appeared long newspaper articles which dealt with the idea of there being a number of different men murdering in different ways. As you know, the Berlin criminal commissioner, Gennat, was the chief upholder of this theory (Rumbelow, 1975, p. 269).***

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Some of the literature on these issues gives the impression that multiple murderers are, in **Rule's (U.S. Congress, 1984)** words, trollers, and that, secondarily, they cross multiple jurisdictions. This, in turn, seems to be viewed as "only" a technological problem for which the solution was the FBI's **VICAP**. The findings of this study (1988) indicated that multiple murderers did not all travel nor all stay at home and kill. The problem is that these killers recognize that they need not necessarily travel to elude police. It is often sufficient to kill in separate police jurisdictions. During the 1970s, police often expressed the view that two murders could not be related: they were committed in separate jurisdictions. As if murderers thought in the same terms as the police and would not be so inconsiderate as to defy police jurisdictional boundaries.

There were two seemingly contradictory findings in regard to the multiple murderer's patterns (see **Ritter, 1988**). The first – that multiple murderers often changed their methods and picked dissimilar victims – has been discussed. The second was that multiple murderers have generally exhibited some pattern – even if only one aspect of their murders was consistent. This means that, for the purposes of identifying individual patterns and developing computerized programs (such as VICAP), there is a necessity for a very broad perspective. For instance, the placement of the bodies may be the most distinctive feature of a series, such as the Hillside Stranglings, while the methods alone might indicate that there is no series. The broad perspective or definition of methods is needed, for the more specific the circumstances that are known about a given case, as Levin and Fox (1985) found, the more likely that case is to be uniquely indicative of the crimes of a single, serial killer.

## **SUGGESTED LINKS**

- **Increasing frequency and brutality in a series of murders**
- **The dynamics of sequential progression in serial murders**
- **Intellectual thievery in the business of serial murder**
- **Intellectual thievery in the business of serial murder, Part 2**
- **Intellectual thievery in the business of serial murder, Part 3**

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